The New Testament in Modern English with Notes and Maps

J.B. Phillips

GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

With people, places, definitions ...

Writer: The apostle Matthew (also called Levi);

Date: Traditionally the first Gospel to be written, perhap s c AD40-50 in Aramaic, with the Greek translation sometime before AD70;

Where written: Probably Palestine;

Readers: To appeal to Jews, and especially Jewish Christians. There are frequent references to Jewish prophecy, and many Old Testament quotations;

Why written: To show that the man Jesus of Nazareth, was the kingly Messiah or Christ prophesied as the saviour of Israel throughout much of Jewish history.

According to Some Modern Scholarship: There was no Aramaic original. Instead the Gospel was written by an unknown Jewish Christian, using Mark's Gospel and other collections among his sources. These might have included sayings compiled by the apostle Matthew. Suggested date is c AD85-90; place of writing possibly Syrian Antioch.

THE BEGINNINGS - FROM THE BIRTH OF JESUS TO THE START OF HIS MINISTRY c 6BC-AD27

Matthew 1:1-25

AN ACCOUNT OF THE ANCESTRY OF JESUS
(also Luke 3:23b-38)

Genealogy of Jesus - His two lines of ancestry differ considerably in part, although there are also important similarities. Thus both Matthew and Luke record the descent of Jesus from the patriarch

Abraham through King David. Luke then goes further back into Bible history to show that Jesus was a "son of Adam".

Many and varied reasons have been given for the differences in recorded ancestry after King David, none of which are wholly satisfactory. But as the differences are so obvious, and Luke is generally regarded as reliable, the two genealogies have been recorded by the two Gospel writers for no doubt very good reasons. These just happen to escape modern analysis. However it is helpful to know that father can mean "ancestor of", and son, "descended from".

There are many points of note, but one of the most interesting concerns the few women listed - just four. All are Gentile, and not one a model of Jewish virtue:

Tamar - probably a Canaanite, an adulterous and scheming daughter-in-law of Judah;

Rahab - a Canaanite and a prostitute of Jericho who helped the Hebrew spies;

Ruth - from Moab, who schemed more subtly than Tamar, and married Boaz; and

Bathsheba - possibly a Hittite, who committed adultery with King David. He then had her husband Uriah, killed in battle.

Much information can be found in the Old Testament on many of the men, and the women listed in the genealogies. Chapter and verse references are given in the following text:

Matthew 1:1-17 - In Matthew, the line starts with Abraham and goes Up through King David and his son Solomon to Jesus, to emphasise his royal descent:

This is the record of the ancestry of Jesus Christ who was the descendant of both David and Abraham:

The Patriarchs:

Abraham (c 1,800BC, originally "Abram", a man of great faith, and father of nations, Genesis chapters 11-25) was the father of

Isaac (Genesis 17-35), who was the father of

Jacob (later "Israel" and father of the 12 tribes, Genesis 25-50), who was the father of

Judah (father of the royal tribe of Israel, Genesis 29-50) and his brothers, who was the father of Perez (Genesis 38:29) and Zerah (Genesis 38:30) (whose mother was Tamar - Genesis 38). ....

Perez to David (Ruth 4:18-22):

Perez was the father of
Hezron, who was the father of
Ram, who was the father of
Amminadab, who was the father of
Nahshon, who was the father of
Salmon, who was the father of Boaz (whose mother was Rahab - Joshua chapters 2 and 6).
Boaz (Book of Ruth) was the father of Obed (whose mother was Ruth - also the Book of Ruth), and
Obed was the father of
Jesse (1 Samuel 16-17), who was the father of ....

Kings of the United Kingdom of Israel and Judah c 1,000BC:

.... King David (1 Samuel 16-31; 2 Samuel 1-24; 1 Kings 1-2), who was the father of Solomon (whose mother was Uriah's wife - 2 Samuel 11-12; 1 Kings 1-2).

Solomon (2 Samuel 11-12; 1 Kings 1-11; 1 Chronicles 22-23, 28-29; 2 Chronicles 1-9) was the father of ....

Kings of Judah - good and bad:

.... Rehoboam, who was the father of
Abijah, who was the father of
Asa, who was the father of
Jehoshaphat, who was the father of

Joram (or Jehoram), who was the father (or great-great grandfather, through Kings Ahaziah, Joash, and Amaziah) of
Uzziah (or Azariah), who was the father of
Jotham, who was the father of
Ahaz, who was the father of
Hezekiah, who was the father of
Manasseh, who was the father of
Amon, who was the father of
Josiah, who was the father (or grandfather, through King Jehoiakim) of
Jechoniah (or Jehoiachin) and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon (c 587BC).

- The lives of the Kings of Judah - and of Israel, can be found in 1 Kings 12-22, 2 Kings 1-25, and 2 Chronicles 10-36;

- When Jechoniah was taken captive to Babylon, his uncle, Zedekiah, was appointed last King of Judah -

After Babylon:

After the Babylonian exile Jechoniah (or Jehoiachin) was the father of
Shealtiel (or Salathiel, 1 Chronicles 3:17), who was the father (or grandfather, through Pedaiah, 1 Chronicles 3:19) of
Zerubbabel (a leader of the exiles who returned to Jerusalem, Ezra 2-5), who was the father of
Abiud, who was the father of
Eliakim, who was the father of
Azor, who was the father of
Sadoc, who was the father of
Achim, who was the father of
Eliud, who was the father of
Eleazar, who was the father of
Matthan, who was the father of
Jacob, who was the father of
Joseph (the carpenter), who was the husband of Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ.

The genealogy of Jesus Christ may thus be traced for fourteen generations from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the deportation to Babylon, and fourteen from the deportation to Christ himself.

THE COMING BIRTH OF JESUS IS ANNOUNCED (also Luke 1:26-56)

Matthew 1:18-24a - The birth of Jesus Christ happened like this. When Mary was engaged to Joseph, just before their marriage, she was discovered to be pregnant - by the Holy Spirit .....

Holy Spirit - "Holy" from Old English for "whole", "sound"; "Spirit" from Latin for "a breath" or "to breathe". The Holy Spirit is the third part of the Christian Trinity with God the Father, and Jesus Christ the Son -

.... Whereupon Joseph, her future husband, who was a good man and did not want to see her disgraced, planned to break off the engagement quietly. But while he was turning the matter over in his mind an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David (the David of "David and Goliath", who became the great poet-king of Israel, c 1,000BC), do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife! What she has conceived is conceived through the Holy Spirit, and she will give birth to a son, whom you will call Jesus ('the Saviour') for it is he who will save his people from their sins."

All this happened to fulfil what the Lord had said through the prophet -

'Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel' (Isaiah 7:14). ("Immanuel" means "God with us.")

When Joseph woke up he did what the angel had told him.

Prophet - Greek for "spokesman". Usually an Old Testament teacher or interpreter of God's will to his chosen people - the Jews. Prophets were usually more concerned with speaking out against the Godless

state of the people, than with foretelling the future. Prophets also play a role in the New Testament.

BIRTH OF JESUS
(also Luke 2:1-38)

Matthew 1:24b-25 - He (Joseph) married Mary, but had no intercourse with her until she had given birth to a son. Then he gave him the name Jesus.

Matthew 2:1-23

INFANCY AND CHILDHOOD OF JESUS
(also Luke 2:39-52)

Matthew 2:1-23 - Jesus was born in Bethlehem, in Judea, in the days when Herod (the Great) was king of the province. Not long after his birth there arrived from the east a party of astrologers (Magi, or traditionally "wise men", possibly from Arabia or Persia) making for Jerusalem and enquiring as they went, "Where is the child born to be king of the Jews? For we saw his star in the east and we have come here to pay homage to him."

When King Herod heard about this he was deeply perturbed, as indeed were all the other people living in Jerusalem. So he summoned all the Jewish scribes and chief priests together and asked where "Christ" should be born. ....

Scribes - From the Latin "to write". Professional scholars, interpreters and teachers of the Jewish Law; theologians and jurists;

Chief priest - "Priest" from the Greek "presbyter" for an "elder". Members of "high priestly" families, who held senior positions in the Jerusalem Temple under the High Priest. In the time of Jesus, they were usually from an aristocratic Sadducee background, and the High Priest might be chosen from among them;

Both scribes and chief priests are often linked with elders in the New Testament. Elders from the Old English, "old". A title used throughout the Old Testament, and in the New Testament Gospels and Acts for Jewish religious officials and leaders. Later in the New Testament, in

the Acts of the Apostles, and some of the Letters, "elders" refers to leaders in the early Christian Church -

... Their reply (the scribes and chief priests) was: "In Bethlehem, in Judea, for this is what the prophet (Micah) wrote about the matter -

'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are not the least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel' (Micah 5:2)."

Then Herod invited the wise men to meet him privately and found out from them the exact time when the star appeared. Then he sent them off to Bethlehem saying, "When you get there, search for this little child with the utmost care. And when you have found him come back and tell me - so that I may go and worship him too."

The wise men listened to the king and then went on their way to Bethlehem. And now the star, which they had seen in the east, went in front of them as they travelled until at last it shone immediately above the place where the little child lay. The sight of the star filled them with indescribable joy.

So they went into the house and saw the little child with his mother Mary. And they fell on their knees and worshipped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts - gold, incense and myrrh.

Gold, Incense, Myrrh - Traditionally:

- gold for a King;

- incense or frankincense for God or the Son of God; and

- myrrh, an aromatic gum-resin used in embalming and as a painkiller, to represent mortal man and the eventual death of Jesus -

Then, since they were warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they went back to their own country by a different route.

But after they had gone, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up now, take the little child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you. For Herod means to seek out the child and kill him."

So Joseph got up, and taking the child and his mother with him in the middle of the night, set off for Egypt, where he remained until Herod's death.

This again is a fulfilment of the Lord's word spoken through the prophet -

'Out of Egypt I called my son' (Hosea 11:1).

When Herod saw that he had been fooled by the wise men he was furiously angry. He issued orders, and killed all the male children of two years and under in Bethlehem and the surrounding district - basing his calculation on his careful questioning of the wise men.

Then Jeremiah's prophecy was fulfilled:

'A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted, because they were no more' (Jeremiah 31:15).

Jesus is brought to Nazareth

But after Herod's death (in 4BC) an angel of the Lord again appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Now get up and take the infant and his mother with you and go into the land of Israel. For those who sought the child's life are dead."

So Joseph got up and took the little child and his mother with him and journeyed towards the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was now reigning as king of Judea in the place of his father Herod, he was afraid to enter the country. Then he received warning in a dream to turn aside into the district of Galilee (now ruled by Antipas, tetrarch of Galilee and Perea) and came to live in a small town called Nazareth - thus fulfilling the old prophecy, that he should be called a Nazarene.

Matthew 3:1-17

APPEARANCE OF JOHN THE BAPTIST
(also Mark 1:2-8; Luke 3:1-20; John 1:6-28)

Matthew 3:1-12 - In due course John the Baptist arrived, preaching in the Judean desert: "You must change your hearts - for the

kingdom of Heaven has arrived!"

Kingdom of Heaven (or God) - A New Testament phrase for Heaven and the reign of God, whether within the Christian believer or in the wider world. A description used throughout the Gospels by Jesus, and also by the writers of Acts and the Letters -

This (... John the Baptist) was the man whom the prophet Isaiah spoke about in the words:

'The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight' (Isaiah 40:3)

John wore clothes of camel-hair with a leather belt round his waist, and lived on locusts and wild honey. The people of Jerusalem and of all Judea and the Jordan district flocked to him, and were baptised by him in the river Jordan, publicly confessing their sins.

But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism ....

Pharisees - Hebrew for "Separated". Members of the conservative Jewish religious party - not a political party. They conformed to the written Law of Moses in the first five books of the Old Testament, and the traditional oral interpretation of them;

Sadducees - A Hebrew word probably associated with descendants of "Zadok" the priest - 2 Samuel 8:17. Members of the aristocratic Jewish religious and political party that only accepted the written Law of Moses. They did not observe the oral interpretation, and denied the resurrection of the dead and the existence of spirits -

.... he said: "Who warned you, you serpent's brood, to escape from the wrath to come? Go and do something to show that your hearts are really changed. Don't suppose that you can say to yourselves, 'We are Abraham's children', for I tell you that God could produce children of Abraham out of these stones!

"The axe already lies at the root of the tree, and the tree that fails to produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. It is true that I baptise you with water as a sign of your repentance, but the one who follows me is far stronger than I am - indeed I am not fit to

carry his shoes. He will baptise you with the fire of the Holy Spirit. He comes all ready to separate the wheat from the chaff and very thoroughly will he clear his threshing-floor - the wheat he will collect into the granary and the chaff he will burn with a fire that can never be put out."

BAPTISM OF JESUS
(also Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-23a; John 1:29-34)

Matthew 3:13-17 - Then Jesus (of Nazareth) came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptised by John. But John tried to prevent him. "I need you to baptise me", he said. "Surely you do not come to me?" But Jesus replied, "It is right for us to meet all the Law's demands - let it be so now."

Then John agreed to his baptism. Jesus came straight out of the water afterwards, and suddenly the heavens opened and he saw the Spirit of God coming down like a dove and resting upon him. And a voice came out of Heaven saying, "This is my dearly-loved son, in whom I am well pleased."

Matthew 4:1-25

JESUS' TEMPTATION BY THE DEVIL
(also Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-13)

Matthew 4:1-11 - Then (after his baptism) Jesus was led by the (Holy) Spirit up into the desert (the Wilderness of Judea), to be tempted by the devil. ....

The Devil (or Satan) - "The devil" from the Greek "to slander"; "Satan" from the Hebrew for "adversary", "to oppose", "to plot against". The supreme person and spirit of evil -

.... After a fast of forty days and nights he was very hungry.

"If you really are the Son of God," said the tempter, coming to him, "tell these stones to turn into loaves."

Jesus answered, "The scripture says

'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God' (Deuteronomy 8:3)."

Scripture - From the Latin "to write". The books of the Old Testament, and later, for Christians, also the New Testament -

Then the devil took him to the holy city, and set him on the highest ledge of the Temple. ....

Temple - From the Latin for an open or consecrated place, a place of worship. The three successive buildings of Jewish worship in Jerusalem. In Christian terms, the place where God lives, whether in our body or heart -

.... "If you really are the Son of God," he said, "Throw yourself down. For the scripture says -

'He shall give his angels charge concerning you,' and 'In their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone' (Psalm 91:11,12)."

"Yes," retorted Jesus, "and the scripture also says

'You shall not tempt the Lord your God' (Deuteronomy 6:16)."

Once again the devil took him to a very high mountain, and from there showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their magnificence. "Everything there I will give you," he said to him, "if you will fall down and worship me."

"Away with you, Satan!" replied Jesus, "the scripture says,

'You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only you shall serve' (Deuteronomy 6:13)."

Then the devil let him alone, and the angels came to him and took care of him.

HIS TRAVELS AND ACTS c AD27-30

HOW JESUS STARTS HIS MINISTRY ACCORDING TO MATTHEW (also Mark 1:14-15; Luke 4:14-15; John 1:35-36)

Matthew 4:12-17 - Now when Jesus heard that John (the Baptist) had been arrested (by Herod Antipas, tetrarch of Galilee and Perea) he went back to Galilee. He left Nazareth and came to live in Capernaum, a lake-side town in the Zebulun-Naphtali territory. ....

Zebulun and Naphtali - Two of the twelve tribes of Israel whose original land coincided with part of the Galilee territory -

.... In this way Isaiah's prophecy came true:

'The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles: the people who sat in darkness saw a great light, and upon those who sat in the region and shadow of death, light has dawned' (Isaiah 9:1,2).

From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, "You must change your hearts - for the kingdom of Heaven has arrived."

THE CALLING OF SIMON PETER, ANDREW, JAMES AND JOHN (also Mark 1:16-20; Luke 5:1-11)

Matthew 4:18-22 - While he (Jesus, after he had begun to preach) was walking by the lake of Galilee he saw two brothers, Simon (Peter) and Andrew, casting their large net into the water. They were fishermen, so Jesus said to them, "Follow me and I will teach you to catch men!"

At once they left their nets and followed him.

Then he went further on and saw two more men, also brothers, James and John. They were aboard the boat with their father Zebedee repairing their nets, and he called them. At once they left the boat, and their father, and followed him.

JESUS CONTINUES PREACHING AND HEALING (also Mark 1:35-39; Luke 4:42-44)

Matthew 4:23-25 - Jesus (after calling the brothers Simon Peter and Andrew, and James and John to be his disciples, and before the Sermon on the Mount) now moved about through the whole of Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the good news about the kingdom, and healing every disease and disability among

the people. His reputation spread throughout Syria, and people brought to him all those who were ill, suffering from all kinds of diseases and pains - including the devil-possessed, the insane and the paralysed. He healed them, and was followed by enormous crowds from Galilee, The Ten Towns (Decapolis), Jerusalem, Judea and from beyond the river Jordan (in Perea).

Matthew 5:1-48

THE SERMON

Matthew 5:1 - This is the first of Matthew's Five Discourses, concluding at verse 7:28 with "When Jesus had finished ...":

When Jesus (as he continued teaching and healing in Galilee) saw the vast crowds he went up the hill-side and after he had sat down his disciples came to him.

TRUE HAPPINESS AND SORROW - "THE BEATITUDES" (also Luke 6:20-26)

Matthew 5:2-12 - Then he began his teaching by saying to them,

"How happy are the humble-minded, for the kingdom of Heaven is theirs!

"How happy are those who know what sorrow means for they will be given courage and comfort!

"Happy are those who claim nothing, for the whole earth will belong to them!

"Happy are those who are hungry and thirsty for goodness, for they will be fully satisfied!

"Happy are the merciful, for they will have mercy shown to them!

"Happy are the utterly sincere, for they will see God!

"Happy are those who make peace, for they will be sons of God!

"Happy are those who have suffered persecution for the cause of goodness, for the kingdom of Heaven is theirs!

"And what happiness will be yours when people blame you and ill-treat you and say all kinds of slanderous things against you for my sake! Be glad then, yes, be tremendously glad - for your reward in Heaven is magnificent. They persecuted the prophets before your time in exactly the same way.

PARABLE: LIVING AS WITNESSES TO JESUS CHRIST - "SALT, AND THE SALT OF THE EARTH" (also Mark 9:50; Luke 14:34-35)

Matthew 5:13 - "You are the earth's salt. But if the salt should become tasteless, what can make it salt again? It is completely useless and can only be thrown out of doors and stamped under foot."

PARABLE: LIVING AS WITNESSES TO JESUS CHRIST - "LIGHT, AND THE LAMP ON THE STAND" (also Mark 4:21-23; Luke 8:16-17; 11:33)

Matthew 5:14-16 - "You are the world's light - it is impossible to hide a town built on the top of a hill. Men do not light a lamp and put it under a bucket. They put it on a lamp-stand and it gives light for everybody in the house.

"Let your light shine like that in the sight of men. Let them see the good things you do and praise your Father in Heaven."

JESUS HAS COME NOT TO ABOLISH THE LAW AND THE PROPHETS, BUT TO COMPLETE THEM (also Luke 16:16-17)

Matthew 5:17-20 - "You must not think I have come to abolish the Law ....

The Law - From the Old Norse "lie", "lay". The Laws of God as set down by Moses in the first five books or Pentateuch of the Old Testament - Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy. Also their detailed oral interpretation as it developed over the pre-Christian centuries -

.... or the Prophets (of the Old Testament); I have not come to abolish them but to complete them. Indeed, I assure you that, while

Heaven and earth last, the Law will not lose a single dot or comma until its purpose is complete. This means that whoever now relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men to do the same will himself be called least in Heaven. But whoever teaches and practises them will be called great in the kingdom of Heaven. For I tell you that your goodness must be a far better thing then the goodness of the scribes and Pharisees before you can set foot in the kingdom of Heaven at all!

ANGER AND RECONCILIATION

Matthew 5:21-24 - "You have heard that it was said to the people in the old days,

'You shall not murder' (Exodus 20:13; Deuteronomy 5:17),

and anyone who does must stand his trial. But I say to you that anyone who is angry with his brother must stand his trial; anyone who contemptuously calls his brother a fool must face the supreme court; and anyone who looks on his brother as a lost soul is himself heading straight for the fire of destruction.

"So that if, while you are offering your gift at the altar, you should remember that your brother has something against you, you must leave your gift there before the altar and go away. Make your peace with your brother first, then come and offer your gift."

SETTLING DISAGREEMENTS WISELY
(also Luke 12:57-59)

Matthew 5:25-26 - "Come to terms quickly with your opponent while you have the chance, or else he may hand you over to the judge and the judge in turn hand you over to the officer of the court and you will be thrown into prison. Believe me, you will never get out again till you have paid your last farthing!"

ADULTERY AND LUST

Matthew 5:27-28 - "You have heard that it was said to the people in the old days,

'You shall not commit adultery' (Exodus 20:14; Deuteronomy 5:18).

But I say to you that every man who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her - in his heart.

GETTING RID OF TEMPTATION - "THE OFFENDING "EYE", "HAND", "FOOT""
(also Mark 9:43-49)

- These are not literal commands to mutilate ourselves as some sects have and still do in various parts of the world. The aim is to emphasise the importance of getting rid of or avoiding any temptations that may lead us away from the narrow Christian path:

Matthew 5:29-30 - "Yes, if your right eye leads you astray pluck it out and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than that your whole body should be thrown on to the rubbish-heap.

"Yes, if your right hand leads you astray cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than that your whole body should go to the rubbish-heap.

DIVORCE AND ADULTERY
(also Luke 16:18)

Matthew 5:31-32 - "It also used to be said that

'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce' (Deuteronomy 24:1).

But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife except on the ground of unfaithfulness is making her an adulteress. And whoever marries the woman who has been divorced also commits adultery.

SWEARING AND MAKING VOWS

Matthew 5:33-37 - "Again, you have heard that the people in the old days were told -

'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord' (Leviticus 19:12; Numbers 30:2; Deuteronomy 23:21),

but I say to you, don't use an oath at all. Don't swear by Heaven for it is God's throne, nor by the earth for it is his footstool, nor by

Jerusalem for it is the city of the great king. No, and don't swear by your own head, for you cannot make a single hair - white or black! Whatever you have to say let your 'yes' be a plain 'yes' and your 'no' a plain 'no' - anything more than this has a taint of evil.

DON'T TAKE REVENGE - "TURN THE OTHER CHEEK" (also Luke 6:29a)

Matthew 5:38-39 - "You have heard that it used to be said

'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth' (Exodus 21:24; Leviticus 24:20; Deuteronomy 19:21),

but I tell you, don't resist the man who wants to harm you. If a man hits your right cheek, turn the other one to him as well.

DON'T SET LIMITS ON HOW MUCH YOU SERVE - "GO THE EXTRA MILE" (also Luke 6:29b-30)

Matthew 5:40-42 - "If a man wants to sue you for your coat, let him have it and your overcoat as well. If anybody forces you to go a mile with him, do more - go two miles with him. Give to the man who asks anything from you, and don't turn away from the man who wants to borrow."

DON'T HATE - "LOVE YOUR ENEMIES" (also Luke 6:27-28;32-36)

Matthew 5:43-48 - "You have heard that it used to be said,

'You shall love your neighbour' (Leviticus 19:18), and 'hate your enemy',

but I tell you, Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Heavenly Father. For he makes the sun rise upon evil men as well as good, and he sends his rain upon honest and dishonest men alike.

For if you love only those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even tax-collectors do that! And if you exchange greetings only with your own circle, are you doing anything exceptional? Even the

pagans do that much. No, you are to be perfect, like your Heavenly Father.

Matthew 6:1-34

GIVING GENEROUSLY WITHOUT SHOWING OFF

Matthew 6:1-4 - "Beware of doing your good deeds conspicuously to catch men's eyes or you will miss the reward of your Heavenly Father.

"So, when you do good to other people, don't hire a trumpeter to go in front of you - like those play-actors (the scribes and Pharisees) in the synagogues and streets who make sure that men admire them. Believe me, they have had all the reward they are going to get! No, when you give to charity, don't even let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be secret. Your Father who knows all secrets will reward you.

A PATTERN FOR PRAYER - "THE LORD'S PRAYER" (also Luke 11:1-4)

- The Matthew and Luke versions of the Lord's Prayer differ, suggesting a pattern for Christian prayer rather than a rigid form of worship:

Matthew 6:5-13 - "And then, when you pray, don't be like the play-actors. They love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at street-corners so that people may see them at it. Believe me, they have had all the reward they are going to get. But when you pray, go into your own room, shut your door and pray to your Father privately. Your Father who sees all private things will reward you. And when you pray don't rattle off long prayers like the pagans ....

Pagans (or Heathens) - "Pagan", Latin for a "peasant", "villager"; "Heathen" from the Old English. Anyone not belonging to the Jewish religion; later applied to those who did not belong to the Christian Church, a non-Christian -

.... who think they will be heard because they use so many words. Don't be like them. After all, God, who is your Father, knows your

needs before you ask him. Pray then like this -

'Our Heavenly Father, may your name be honoured;

May your kingdom come, and your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day the bread we need,

Forgive us what we owe to you, as we have also forgiven those who owe anything to us.

Keep us clear of temptation, and save us from evil'."

LEARNING TO FORGIVE, IF WE WANT TO BE FORGIVEN

Matthew 6:14-15 - "... if you forgive other people their failures, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you will not forgive other people, neither will your Heavenly Father forgive you your failures."

FASTING WITHOUT SHOWING OFF

Matthew 6:16-18 - ".... when you fast, don't look like those miserable play-actors! For they deliberately disfigure their faces so that people may see that they are fasting. Believe me, they have had all their reward. No, when you fast, brush your hair and wash your face so that nobody knows that you are fasting - let it be a secret between you and your Father. And your Father who knows all secrets will reward you.

REAL SECURITY IN LIFE - "NOT FROM MOTH-EATEN AND RUSTING TREASURES ON EARTH" (also Luke 12:32-34)

Matthew 6:19-21 - "Don't pile up treasures on earth, where moth and rust can spoil them and thieves can break in and steal. But keep your treasure in Heaven where there is neither moth nor rust to spoil it and nobody can break in and steal. For wherever your treasure is, you may be certain that your heart will be there too!"

PARABLE: OUR EYES AS A GUIDE TO OUR INNER BEING - "THE INWARD LIGHT" (also Luke 11:34-36)

Matthew 6:22-23 - "The lamp of the body is the eye. If your eye is sound, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is evil, your whole body will be full of darkness. If all the light you have is darkness, it is dark indeed!"

WE CANNOT SERVE GOD AND MONEY AT THE SAME TIME (also Luke 16:13)

Matthew 6:24 - "No one can be loyal to two masters. He is bound to hate one and love the other, or support one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and the power of money at the same time."

WORRYING ABOUT MONEY AND POSSESSIONS - "HOW GOD PROVIDES FOR THE BIRDS AND THE FLOWERS" (also Luke 12:22-31)

Matthew 6:25-33 - "That is why I say to you, don't worry about living - wondering what you are going to eat or drink, or what you are going to wear. Surely life is more important than food, and the body more important than the clothes you wear. Look at the birds in the sky. They never sow nor reap nor store away in barns, and yet your Heavenly Father feeds them. Aren't you much more valuable to him than they are? Can any of you, however much he worries, make himself an inch taller? And why do you worry about clothes? Consider how the wild flowers grow. They neither work nor weave, but I tell you that even Solomon (son of King David known for his wealth, fame and initially, his wisdom) in all his glory was never arrayed like one of these! Now if God so clothes the flowers of the field, which are alive today and burnt in the stove tomorrow, is he not much more likely to clothe you, you 'little-faiths'?

"So don't worry and don't keep saying, 'What shall we eat, what shall we drink or what shall we wear?! That is what pagans are always looking for; your Heavenly Father knows that you need them all. Set your heart on the kingdom and his goodness, and all these things will come to you as a matter of course.

DON'T WORRY ABOUT THE FUTURE - "THERE ARE ENOUGH TROUBLES FOR TODAY"

Matthew 6:34 - "Don't worry at all then about tomorrow. Tomorrow can take care of itself! One day's trouble is enough for one day."

Matthew 7:1-29

THE PRICE OF CRITICISM AND TREATING OTHERS BADLY - "MEASURE FOR MEASURE" (also Mark 4:24-25; Luke 6:37-38; 8:18)

Matthew 7:1-2 - "Don't criticise people, and you will not be criticised. For you will be judged by the way you criticise others, and the measure you give will be the measure you receive."

THE HYPOCRISY OF JUDGING OTHERS - "THE PLANK OF WOOD IN OUR OWN EYE" (also Luke 6:41-42)

Matthew 7:3-5 - "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and fail to notice the plank in your own? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me get the speck out of your eye', when there is a plank in your own? You fraud! Take the plank out of your own eye first, and then you can see clearly enough to remove your brother's speck of dust."

BE WISE WHEN DEALING WITH PEOPLE ABOUT THE THINGS OF GOD - "CASTING PEARLS BEFORE 'SWINE' "

Matthew 7:6 - "You must not give holy things to dogs, nor must you throw your pearls before pigs - or they may trample them underfoot and turn and attack you."

GOD'S GIFTS ARE FREELY AVAILABLE TO EVERYONE - "ASK! SEEK! KNOCK!" (also Luke 11:9-10)

Matthew 7:7-8 - "Ask and it will be given to you. Search and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened for you. The one who asks will always receive; the one who is searching will always find, and the door is opened to the man who knocks."

ASKING IN PRAYER; HOW GOD MEETS OUR REAL NEEDS - "THE BREAD AND THE STONE, THE FISH AND THE SNAKE" (also Luke 11:11-13)

Matthew 7:9-11 - "If any of you were asked by his son for bread would you be likely to give him a stone, or if he asks for a fish would you give him a snake? If you then, for all your evil, quite naturally give good things to your children, how much more likely is it that your Heavenly Father will give good things to those who ask him?"

DOING TO OTHERS AS WE WOULD HAVE THEM DO TO US - "THE GOLDEN RULE" IN THE POSITIVE FORM (also Luke 6:31)

Matthew 7:12 - "Treat other people exactly as you would like to be treated by them - this is the essence of all true religion."

CHOOSING THE PATH TO TAKE THROUGH LIFE - "THE BROAD AND NARROW WAYS"

Matthew 7:13-14 - "Go in by the narrow gate. For the wide gate has a broad road which leads to disaster and there are many people going that way. The narrow gate and the hard road lead out into life and only a few are finding it."

BEING KNOWN BY WHAT WE DO AND SAY - "THE GOOD AND BAD FRUIT TREES" (also Luke 6:43-45)

Matthew 7:15-20 - "Be on your guard against false religious teachers, who come to you dressed up as sheep but are really greedy wolves. You can tell them by their fruit. Do you pick a bunch of grapes from a thorn-bush or figs from a clump of thistles? Every good tree produces good fruit, but a bad tree produces bad fruit. A good tree is incapable of producing bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot produce good fruit. The tree that fails to produce good fruit is cut down and burnt. So you may know men by their fruit."

ARE WE REALLY DOING GOD'S WILL? OR WILL JESUS SAY "I NEVER KNEW YOU!"

(also Luke 6:46;13:22-30)

Matthew 7:21-23 - "It is not everyone who keeps saying to me 'Lord, Lord' who will enter the kingdom of Heaven, but the man who actually does my Heavenly Father's will.

"In 'that day' many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, didn't we preach in your name, didn't we cast out devils in your name, and do many great things in your name?' Then I shall tell them plainly, 'I have never known you. Go away from me, you have worked on the side of evil!'"

PARABLE: THE ONLY REAL SECURITY IS IN JESUS - "THE HOUSE BUILT ON THE ROCK"
(also Luke 6:47-49)

Matthew 7:24-27 - "Everyone then who hears these words of mine (the Sermon on the Mount) and puts them into practice is like a sensible man who builds his house on the rock. Down came the rain and up came the floods, while the winds blew and roared upon that house - and it did not fall because its foundations were on the rock.

"And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not follow them can be compared with a foolish man who built his house on sand. Down came the rain and up came the floods, while the winds blew and battered that house till it collapsed, and fell with a great crash."

THE AUTHORITY OF JESUS

Matthew 7:28-29 - When Jesus had finished these words (at the end of Matthew's First Discourse, "The Sermon on the Mount") the crowd were astonished at the power behind his teaching. For his words had the ring of authority, quite unlike those of the scribes.

Matthew 8:1-34

THE LEPER
(also Mark 1:40-45; Luke 5:12-16)

Matthew 8:1-4 - Large crowds followed him when he came down from the hillside (after the Sermon on the Mount). There was a leper who came and knelt in front of him. "Sir," he said, "if you want to, you can make me clean." Jesus stretched out his hand and placed it on the leper saying, "Of course I want to. Be clean!" And at once he was clear of the leprosy.

Leprosy - From the Greek "scaly". The word covers a variety of skin diseases, some infectious, of which leprosy was only one -

"Mind you say nothing to anybody," Jesus told him. "Go straight off and show yourself to the priest and make the offering for your recovery that Moses prescribed (in Leviticus 14:1-32), as evidence to the authorities."

THE ROMAN CENTURION'S SERVANT
(also Luke 7:1-10)

Matthew 8:5-13 - Then as he was coming into Capernaum (after healing the leper) a centurion approached. ....

Centurion - The main unit of the highly professional and much-feared Roman army was the 6,000 strong legion under the command of an imperial Legate. It consisted of six cohorts, each under a Tribune, with cohorts divided into "centuries" of approximately 100 soldiers commanded by a Centurion. They had the same reputation as a tough regimental sergeant-major in any modern army. A number of centurions appear in the New Testament, some quite prominently:

In the Gospels:

(1) This centurion whose servant was healed by Jesus;

(2) The centurion present at the crucifixion (Matthew 27:54); and

In the Acts of the Apostles:

(3) Cornelius from Caesarea, the first named Gentile to become a Christian through the teaching of the apostle Peter (Acts 10:1);

(4) Those centurions involved in Paul's arrest and imprisonment in Jerusalem and his journey to Caesarea (Acts 22:25; 23:17,23); and

(5) Julius who escorts Paul to Rome (Acts 27:1) -

.... "Sir," he (the centurion) implored him, "my servant is in bed at home paralysed and in dreadful pain."

"I will come and heal him," said Jesus to him.

"Sir," replied the centurion, "I'm not important enough for you to come under my roof. Just give the order, please, and my servant will recover. I'm a man under authority myself, and I have soldiers under me. I can say to one man 'Go' and I know he'll go, or I can say 'Come here' to another and I know he'll come - or I can say to my slave 'Do this' and he'll always do it."

When Jesus heard this, he was astonished. "Believe me," he said to those who were following him, "I have never found faith like this, even in Israel! I tell you that many people will come from east and west and sit at my table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of Heaven. But those who should have belonged to the kingdom will be banished to the darkness outside, where there will be tears and bitter regret."

Then he said to the centurion, "Go home now, and everything will happen as you have believed it will."

And his servant was healed at that actual moment.

PETER'S MOTHER-IN-LAW'S FEVER: JESUS ALSO HEALS MANY OTHERS THAT EVENING
(also Mark 1:29-34; Luke 4:38-41)

- Here, as elsewhere in the New Testament, some of the apostles and many of Jesus' disciples were married. Celibacy does not appear to have been a major issue in the early Church. However, the Apostle Paul in his First Letter to the Corinthians (chapter 7) does recognise that the unmarried and celibate can enjoy certain advantages in their Christian life:

Matthew 8:14-17 - Then on coming into Peter's house (in Capernaum, after healing the leper and the centurion's servant in Matthew's Gospel) Jesus saw that Peter's mother-in-law had been put to bed with a high fever. He touched her hand and the fever left her. And then she got up and began to see to their needs.

When evening came they brought to him many who were possessed by evil spirits, which he expelled with a word. Indeed he healed all who were ill. Thus was fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy -

'He himself took our infirmities and bore our sicknesses' (Isaiah 53:4)

HARD DECISIONS FOR THE FOLLOWERS OF JESUS - "LET THE DEAD BURY THE DEAD!"
(also Luke 9:57-62)

Matthew 8:18-22 - When Jesus (after healing the leper) had seen the great crowds around him he gave orders for departure to the other side of the lake (of Galilee). But before they started, one of the scribes came up to Jesus and said to him, "Master, I will follow you wherever you go."

"Foxes have earths, birds in the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere that he can call his own," replied Jesus.

Another of his disciples said, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father."

But Jesus said to him, "Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead."

- If the reference to burial is literal, this is Jesus' way of emphasising that no earthly duty can be as important as following him. Alternatively, if this reflects the custom that a young man was not free to take up his own life until his father had indeed died, then Jesus may have been encouraging him to become truly independent.

CALMING THE STORM
(also Mark 4:35-41; Luke 8:22-25)

- The Sea of Galilee, like other stretches of water surrounded by hills and mountains, is subject to sudden and violent storms or squalls:

Matthew 8:23-27 - Then he went aboard the boat (to cross to the other side of the Sea of Galilee after healing many people, including the centurion's servant), and his disciples followed him. Before long a terrific storm sprang up and the boat was awash with the waves.

Jesus was sleeping soundly and the disciples went forward and woke him up.

"Lord, save us!" they cried. "We are drowning!"

"What are you so frightened about, you little-faiths?" he replied.

Then he got to his feet and rebuked the wind and the waters and there was a great calm. The men were filled with astonishment and kept saying, "Whatever sort of man is this - why, even the wind and the waves do what he tells them!"

THE MADMAN (OR MEN) AND THE GADARENE PIGS
(also Mark 5:1-20; Luke 8:26-39)

- The different Gospels and various versions of the Bible place this incident in the region of the Gadarenes, the Gerasenes, and the Gergesenes:

(1) The town of Gadara was a few miles southeast of the Sea of Galilee in the Gentile Decapolis. The region of the Gadarenes may well have spread beyond the town to the shoreside;

(2) Gerasa, also in the Decapolis, but much further away, some 30 miles (50 km) from the Sea of Galilee; and

(3) Only Gergesa was on the actual shoreside in the territory of Gaulanitis - the modern Golan.

Whatever the case, it must have been predominantly Gentile to account for the large numbers of pigs or swine. These were forbidden to Jews as food -

Matthew 8:28-34 - When he arrived on the other side (of the Sea of Galilee after calming the storm - which is the Gadarenes' country) he was met by two devil-possessed men who came out from among the tombs. They were so violent that nobody dared to use that road. "What have you got to do with us, Jesus, you Son of God?" they screamed at him. "Have you come to torture us before the proper time?"

It happened that in the distance there was a large herd of pigs feeding. So the devils implored him, "If you throw us out, send us

into the herd of pigs!"

"Then go!" said Jesus to them.

And the devils came out of the two men and went into the pigs. Then quite suddenly the whole herd rushed madly down a steep cliff into the lake and were drowned.

The swineherds took to their heels, and ran to the town. There they poured out the whole story, not forgetting what had happened to the two men who had been devil-possessed. Whereupon the whole town came out to meet Jesus, and as soon as they saw him implored him to leave their (Gentile) territory.

Matthew 9:1-38

THE PARALYSED MAN
(also Mark 2:1-12; Luke 5:17-26)

Matthew 9:1-8 - (After healing the madman - or men - of Gadarene) ... Jesus re-embarked on the boat, crossed the lake, and came to his own town (of Capernaum). Immediately some people arrived bringing him a paralytic lying flat on his bed. When Jesus saw the faith of those who brought him he said to the paralytic, "Cheer up, my son! Your sins are forgiven."

At once some of the scribes thought to themselves, "This man is blaspheming". But Jesus realised what they were thinking, and said to them, "Why must you have such evil thoughts in your minds? Do you think it is easier to say to this man, 'Your sins are forgiven' or 'Get up and walk'? But to make it quite plain that the Son of Man has full authority on earth to forgive sins" - and here he spoke to the paralytic - "Get up, pick up your bed and go home." And the man sprang to his feet and went home. When the crowds saw what had happened they were filled with awe and praised God for giving such power to men.

CALLING OF MATTHEW THE TAX COLLECTOR
(also Mark 2:13-17; Luke 5:27-32)

Matthew 9:9-13 - Jesus left there (Capernaum) and as he passed on he saw a man called Matthew sitting at his desk in the tax-collector's office.

Tax collectors - "Publicans" in Latin. Jewish or other local people who collected taxes for the Roman authorities. Jewish tax-collectors were thrice despised - they dealt with Gentiles, they were extortioners, and they collaborated with the occupying power -

"Follow me!" he said to him - and the man (Matthew) got to his feet and followed him.

Later, as Jesus was in the house sitting at the dinner-table, a good many tax-collectors and other disreputable people came on the scene and joined him and his disciples. The Pharisees noticed this and said to the disciples, "Why does your master have his meals with tax-collectors and sinners?" But Jesus heard this and replied, "It is not the fit and flourishing who need the doctor, but those who are ill! Suppose you go away and learn what this means:

'I desire mercy and not sacrifice' (Hosea 6:6).

In any case I did not come to invite the 'righteous' but the 'sinners'."

THE PRESENCE OF JESUS SHOULD MEAN JOY - "THE WEDDING GUESTS AND THE BRIDEGROOM"
(also Mark 2:18-20; Luke 5:33-35)

Matthew 9:14-15 - Then (after Jesus had told the Pharisee's why he ate with "sinners") John (the Baptist)'s disciples approached him with the question, "Why is it that we and the Pharisees observe the fasts, but your disciples do nothing of the kind?"

"Can you expect wedding-guests to mourn while they have the bridegroom with them?" replied Jesus. "The day will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them - they will certainly fast then!"

THE TEACHING OF JESUS AND THE OLD WAYS CAN NOT BE MIXED - "THE NEW CLOTH SEWN ONTO THE OLD" and "THE

NEW WINE POURED INTO OLD WINESKINS"
(also Mark 2:21-22; Luke 5:36-39)

Matthew 9:16-17 - (After the question about fasting, Jesus continued ....) "Nobody sews a patch of unshrunken cloth on to an old coat, for the patch will pull away from the coat and the hole will be worse than ever. Nor do people put new wine into old wineskins - otherwise the skins burst, the wine is spilt and the skins are ruined. But they put new wine into new skins and both are preserved."

THE WOMAN WITH THE HAEMORRHAGE and THE RAISING OF JAIRUS' DAUGHTER
(also Mark 5:21-43; Luke 8:40-56)

Matthew 9:18-26 - While he was saying these thing to them (parables such as the bride and the bridegroom, and the new cloth sewn onto old; also after healing the madman in the region of the Gadarenes) an official (or synagogue ruler or president) came up to him and, bowing low before him, said, "My daughter has just this moment died. Please come and lay your hand on her and she will come back to life!"

At this Jesus got to his feet and followed him, accompanied by his disciples. And on the way a woman who had a haemorrhage for twelve years approached him from behind and touched the edge of his cloak.

"If I can only touch his cloak," she kept saying to herself, "I shall be all right."

But Jesus turned right round and saw her.

"Cheer up, my daughter," he said, "your faith has made you well!" And the woman was completely cured from that moment.

Then when Jesus came into the official's house and noticed the flute-players and the noisy crowd he said, "You must all go outside; the little girl is not dead, she is fast asleep."

This was met with scornful laughter. But when Jesus had forced the crowd to leave, he came right into the room, took hold of her hand,

and the girl got up. And this became the talk of the whole district.

TWO BLIND MEN and THE DUMB MAN

Matthew 9:27-34 - As Jesus passed on his way (after bringing the daughter of Jairus back to life) two blind men followed him with the cry, "have pity on us, Son of David!" And when he had gone inside the house these two came up to him.

"Do you believe I can do it?" he said to them.

"Yes, Lord," they replied.

Then he touched their eyes, saying, "You have believed and you will not be disappointed."

Then their sight returned, but Jesus sternly warned them, "Don't let anyone know about his." Yet they went outside and spread the story throughout the whole district.

Later, when Jesus and his party were coming out, they brought to him a dumb man who was possessed by a devil. As soon as the devil had been ejected the dumb man began to talk. The crowds were simply amazed and said, "Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel." But the Pharisees' comment was, "He throws out these devils because he is in league with the devil himself."

MORE DISCIPLES ARE NEEDED - THE SEVENTY (OR 72) ARE SENT OUT
(also Luke 10:1-12,16-20)

Matthew 9:35-38 - (In this account he speaks about the great harvest .....) Jesus now travelled through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the Gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of illness and disability. As he looked at the vast crowds he was deeply moved with pity for them, for they were as bewildered and miserable as a flock of sheep with no shepherd.

"The harvest is great enough," he remarked to his disciples, "but the reapers are few. So you must pray to the Lord of the harvest to send men out to reap it."

Matthew 10:1-42

CHOOSING THE TWELVE APOSTLES
(also Mark 3:13-19; Luke 6:12-16)

Matthew 10:1-4 - The start of Matthew's Second Discourse, "The twelve apostles are sent out" concluding at verse 11:1, "When Jesus had finished ...". The First Discourse, "the Sermon on the Mount", follows shortly:

Jesus (feeling deep pity for the crowds of people who followed him, remarks that "the harvest is great enough ... but the reapers are few ...") called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to expel evil spirits and heal all kinds of disease and infirmity. The names of the twelve apostles were: First,

1. Simon, called Peter, with his brother
2. Andrew;
3. James, and his brother
4. John, sons of Zebedee;
5. Philip and
6. Bartholomew (or Nathanael),
7. Thomas, and
8. Matthew (or Levi) the tax-collector,
9. James, the son of Alphaeus (or James the Less or Little), and
10. Thaddaeus (or Judas, son of James; also known as Lebbaeus insome ancient manuscripts),
11. Simon the Patriot (or Zealot), and
12. Judas Iscariot, who later turned traitor.

Zealot - Related to "zeal" from the Greek "to boil". Member of one of the Jewish partisan or terrorist groups dedicated to overthrowing Roman rule of Palestine.

THE TWELVE APOSTLES ARE SENT OUT TO PREACH AND HEAL
(also Mark 6:6b-13; Luke 9:1-6)

Matthew 10:5-15 - (Sometime after raising the daughter of Jairus .....) These (the newly chosen apostles) were the twelve whom Jesus sent out, with the instructions: "Don't turn off into any of the heathen roads, and don't go into any Samaritan town. Concentrate on the lost sheep of the house of Israel (the Jews). As you go proclaim that the kingdom of Heaven has arrived. Heal the sick, raise the dead, cure the lepers, drive out devils - give, as you have received, without any charge whatever.

"Don't take any gold or silver or even coppers to put in your purse; nor a knapsack for the journey, nor even a change of clothes, or sandals or a staff - the workman is worth his keep!

"Wherever you go, whether it is into a town or a village, find out someone who is respected, and stay with him until you leave. As you enter his house give it your blessing. If the house deserves it, the peace of your blessing will come to it. But if it doesn't, your peace will return to you.

"And if no one will welcome you or even listen to what you have to say, leave that house or town, and once outside it shake off the dust of that place from your feet. Believe me, Sodom and Gomorrah (the towns of immorality destroyed in Abraham's time) will fare better in the day of judgment than that town."

WARNINGS AND ENCOURAGEMENTS AS THE APOSTLES ARE SENT OUT
(also Luke 12:2-12;49-53;14:25-27)

Matthew 10:16-11:1 - "Here I am sending you (the recently chosen twelve apostles) out like sheep with wolves all round you; so be as wise as serpents and yet as harmless as doves. But be on your guard against men. For they will take you to the court and flog you in their synagogues. You will be brought into the presence of governors and kings because of me - to give your witness to them and to the heathen.

"But when they do arrest you, never worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say. You will be told at the time what you are to say. For it will not be really you who are speaking but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.

"Brothers are going to betray their brothers to death, and fathers their children. Children are going to betray their parents and have them executed. You yourselves will be universally hated because of my name. But the man who endures to the very end will be safe and sound.

"But when they persecute you in one town make your escape to the next. Believe me, you will not have covered the towns of Israel before the Son of Man arrives. The disciple is not superior to his teacher any more than the servant is superior to his master, for what is good enough for the teacher is good enough for the disciple as well, and the servant will not fare better than his master. If men call the master of the household the 'Prince of Evil', what sort of names will they give to his Servants? But never let them frighten you, for there is nothing covered up which is not going to be exposed nor anything private which will not be made public. The things I tell you in the dark you must say in the daylight, and the things you hear in your private ear you must proclaim from the house-tops.

They should reverence God but have no fear of man

"Never be afraid of those who can kill the body but are powerless to kill the soul! Far better to stand in awe of the one (God) who has the power to destroy body and soul in the fires of destruction!

"Two sparrows sell for a farthing, don't they? Yet not a single sparrow falls to the ground without your Father's knowledge. The very hairs of your head are all numbered. Never be afraid, then - you are far more valuable than sparrows.

"Every man who publicly acknowledges me I shall acknowledge in the presence of my Father in Heaven, but the man who disowns me before men I shall disown before my Father in Heaven.

The Prince of Peace comes to bring division

"Never think I have come to bring peace upon the earth. No, I have not come to bring peace but a sword! For I have come to

'set a man against his own father, a daughter against her own mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law', and 'a man's foes will be those of his own household' (Micah 7:6).

"Anyone who puts his love for father or mother above his love for me does not deserve to be mine, and he who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me, and neither is the man who refuses to take up his cross and follow my way. The man who has found his own life will lose it, but the man who has lost it for my sake will find it.

"Whoever welcomes you, welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me is welcoming the one who sent me.

"Whoever welcomes a prophet just because he is a prophet will get a prophet's reward. And whoever welcomes a good man just because he is a good man will get a good man's reward. Believe me, anyone who gives even a drink of water to one of these little ones, just because he is my disciple, will by no means lose his reward."

Matthew 11:1-30

(Chapter 11 ...) When Jesus had finished giving his twelve disciples these instructions (at the end of Matthew's Second Discourse) he went on from there to teach and preach in the towns (of Galilee) in which they lived.

JESUS AND JOHN THE BAPTIST COMPARED - "YET STILL THE PEOPLE WILL NOT REPENT"
(also Luke 7:18-35; 10:13-15)

Matthew 11:2-24 - (Jesus has sent out the twelve apostles to preach and heal .....) John the Baptist was in prison when he heard what Christ was doing, and he sent a message through his own disciples asking the question, "Are you the one who was to come or are we to look for somebody else?"

Jesus gave them this reply, "Go and tell John what you see and her - that blind men are recovering their sight, cripples are walking, lepers being healed, the deaf hearing, the dead being brought to life and the good news is being given to those in need. And happy is the man who never loses faith in me."

As John's disciples were going away Jesus began talking to the crowd about John: "What did you go out into the desert to look at? A reed waving in the breeze? No? Then what was it you went out to see? - a man dressed in fine clothes? But the men who wear fine clothes live in the courts of kings! But what did you really go to see - a prophet? Yes, I tell you, a prophet and far more than a prophet! This is the man of whom the scripture says -

'Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you' (Malachi 3:1).

"Believe me, no one greater than John the Baptist has ever been born of all mankind, and yet a humble member of the kingdom of Heaven is greater than he.

"From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of Heaven has been taken by storm and eager men are forcing their way into it. For the Law and all the prophets foretold it till the time of John and - if you can believe it - John himself is the 'Elijah' who must come before the kingdom. The man who has ears to hear must use them.

"But how can I show what the people of this generation are like? They are like children sitting in the market-place calling out to their friends, 'We played at weddings for you but you wouldn't dance, and we played at funerals and you wouldn't cry!' For John came in the strictest austerity and people say, 'He's crazy!' Then the Son of Man came, enjoying life, and people say, 'Look, a drunkard and a glutton - the bosom-friend of the tax-collector and the sinner.' Ah, well, wisdom stands or falls by her own actions."

Jesus denounces apathy - and thanks God that simple men understand his message

Then Jesus began reproaching the towns where most of his miracles had taken place because their hearts were unchanged.

"Alas for you, Chorazin! Alas for you, Bethsaida! (both Jewish towns.) For if Tyre and Sidon (in Gentile Phoenicia) had seen the demonstrations of God's power which you have seen they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. Yet I tell you this, that it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you.

"And as for you, Capernaum (also Jewish), are you on your way up to Heaven? I tell you will go hurtling down among the dead! If Sodom (and Gomorrah - Genesis chapter19) had seen the miracles that you have seen, Sodom would be standing today. Yet I tell you now that it will be more bearable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you."

JESUS REJOICES FOR THOSE ABLE TO UNDERSTAND HIS MESSAGE
(also 13:16-17; Luke 10:21-24)

Matthew 11:25-27 - At this same time (as he warned the towns of Chorazin and Bethsaida) Jesus said, "O Father, Lord of Heaven and earth, I thank you for hiding these things from the clever and intelligent and for showing them to mere children. Yes, I thank you, Father, that this was your will."

Then he said: "Everything has been put in my hands by my Father, and nobody knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son - and the man to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

THE REST JESUS OFFERS THE WEARY AND BURDENED

Matthew 11:28-30 - "Come to me, all of you who are weary and over-burdened, and I will give you rest! Put on my yoke and learn from me. For I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Matthew 12:1-50

THE DISCIPLES PICK CORN ON THE SABBATH - "THE SABBATH IS MADE FOR MAN"
(also Mark 2:23-28; Luke 6:1-5)

Matthew 12:1-8 - It happened then (following the comparison between Jesus and John the Baptist) that Jesus passed through the cornfields on the Sabbath day. His disciples were hungry and began picking the ears of wheat and eating them. But the Pharisees saw them do it.

"There, you see," they remarked to Jesus, "your disciples are doing what the Law forbids them to do on the Sabbath."

"Haven't any of you read what David did when he and his companions were hungry?" replied Jesus, "- how he went into the house of God (to the high priest Ahimelech - 1 Samuel 21:1-6) and ate the presentation loaves, which he and his followers were not allowed to eat since only priests can do so?

"Haven't any of you read in the Law that every Sabbath day priests in the Temple can break the Sabbath and yet remain blameless? I tell you that there is something more important than the Temple here. If you had grasped the meaning of the scripture

'I desire mercy and not sacrifice' (Hosea 6:6),

you would not have been so quick to condemn the innocent! For the Son of Man is master even of the Sabbath."

THE MAN WITH THE SHRIVELLED HAND
(also Mark 3:1-6; Luke 6:6-11)

Matthew 12:9-14 - Leaving there (the cornfields where Jesus and his disciples were criticised by Pharisees for picking corn on the Sabbath) he went into their synagogue (in Galilee, possibly Capernaum), where there happened to be a man with a shrivelled hand.

"Is it right to heal anyone on the Sabbath day?" they asked him - hoping to bring a charge against him.

"If any of you had a sheep which fell into a ditch on the Sabbath day, would he not take hold of it and pull it out?" replied Jesus. "How much more valuable is a man than a sheep? You see, it is right to do good on the Sabbath day."

Then Jesus said to the man, "Stretch out your hand!" He did stretch it out, and it was restored as sound as the other.

But the Pharisees went out and held a meeting against Jesus and discussed how they could get rid of him altogether.

JESUS CONTINUES HEALING MANY
(also Mark 3:7-12; Luke 6:17-19)

Matthew 12:15-21 - But Jesus knew of this (the Pharisees desire to get rid of him, especially after healing the man with the shrivelled hand) and he left the place (possibly Capernaum).

Large crowds followed him and he healed them all, with the strict injunction that they should not make him conspicuous by their talk, thus fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy:

'Behold, my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved in whom my soul is well pleased; I will put my Spirit upon him, and he will declare justice to the Gentiles. He will not quarrel nor cry out, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and smoking flax he will not quench, till he sends forth justice to victory. And in his name Gentiles will trust' (Isaiah 42:1-4).

THE DUMB (AND BLIND) MAN
(also Luke 11:14)

Matthew 12:22-23 - Then (after healing the man with the shrivelled hand, and many others) a devil-possessed man who could neither see nor speak was brought to Jesus. He healed him, so that the dumb man could both speak and see. At this the whole crowd went wild with excitement, and people kept saying, "Can this be the Son of David?" (.... Jesus is then accused by the Pharisees of using the power of the devil.)

JESUS IS ACCUSED OF USING THE POWER OF THE DEVIL TO HEAL
(also Mark 3:22-30; Luke 11:14-23; 12:8-10)

The Pharisees draw an evil conclusion, and Jesus rebukes them

Matthew 12:24-32 - But the Pharisees on hearing this remark said to each other, "This man is only expelling devils because he is in league with Beelzebub, the prince of devils." (Beelzebub - a name for the devil taken from the Hebrew for a Philistine god.)

Jesus knew what they were thinking and said to them, "Any kingdom divided against itself is bound to collapse, and no town or household divided against itself can last for long. If it is Satan who is expelling Satan, then he is divided against himself - so how do you suppose that his kingdom can continue? And if I expel devils because I am an ally of Beelzebub, what alliance do your sons make when they do the same thing? They can settle that question for you! But if I am expelling devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has swept over you unawares! How do you suppose anyone could get into a strong man's house and steal his property unless he first tied up the strong man? But if he did that, he could ransack his whole house.

"The man who is not on my side is against me, and the man who does not gather with me is really scattering. That is why I tell you that men may be forgiven for every sin and blasphemy, but blasphemy against the (Holy) Spirit cannot be forgiven. A man may say a word against the Son of Man (Jesus) and be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit cannot be forgiven either in this world or in the world to come!

BEING KNOWN BY WHAT WE DO AND SAY - "THE GOOD AND BAD FRUIT TREES"

Matthew 12:33-37 - "You must choose between having a good tree with good fruit and a rotten tree with rotten fruit. For you can tell a tree at once by its fruit.

"You serpent's brood (Pharisees, who later accuse Jesus of being in league with the devil), how can you say anything good out of your evil hearts? For a man's words depend on what fills his heart. A good man gives out good - from the goodness stored in his heart; a bad man gives out evil - from his store of evil. I tell you that men will have to answer at the day of judgment for every careless word they

utter - for it is your words that will acquit you, and your words that will condemn you."

THE SCRIBES AND PHARISEES DEMAND A SIGN FROM JESUS (also Luke 11:29-32)

Matthew 12:38-42 - Then (after Jesus had been accused of being in league with the devil) some of the scribes and Pharisees said, "Master, we want to see a sign from you (a supernatural one to prove he is the Messiah)." But Jesus told them, "It is an evil and unfaithful generation that craves for a sign, and no sign will be given to it - except the sign of the prophet Jonah (in the Book of Jonah). For just as Jonah was in the belly of that great sea-monster for three days and nights, so will the Son of Man (Jesus) be in the heart of the earth for three days and nights (between his death and resurrection). The men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation in the judgment and will condemn it. For they did repent when Jonah preached to them, and you have more than Jonah's preaching with you now! The Queen of the South (the Queen of Sheba, in what is now southern Arabia - 1 Kings 10) will stand up in the judgment with this generation and will condemn it. For she came from the ends of the earth to listen to the wisdom of (King) Solomon, and you have more than the wisdom of Solomon with you now!

THE DANGER OF NOT BEING FILLED WITH THE THINGS OF GOD - "THE RETURN OF THE EVIL SPIRITS" (also Luke 11:24-26)

Matthew 12:43-45 - (After Jesus refuses to give the Pharisees a sign, he goes on .....) "When the evil spirit goes out of a man it wanders through waterless places looking for rest and never finding it. Then it says, 'I will go back to my house from which I came.' When it arrives it finds it unoccupied, but clean and all in order. Then it goes and collects seven other spirits more evil than itself to keep it company, and they all go in and make themselves at home. The last state of that man is worse than the first - and that is just what will happen to this evil generation."

JESUS AND HIS OWN FAMILY - THE INITIAL DIVISIONS BETWEEN THEM
(also Mark 3:31-35; Luke 8:19-21)

Matthew 12:46-50 - While he was still talking to the crowds (after the Pharisees had demanded a sign), his mother (Mary) and his brothers happened to be standing outside wanting to speak to him. Somebody said to him, "Look, your mother and your brothers are outside wanting to speak to you." But Jesus replied to the one who told him, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?"; then with a gesture of his hand towards his disciples he went on, "There are my mother and brothers! For whoever does the will of my Heavenly Father is brother and sister and mother to me."

Matthew 13:1-58

MYSTERIES OF THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN: LISTENING AND RESPONDING TO THE GOSPEL OF JESUS - "SOWING THE SEED"
(also Mark 4:1-9; Luke 8:4-8)

Matthew 13:1-9 - The start of Matthew's Third Discourse, "Parables of the kingdom of Heaven" concluding at verse 13:53 with "When Jesus had finished ...":

It was on the same day (he spoke about his "real family") that Jesus went out of the house and sat down by the lake-side (of the Sea of Galilee). Such great crowds collected round him that he went aboard a small boat and sat down while all the people stood on the beach. He told them a great deal in parables, and began: "There was once a man who went out to sow. In his sowing some of the seeds fell by the road-side and the birds swooped down and gobbled them up. Some fell on stony patches where they had very little soil. They sprang up quickly in the shallow soil, but when the sun came up they were scorched by the heat and withered away because they had no roots. Some seeds fell among thorn-bushes and the thorns grew up and choked the life out of them. But some fell on good soil and produced a crop - some a hundred times what had been sown, some

sixty and some thirty times. The man who has ears should use them!"

WHY JESUS SPOKE IN PARABLES
(also Mark 4:10-12; Luke 8:9-10)

Matthew 13:10-17 - At this (after Jesus had told the parable about sowing the seed) the disciples approached him and asked, "Why do you talk to them in parables?"

"Because you have been given the chance to understand the secrets of the kingdom of Heaven," replied Jesus, "but they have not. For when a man has something, more is given to him till he has plenty. But if he has nothing even his nothing will be taken away from him. This is why I speak to them in these parables; because they go through life with their eyes open, but see nothing, and with their ears open, but understand nothing of what they hear. They are the living fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy which says:

'Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, and seeing you will see and not perceive; for the heart of this people has grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they should understand with their heart and turn, so that I should heal them' (Isaiah 6:9,10).

"But how fortunate you are to have eyes that see and ears that hear! Believe me, a great many prophets and good men have longed to see what you are seeing and they never saw it. Yes, and they longed to hear what you are hearing and they never heard it.

- Jesus now tells four parables about the mysteries of Heaven - "sowing the seed", "the wheat and weeds in the field", "the mustard seed", and "the yeast".

MYSTERIES OF THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN: LISTENING AND RESPONDING TO THE GOSPEL OF JESUS - "SOWING THE SEED" - Concluded
(Matthew 13:18-23; Mark 4:13-20; Luke 8:11-15)

Matthew 13:18-23 - "Now listen to the parable of the sower. When a man hears the message of the kingdom and does not grasp it, the evil one (Satan) comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is like the seed sown by the road-side. The seed sown on the stony patches represents the man who hears the message and eagerly accepts it. But it has not taken root in him and does not last long - the moment trouble or persecution arises through the message he gives up his faith at once. The seed sown among the thorns represents the man who hears the message, and then the worries of this life and the illusions of wealth choke it to death and so it produces no 'crop' in his life. But the seed sown on good soil is the man who both hears and understands the message. His life shows a good crop, a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown."

MYSTERIES OF THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN: FINAL SEPARATION OF THE GOOD FROM THE EVIL - "THE WHEAT AND THE WEEDS IN THE FIELD"

Matthew 13:24-30 - Then he put another parable before them (after the one about "sowing the seed"). "The kingdom of Heaven," he said, "is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while his men were asleep his enemy came and sowed weeds (or "tares") among the wheat, and went away. When the crop came up and ripened, the weeds appeared as well. Then the owner's servants came up to him and said, 'Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where did all these weeds come from? 'Some blackguard has done this to spite me.' he replied. 'Do you want us then to go out and pull them all up?' said the servants. 'No,' he returned, 'if you pull up the weeds now, you would pull up the wheat with them. Let them both grow together till the harvest. And at harvest-time I shall tell the reapers, 'Collect all the weeds first and tie them up in bundles ready to burn, but collect the wheat and store it in my barn.'"

MYSTERIES OF THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN: "THE TINY MUSTARD SEED THAT GROWS INTO A GREAT TREE" (also Mark 4:30-32; Luke 13:18-19)

Matthew 13:31-32 - Then he put another parable before them (after the "wheat and the weeds in the field"): "the kingdom of Heaven is like a tiny grain of mustard-seed which a man took and sowed in his field. As a seed it is the smallest of them all, but it grows to be the biggest of all plants. It becomes a tree, big enough for birds to come and nest in its branches."

MYSTERIES OF THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN: "THE YEAST MIXED WITH FLOUR" (also Luke 13:20-21)

Matthew 13:33 - This is another of the parables he told them (after the "mustard seed"): "The kingdom of Heaven is like yeast, taken by a woman and put into three measures of flour until the whole lot had risen."

WHY JESUS SPOKE IN PARABLES - Concluded (also Mark 4:33-34; Luke 8:9-10)

Matthew 13:34-35 - All these things Jesus spoke to the crowd in parables, and he did not speak to them at all without using parables - to fulfil the prophecy:

'I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world' (Psalm 78:2).

MYSTERIES OF THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN: FINAL SEPARATION OF THE GOOD FROM THE EVIL - "THE WHEAT AND THE WEEDS IN THE FIELD" - Concluded

Jesus again explains a parable to his disciples

Matthew 13:36-43 - Later (after the two parables), he left the crowds and went indoors, where his disciples came and said, "Please explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field."

"The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man," replied Jesus. "The field is the whole world. The good seed? That is the sons of the kingdom, while the weeds are the sons of the evil one. The blackguard who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the end of this world. The reapers are angels.

"Just as weeds are gathered up and burned in the fire so will it happen at the end of this world. The Son of Man will send out his angels and they will uproot from the kingdom everything that is spoiling it, and all those who live in defiance of its laws, and will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be tears and bitter regret. Then the good will shine out like the sun in their Father's kingdom. The man who has ears should use them

MYSTERIES OF THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN: "THE BURIED TREASURE"

Matthew 13:44 - "Again (after Jesus has explained the parable of the "wheat and the weeds", he continues .....), the kingdom of Heaven is like some treasure which has been buried in a field. A man finds it and buries it again, and goes off overjoyed to sell all his possessions to buy himself that field.

MYSTERIES OF THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN: "THE PEARL OF GREAT VALUE"

Matthew 13:45-46 - "Or again, the kingdom of Heaven is like a merchant searching for fine pearls. When he has found a single pearl of great value, he goes and sells all his possessions and buys it.

MYSTERIES OF THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN: "THE FISHING NET". Also "THE HOUSEHOLDER'S STORE"

Matthew 13:47-52 - "Or the kingdom of Heaven is like a big net thrown into the sea collecting all kinds of fish. When it is full, the fishermen haul it ashore and sit down and pick out the good ones for the barrels, but they throw away the bad. That is how it will be at the end of this world. The angels will go out and pick out the wicked from among the good and throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be tears and bitter regret.

"Have you grasped all this?"

"Yes," they replied.

"You can see, then," returned Jesus, "how every one who knows the Law and becomes a disciple of the kingdom of Heaven is like a

householder who can produce from his store both the new and the old."

JESUS IS REJECTED IN NAZARETH FOR THE SECOND TIME (also Mark 6:1-6a)

Matthew 13:53-58 - When Jesus (at the end of Matthew's Third Discourse, "Parables of the kingdom of Heaven") had finished these parables he left the place (Capernaum), and came into his own country (of Nazareth). Here he taught the people in their own synagogue, till in their amazement they said, "Where does this man get his wisdom and these powers? He's only (Joseph) the carpenter's son. Isn't Mary his mother, and aren't James, Joseph, Simon and Judas his brothers? And aren't all his sisters living here with us? Where did he get all this?" And they were deeply offended with him.

But Jesus said to them, "No prophet goes unhonoured except in his own country and in his own home!"

And he performed very few miracles there because of their lack of faith.

James (Hebrew, Jacobus) - Four or five James' appear in the New Testament:

(1) The apostle James, son of Zebedee;

(2) The apostle James, son of Alphaeus,who is possibly the same as:

(3) James, son of Clopas and the Mary who was present at the crucifixion. "Clopas", "Cleophas" or "Cleopas" may be the same person as the Aramaic "Alphaeus";

(4) James, father of the apostle Judas (Luke 6:16) - not Judas Iscariot; and

(5) This James, the brother of Jesus, who in the Acts of the apostles becomes a leader of the church in Jerusalem after Jesus' resurrection. Also author of the Letter of James.

Joseph (or Joses) - Six Josephs appear:

(1) Joseph, husband of Mary and father of Jesus;

(2) This Joseph (or Joses), brother of Jesus;

(3) Joseph (or Joses), brother of the apostle James, son of Alphaeus;

(4) Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Sanhedrin who placed the body of Jesus in his own tomb; and

In the Acts of the Apostles:

(5) Joseph Barsabas, one of the two disciples short-listed to replace the dead Judas Iscariot as the twelfth apostle;

(6) Joseph the Levite from Cyprus, the original name of Barnabas who travelled with Paul on his First Missionary Journey.

Simon - Nine Simons:

(1) The apostle Simon Peter;

(2) The apostle Simon the Patriot, or the Zealot;

(3) Simon, the father of Judas Iscariot;

(4) Simon the Pharisee in whose house the feet of Jesus were anointed by "a bad woman";

(5) This Simon, brother of Jesus;

(6) Simon the leper in whose house in Bethany Jesus was anointed in a separate incident from the one involving Simon the Pharisee. The woman in this case was Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus;

(7) Simon of Cyrene who carried the cross of Jesus to his place of execution on Calvary; and

In the Acts of the Apostles:

(8) Simon the magician baptised by Philip the Evangelist in Samaria; and

(9) Simon the tanner with whom the apostle Peter stayed in Joppa.

Judas (or Jude - Hebrew, Judah) - Six Judas':

(1) Judas Iscariot, the apostle who betrayed Jesus;

(2) The apostle Judas (or Thaddaeus), son of James;

(3) This Judas (or Jude), brother of Jesus and traditionally author of the Letter of Jude; and

In the Acts of the Apostles:

(4) Judas of Galilee who led a Jewish rebellion in AD6;

(5) Judas of Damascus, in whose house the blinded Saul (the apostle Paul) stayed after Jesus had appeared to him in c AD34; and

(6) Judas Barsabbas, a prominent member of the church in Jerusalem who travelled with Paul to Syrian Antioch after the Council at Jerusalem in c AD49.

Matthew 14:1-36

DEATH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST
(also Mark 6:14-29; Luke 9:7-9)

Matthew 14:1-12 - "About this time (as Jesus was being rejected in Nazareth for the second time) Herod, governor of the province (Herod Antipas, tetrarch of Galilee and Perea), heard the reports about Jesus (healing and preaching) and said to his men, "This must be John the Baptist: he has risen from the dead. That is why miraculous powers are at work in him."

For previously Herod had arrested John and had him bound and put in prison (believed to be the fortress of Machaerus in Perea), all on account of Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip (not Philip the tetrarch of Iturea and Trachonitis). For John had said to him, "It is not right for you to have this woman." Herod wanted to kill him for this, but he was afraid of the people, since they all thought John was a prophet. But during Herod's birthday celebrations Herodias' daughter (Salome, daughter of Philip and Herodias) delighted him by dancing before his guests, so much so that he swore to give her anything she liked to ask. And she, prompted by her mother, said, "I want you to give me, here and now, on a dish, the head of John the Baptist!" Herod was aghast at this, but because he had sworn in

front of his guests, he gave orders that she should be given what she had asked. So he sent men and had John beheaded in the prison. Then his head was carried in on a dish and presented to the young girl who handed it to her mother.

Later John's disciples came, took his body and buried it. Then they went and told the news to Jesus."

FEEDING THE FIVE THOUSAND
(also Mark 6:30-44; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-15)

- Feeding the 5,000 is the only miracle of nature or healing recorded in all four Gospels:

Matthew 14:13-21 - When he heard it (... news of the death of John the Baptist) he went away by boat (on the Sea of Galilee) to a deserted place, quite alone.

Jesus feeds a tired and hungry crowd

Then the crowds heard of his departure and followed him out of the towns on foot. When Jesus emerged from his retreat he saw a vast crowd and was very deeply moved and cured the sick among them. As evening fell his disciples came to him and said, "We are right in the wilds here and it is very late. Send away these crowds now, so that they can go into the villages and buy themselves food."

"There's no need for them to go away," returned Jesus. "You give them something to eat!"

"But we haven't anything here," they told him, "except five loaves and two fish." To which Jesus replied, "Bring them here to me."

He told the crowd to sit down on the grass. Then he took the five loaves and the two fish in his hands, and, looking up to Heaven, he thanked God, broke the loaves and passed them to his disciples who handed them to the crowd. Everybody ate and was satisfied. Afterwards they collected twelve baskets full of the pieces which were left over. Those who ate numbered about five thousand men, apart from the women and children.

WALKING ON WATER
(also Mark 6:45-52; John 6:16-24)

Matthew 14:22-33 - Directly after this (feeding the five thousand) Jesus insisted on his disciples' getting aboard their boat and going on ahead to the other side (of the Sea of Galilee), while he himself sent the crowds home. And when he had sent them away he went up the hill-side quite alone, to pray. When it grew late he was there by himself while the boat was by now a long way from the shore at the mercy of the waves, for the wind was dead against them. In the small hours Jesus went out to them, walking on the water of the lake. When the disciples caught sight of him walking on the water they were terrified. "It's a ghost!" they said, and screamed with fear. But at once Jesus spoke to them. "It's all right! It's I myself, don't be afraid!"

"Lord, if it's really you," said Peter, "tell me to come to you on the water."

"Come on, then," replied Jesus.

Peter stepped down from the boat and did walk on the water, making for Jesus. But when he saw the fury of the wind he panicked and began to sink, calling out, "Lord save me!" At once Jesus reached out his hand and caught him, saying, "You little-faith! What made you lose your nerve like that?" Then, when they were both aboard the boat, the wind dropped. The whole crew came and knelt down before Jesus, crying, "You are indeed the Son of God!"

JESUS HEALS THE SICK AT GENNESARET
(also Mark 6:53-56)

Matthew 14:34-36 - When they had crossed over to the other side of the lake (of Galilee, and after Jesus had walked on the water), they landed at Gennesaret (a plain on the north west coast of the Sea of Galilee), and when the men of that place had recognised him, they sent word to the whole surrounding country and brought all the diseased to him. They implored him to let them "touch just the edge of his cloak", and all those who did so were cured.

Matthew 15:1-39

JESUS AND THE SCRIBES AND PHARISEES - "WHAT REALLY MAKES A PERSON CLEAN"
(also Mark 7:1-23)

Matthew 15:1-20 - Then (after Jesus had fed the 5,000) some of the scribes and Pharisees from Jerusalem came and asked Jesus, "Why do your disciples break our ancient tradition and eat their food without washing their hands properly?"

"Tell me," replied Jesus, "why do you break God's commandment through your tradition? For God said,

'Honour your father and your mother' (Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16), and

'He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death' (Exodus 21:17; Leviticus 20:9).

But you say that if a man tells his parents, 'Whatever use I might have been to you is now given to God', then he owes no further duty to his parents. And so your tradition empties the commandment of God of all its meaning. You hypocrites! Isaiah describes you beautifully when he said:

'These people draw near to me with their mouth, and honour me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. And in vain they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men' (Isaiah 29:13)."

Superficial and true cleanliness

Then he called the crowd to him and said, "Listen, and understand this thoroughly! It is not what goes into a man's mouth that makes him common or unclean. It is what comes out of a man's mouth that makes him unclean."

Later his disciples came to him and said, "Do you know that the Pharisees are deeply offended by what you said?"

"Every plant which my Heavenly Father did not plant will be pulled up by the roots," returned Jesus. "Let them alone. They are blind

guides, and when one blind man leads another blind man they will both end up in the ditch!"

"Explain this parable to us," broke in Peter.

"Are you still unable to grasp things like that?" replied Jesus.

"Don't you see that whatever goes into the mouth passes into the stomach and then out of the body altogether? But the things that come out of a man's mouth come from his heart and mind, and it is they that really make a man unclean. For it is from a man's mind that evil thoughts arise - murder, adultery, lust, theft, perjury and blasphemy. These are the things which make a man unclean, not eating without washing his hands properly!"

THE SICK DAUGHTER OF THE SYROPHOENICIAN WOMAN (also Mark 7:24-30)

- The woman is a Gentile Canaanite living in the Phoenician part of Syria - present day Lebanon. This is another difficult account to understand. First Jesus says the Gospel is only for the Jews - the "lost sheep of the house of Israel". Then, in using the term "dogs" to refer to Gentiles, he is being uncharacteristically unkind.

The term "dogs" is believed to have been meant in the more gentle form of domestic "young puppies". But whatever the actual incident, or how it is reported, Jesus did not refuse her request, and her daughter was healed. And later in the early Church, it is the Gentiles who become the main beneficiaries of the Gospel of Jesus:

Matthew 15:21-28 - Jesus left that place (the Galilee region after clashing with the scribes and Pharisees about what really makes a person clean) and retired into the Tyre and Sidon district. There a Canaanite woman from those parts came to him crying at the top of her voice, "Lord, have pity on me! My daughter is in a terrible state - a devil has got into her!"

Jesus made no answer, and the disciples came up to him and said, "Do send her away - she's still following us and calling out."

"I was only sent," replied Jesus, "to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

Then the woman came and knelt at his feet. "Lord, help me," she said.

"It is not right, you know," Jesus replied, "to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs."

"Yes, Lord, I know, but even the dogs live on the scraps that fall from their master's table!"

"You certainly don't lack faith," returned Jesus, "it shall be as you wish."

And at that moment her daughter was cured.

FEEDING THE FOUR THOUSAND
(also Mark 8:1-10)

Matthew 15:29-39 - Jesus left there (the Tyre and Sidon region where he had healed the daughter of the Syrophoenician woman), walked along the shore of the lake of Galilee, then climbed the hill and sat down. And great crowds came to him, bringing with them people who were lame, crippled, blind, dumb and many others. They simply put them down at his feet and he healed them. The result was that the people were astonished at seeing dumb men speak, crippled men healed, lame men walking about and blind men having recovered their sight. And they praised the God of Israel.

But Jesus quietly called his disciples to him. "My heart goes out to this crowd," he said. "They've stayed with me three days now and have no more food. I don't want to send them home without anything or they will collapse on the way."

"Where could we find enough food to feed such a crowd in this deserted spot?" said the disciples.

"How many loaves have you?" asked Jesus.

"Seven, and a few small fish," they replied.

Then Jesus told the crowd to sit down comfortably on the ground. And when he had taken the seven loaves and the fish into his hands, he broke them with a prayer of thanksgiving and gave them to the disciples to pass on to the people. Everybody ate and was satisfied,

and they picked up seven baskets full of the pieces left over. Those who ate numbered four thousand men apart from women and children. Then Jesus sent the crowds home, boarded the boat and arrived at the district of Magadan (or Dalmanutha, in Mark's Gospel following. Neither location is known, but both probably represent Magdala).

Matthew 16:1-28

THE SCRIBES AND PHARISEES DEMAND MORE SIGNS FROM JESUS
(also Mark 8:11-12; Luke 12:54-56)

Matthew 16:1-4 - (Jesus has fed the 4,000 .....) Once the Pharisees and the Sadducees arrived together to test him, and asked him to give them a sign from Heaven. But he replied, "When the evening comes you say, 'Ah, fine weather - the sky is red.' In the morning you say, 'There will be a storm today, the sky is red and threatening.' Yes, you know how to interpret the look of the sky but you have no idea how to interpret the signs of the times! A wicked and unfaithful age insists on a sign; and it will not be given any sign at all but that of the prophet Jonah (who spent three days within the great fish, the same period between Jesus' death and resurrection)." And he turned on his heel and left them.

THE YEAST OF THE PHARISEES
(also Mark 8:13-21; Luke 12:1)

Matthew 16:5-12 - Then (after the Pharisee's demand for a sign) his disciples came to him on the other side of the lake (the Sea of Galilee), forgetting to bring any bread with them. "Keep your eyes open," said Jesus to them, "and be on your guard against the 'yeast' of the Pharisees and Sadducees!" But they were arguing with each other, and saying, "We forgot to bring the bread." When Jesus saw this he said to them, "Why all this argument among yourselves about not bringing any bread, you little-faiths? Don't you understand yet, or have you forgotten the five loaves and the five thousand, and how many baskets you took up afterwards; or the seven loaves and the four thousand and how many baskets you took up then? I wonder

why you don't understand that I wasn't talking about bread at all - I told you to beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees." Then they grasped the fact that he had not told them to be beware of yeast in the ordinary sense but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

"WHO DO PEOPLE SAY I AM?" ASKS JESUS
(also Mark 8:27-30; Luke 9:18-21)

Matthew 16:13-20 - When Jesus reached the Caesarea-Philippi district (sometime after feeding the four thousand, and the Pharisee's demand for a sign from heaven) he asked his disciples a question. "Who do people say the Son of Man is?"

"Well, some say John the Baptist," they told him. "Some say Elijah (the great prophet of Israel who later appears with Jesus during the Transfiguration), others Jeremiah (prophet of Judah at the time of the Babylonian conquest and author of the book of that name) or one of the prophets."

"But what about you?" he said to them. "Who do you say that I am?"

Simon Peter answered, "You? You are Christ, the Son of the living God!"

"Simon, son of Jonah (or John), you are a fortunate man indeed!" said Jesus, "for it was not your own nature but my Heavenly Father who has revealed this truth to you! Now I tell you that you are Peter the rock ("Petros" in Greek, hence Peter. He is also known as "Kephas" or "Cephas", Aramaic for rock), and it is on this rock that I am going to found my Church, and the powers of death will never prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of Heaven; whatever you forbid on earth will be what is forbidden in Heaven and whatever you permit on earth will be what is permitted in Heaven!" Then he impressed on his disciples that they should not tell anyone that he was Christ.

JESUS TEACHES ABOUT HIS DEATH AND RESURRECTION FOR A FIRST TIME
(also Mark 8:31-33; Luke 9:22)

Matthew 16:21-23 - From that time onwards (near Caesarea-Philippi after Simon Peter had declared that Jesus was the Christ) Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he would have to go to Jerusalem, and endure much suffering from the elders, chief priests and scribes, and finally be killed; and be raised to life again on the third day.

Then Peter took him on one side and started to remonstrate with him over this. "God bless you, Master! Nothing like this must happen to you!" Then Jesus turned round and said to Peter, "Out of my way, Satan! ... you stand right in my path, Peter, when you look at things from man's point of view and not from God's"

CARRYING THE CROSS OF JESUS
(also Mark 8:34-9:1; Luke 9:23-27)

Matthew 16:24-28 - Then (after predicting his death and resurrection for the first time .....) Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone wants to follow in my footsteps he must give up all right to himself, take up his cross and follow me. For the man who wants to save his life will lose it; but the man who loses his life for my sake will find it. For what good is it for a man to gain the whole world at the price of his own soul? What could a man offer to buy back his soul once he had lost it?

"For the Son of Man will come in the glory of his Father and in the company of his angels and then he will repay every man for what he has done. Believe me, there are some standing here today who will know nothing of death till they have seen the Son of Man coming as a king."

Matthew 17:1-27

THE TRANSFIGURATION OF JESUS
(also Mark 9:2-13; Luke 9:28-36)

- God reveals Jesus' divinity to three of the apostles as he appears in a glorified form with the patriarch Moses and the prophet Elijah:

Matthew 17:1-13 - Six days later (after Jesus taught his disciples about his death and resurrection for a first time) Jesus chose Peter, James and his brother John, to accompany him high up on the hill-side (traditionally Mount Hermon or Mount Tabor) where they were quite alone. There his whole appearance changed before their eyes, his face shining like the sun and his clothes as white as light. Then Moses and Elijah (the latter, the great "Prophet of Fire" of the Old Testament and forerunner of John the Baptist) were seen talking to Jesus.

"Lord," exclaimed Peter, "it is wonderful for us to be here! If you like I could put up three shelters, one each for you and Moses and Elijah - "

But while he was still talking a bright cloud overshadowed them and a voice came out of the cloud: "This is my dearly loved Son in whom I am well pleased. Listen to him!"

When they heard this voice the disciples fell on their faces, overcome with fear. Then Jesus came up to them and touched them.

"Get up and don't be frightened," he said. And as they raised their eyes there was no one to be seen but Jesus himself.

On their way down the hill-side Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about what they had seen until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead. Then the disciples demanded, "Why is it, then, that the scribes always say Elijah must come first?"

"Yes, Elijah does come first," replied Jesus, "and begins the world's reformation. But I tell you that Elijah has come already and men did not recognise him. They did what they liked with him, and they will do the same to the Son of Man."

Then they realised that he had been referring to John the Baptist.

THE EPILEPTIC BOY
(also Mark 9:14-29; Luke 9:37-43a; 17:5-6)

- If the Transfiguration of Jesus was on Mount Hermon in the north, this healing may have taken place in the town of Caesarea Philippi.

Alternatively, if on the more southerly Mount Tabor, the healing was in the Galilee area. Traditions vary:

Matthew 17:14-21 - When they (Jesus and the apostles Peter, James and John) returned to the crowds again (after the Transfiguration) a man came and knelt in front of Jesus. "Lord, do have pity on my son," he said, "for he is a lunatic and is in a terrible state. He is always falling into the fire or into the water. I did bring him to your disciples but they couldn't cure him."

"You really are an unbelieving and difficult people," Jesus returned. "How long must I be with you, and how long must I put up with you? Bring him here to me!"

Then Jesus reprimanded the evil spirit and it went out of the boy, who was cured from that moment.

Afterwards the disciples approached Jesus privately and asked, "Why weren't we able to get rid of it?"

"Because you have so little faith," replied Jesus. "I assure you that if you have as much faith as a grain of mustard-seed you can say to this hill, 'Up you get and move over there!' and it will move - you will find nothing is impossible."

- Some manuscripts conclude with a verse 21:

"However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting"

JESUS TEACHES ABOUT HIS DEATH AND RESURRECTION FOR A SECOND TIME
(also Mark 9:30-32; Luke 9:43b-45)

Matthew 17:22-23 - As they went about together in Galilee (after healing the boy with epilepsy either in Caesarea Philippi or Galilee), Jesus told them, "The Son of Man is going to be handed over to the power of men, and they will kill him. And on the third day he will be raised to life again." This greatly distressed the disciples.

A FISH PAYS THE TEMPLE TAX!

- A strange story as Jesus does not use "magic tricks". Yet it shows that although as the Son of God he did not have to pay the Temple

Tax, he did so to avoid giving unnecessary offence. Matthew does not report if Peter's fishing was successful!

Matthew 17:24-27 - Then when they (Jesus and his disciples, after his Transfiguration and the healing of the epileptic boy) arrived at Capernaum the Temple tax-collectors came up and said to Peter, "Your master doesn't pay Temple-tax, we presume?" (A Jewish half-shekel, or two Greek drachmas, was paid by every adult male Jew towards the cost of the Temple in Jerusalem.)

"Oh, yes, he does!" replied Peter. Later when he went into the house Jesus anticipated what he was going to say. "What do you think, Simon?" he said. "Whom do the kings of this world get their rates and taxes from - their own people or from others?"

"From others," replied Peter.

"Then the family is exempt," Jesus told him. "Yet we don't want to give offence to these people, so go down to the lake and throw in your hook. Take the first fish that bites, open his mouth and you'll find a coin (a shekel or four drachma piece). Take that and give it to them, for both of us."

Matthew 18:1-35

"WHO IS THE GREATEST?"
(also Mark 9:33-37; Luke 9:46-48)

Matthew 18:1-5 - The start of Matthew's Fourth Discourse "Greatness and Forgiveness" concluding at verse 19:1 "When Jesus had finished ...":

It was at this time (after healing the epileptic boy, and then using a fish to pay the temple tax!) that the disciples came to Jesus with the question, "Who is really greatest in the kingdom of Heaven?"

Jesus called a little child to his side and set him on his feet in the middle of them all. ....

- As with the Samaritan woman,so now with children, Jesus completely disregards tradition. He places the highest value on the

young at a time when they were little more than slaves -

.... "Believe me," he said, "unless you change your whole outlook and become like little children you will never enter the kingdom of Heaven. It is the man who can be as humble as this little child who is greatest in the kingdom of Heaven.

"Anyone who welcomes one child like this for my sake is welcoming me."

LEADING OTHERS INTO SIN - "THE MILLSTONE AROUND THE NECK"
(also Mark 9:42; Luke 17:1-3a)

Matthew 18:6-7 - "... if anyone leads astray one of these little children who believe in me he would be better off thrown into the depths of the sea with a mill-stone hung round his neck! Alas for the world with its pitfalls! In the nature of things there must be pitfalls. yet alas for the man who is responsible for them!

GETTING RID OF TEMPTATION - "THE OFFENDING "EYE", "HAND", "FOOT""

Matthew 18:8-9 - "If your hand or your foot is a hindrance to your faith, cut it off and throw it away. It is a good thing to go into life maimed or crippled - rather than to have both hands and feet and be thrown on to the everlasting fire. Yes, and if your eye leads you astray, tear it out and throw it away. It is a good thing to go one-eyed into life - rather than to have both your eyes and be thrown on the fire of the rubbish heap.

GOD'S GREAT LOVE FOR THE LOST: "THE LOST SHEEP"
(also Luke 15:1-7)

Matthew 18:10-14 - (After warning about temptations to sin, Jesus continues .....) "Be careful that you never despise a single one of these little ones (the children he has commended for their simplicity) - for I tell you that they have angels who see my Father's face continually in Heaven."

"What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep and one wanders away from the rest, won't he leave the ninety-nine on the hill-side and set out to look for the one who has wandered away? Yes, and if he should chance to find it I assure you he is more delighted over that one than he is over the ninety-nine who never wandered away. You can understand then that it is never the will of your Father in Heaven that a single one of these little ones should be lost."

DISPUTES BETWEEN CHRISTIANS

Matthew 18:15-17 - "But if your brother wrongs you, go and have it out with him at once - just between the two of you. If he will listen to you, you have won him back as your brother. But if he will not listen to you, take one or two others with you so that everything that is said may have the support of two or three witnesses. And if he still won't pay any attention, tell the matter to the church. And if he won't even listen to the church then he must be to you just like a pagan - or a tax-collector!

THE STANDARDS OF HEAVEN MUST BE THE STANDARDS FOR LIVING ON EARTH

Matthew 18:18 - "Believe me, whatever you forbid upon earth will be what is forbidden in Heaven, and whatever you permit on earth will be what is permitted in Heaven."

THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH - "WHEN TWO OR THREE COME TOGETHER IN THE NAME OF JESUS"

Matthew 18:19-20 - "And I tell you once more that if two of you on earth agree in asking for anything it will be granted to you by my Heavenly Father. For wherever two or three people come together in my name, I am there, right among you!"

FORGIVENESS HAS NO LIMITS - "THE UNFORGIVING SERVANT"
(also Luke 17:3b-4)

Matthew 18:21-35 - Then (after Jesus had told the parable of "the lost sheep") Peter approached him with the question, "Master, how

many times can my brother wrong me and I must forgive him? Would seven times be enough?"

"No," replied Jesus, "not seven times, but seventy times seven! For the kingdom of Heaven is like a king who decided to settle his accounts with his servants. When he had started calling in his accounts, a man was brought to him who owed him millions of pounds. And when it was plain that he had no means of repaying the debt, his master gave orders for him to be sold as a slave, and his wife and children and all his possessions as well, and the money to be paid over. At this the servant fell on his knees before his master, 'Oh, be patient with me!' he cried, 'and I will pay you back every penny!' Then his master was moved with pity for him, set him free and cancelled his debt.

"But when this same servant had left his master's presence, he found one of his fellow-servants who owed him a few shillings. He grabbed him and seized him by the throat, crying, 'Pay up what you owe me!' At this his fellow-servant fell down at his feet, and implored him, 'Oh, be patient with me, and I will pay you back!' But he refused and went out and had him put in prison until he should repay the debt.

When the other fellow-servants saw what had happened, they were horrified and told their master the whole incident. Then his master called him in.

"'You wicked servant!' he said. 'Didn't I cancel all that debt when you begged me to do so? Oughtn't you to have taken pity on your fellow-servant as I, your master, took pity on you? And his master in anger handed him over to the gaolers till he should repay the whole debt. This is how my Heavenly Father will treat you unless you each forgive your brother from your heart."

Matthew 19:1-30

THE PHARISEES AND DIVORCE
(also Mark 10:1-12)

Matthew 19:1-12 - When Jesus had finished talking on these matters (at the end of Matthew's Fourth Discourse, "Greatness and Forgiveness"), he left Galilee and went on to the district of Judea on the far side of the Jordan (to Perea). Vast crowds followed him, and he cured them.

Then the Pharisees arrived with a test-question.

"Is it right," they asked, "for a man to divorce his wife on any grounds whatever?"

"Haven't you read," he answered, "that the one who created them from the beginning

'made them male and female' (Genesis 1:27; 5:2)

and said:

'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh' (Genesis 2:24)?

So they are no longer two separate people but one. No man therefore must separate what God has joined together."

"Then why," they retorted, "did Moses command us to give a written divorce-notice and dismiss the woman?" (Deuteronomy 24:1)

"It was because you knew so little of the meaning of love that Moses allowed you to divorce your wives! But that was not the original principle. I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife on any grounds except her unfaithfulness and marries some other woman commits adultery."

His disciples said to him, "If that is a man's position with his wife, it is not worth getting married!"

"It is not everybody who can live up to this," replied Jesus, "- only those who have a special gift. For some are incapable of marriage from birth, some (such as eunuchs) are made incapable by the action of men, and some have made themselves so for the sake of the kingdom of Heaven. Let the man who can accept what I have said accept it."

ACCEPTING THE KINGDOM OF GOD LIKE A CHILD
(also Mark 10:13-16; Luke 18:15-17)

Matthew 19:13-15 - Then (after the Pharisees had questioned Jesus about divorce) some little children were brought to him, so that he could put his hands on them and pray for them. The disciples (with their traditional view about the unimportance of children ...) frowned on the parents' action but Jesus said, "You must let little children come to me, and you must never stop them. The kingdom of Heaven belongs to little children like these!" Then he laid his hands on them and went on his way.

POSSESSIONS AS A POSSIBLE BARRIER TO FOLLOWING JESUS - "THE RICH YOUNG MAN"
(also Mark 10:17-31; Luke 18:18-30)

Matthew 19:16-30 - Then (after welcoming the little children) it happened that a man (or rich young ruler in other accounts) came up to him and said, "Master what good thing must I do to secure eternal life?"

"I wonder why you ask me about what is good?" Jesus answered him. "Only one is good. But if you want to enter that life you must keep the commandments."

"Which ones?" he asked.

"'You shall not murder,' 'You shall not commit adultery,' 'You shall not steal,' 'You shall not bear false witness,' 'Honour your father and your mother' (Exodus 20:12-16; Deuteronomy 5:16-20), and

'You shall love your neighbour as yourself' (Leviticus 19:18),"

replied Jesus.

"I have carefully kept all these," returned the young man. "What is still missing in my life?"

Then Jesus told him, "If you want to be perfect, go now and sell your property and give the money away to the poor - you will have riches in Heaven. Then come and follow me!"

- This reply could be taken to mean that Christians should give away all their wealth, but this passage appears to be specific to this young men - presumably money was his "god". Jesus did not hesitate to rely on the material support of his followers, and in the case of Zacchaeus the rich tax collector, it was enough for him to give away half of his property to the poor -

When the young man heard that he turned away crestfallen, for he was very wealthy.

Then Jesus remarked to his disciples, "Believe me, a rich man will find it very difficult to enter the kingdom of Heaven. Yes, I repeat, a camel could more easily squeeze through the eye of a needle than a rich man get into the kingdom of God!"

The disciples were simply amazed to hear this, and said, "Then who can possibly be saved?"

Jesus looked steadily at them and replied, "Humanly speaking it is impossible; but with God anything is possible!"

Jesus declares that sacrifice for the kingdom will be repaid

At this Peter exclaimed, "Look, we have left everything and followed you. What is that going to be worth to us?"

"Believe me," said Jesus, "when I tell you that in the next world, when the Son of Man shall sit down on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones and become judges of the twelve tribes of Israel. Every man who has left houses or brothers or sisters or fathers or mother or children or land for my sake will receive it all back many times over, and will inherit eternal life. But many who are first now will be last then - and the last first!

Matthew 20:1-34

GOD'S GIFTS MAY BE GRANTED TO EVEN THE LEAST DESERVING - "THE WORKERS IN THE VINEYARD PAID THE SAME WAGE"

Matthew 20:1-16 - (After Peter protests about the sacrifices the disciples have made to follow him, Jesus continues ....) "For the

kingdom of Heaven is like a farmer going out early in the morning to hire labourers for his vineyard. He agreed with them on a wage of a silver coin a day and sent them to work. About nine o'clock he went and saw some others standing about in the market-place with nothing to do. 'You go to the vineyard too," he said to them, 'and I will pay you a fair wage.' And off they went. At about mid-day and again at about three o'clock in the afternoon he went and did the same thing. Then about five o'clock he went out and found some others standing about. 'Why are you standing about here all day doing nothing?' he asked them. 'Because no one has employed us,' they replied. 'You go off into the vineyard as well, then,' he said.

"When evening came the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, 'Call the labourers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last and ending with the first.' So those who were engaged at five o'clock came up and each man received a silver coin. But when the first to be employed came they reckoned they would get more, but they also received a silver coin a man. As they took their money they grumbled at the farmer and said, 'These last fellows have only put in one hour's work and you've treated them exactly the same as us who have gone through all the hard work and heat of the day!'

"But he replied to one of them, 'My friend, I'm not being unjust to you. Wasn't our agreement for a silver coin a day? Take your money and go home. It is my wish to give the latecomers as much as I give you. May I not do what I like with what belongs to me? Must you be jealous because I am generous?'

"So, many who are the last now will be the first then and the first last."

JESUS TEACHES ABOUT HIS DEATH AND RESURRECTION FOR A THIRD TIME
(also Mark 10:32-34; Luke 18:31-34)

Matthew 20:17-19 - Then, as he was about to go up to Jerusalem (from the Perea area across the River Jordan), Jesus took the twelve disciples aside and spoke to them as they walked along. "Listen, we are now going up to Jerusalem and the Son of

Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes - and they will condemn him to death. They will hand him over to the heathen (the Romans)to ridicule and flog and crucify. And on the third day he will rise again!"

JESUS COMES TO SERVE - JOHN AND JAMES WANT TO BE FIRST!
(also Mark 10:35-45)

Matthew 20:20-28 - At this point (as Jesus and the disciples approached Jerusalem for the last time) the mother of the sons of Zebedee arrived with her sons and knelt in front of Jesus to ask him a favour. "What is it you want?" he asked her.

- The mother of the sons of Zebedee - John and James - was probably Salome who was also present at the crucifixion -

"Please say that these two sons of mine may sit one on each side of you when you are king!" she said.

"You don't know what it is you are asking," replied Jesus. "Can you two drink what I have to drink?"

"Yes, we can," they answered.

"Ah, you will indeed 'drink my drink'," Jesus told them, "but as for sitting on either side of me, that is not for me to grant - that belongs to those for whom my Father has planned it."

When the other ten heard of this incident they were highly indignant with the two brothers.

But Jesus called them to him and said, "You know that the rulers of the heathen lord it over them and that their great ones have absolute power? But it must not be so among you. No, whoever among you wants to be great must become the servant of you all, and if he wants to be first among you he must be your slave - just as the Son of Man has not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life to set many others free."

THE BLIND MAN (OR MEN) NEAR JERICHO
(also Mark 10:46-52; Luke 18:35-43)

Matthew 20:29-34 - A great crowd followed them as they were leaving Jericho (on the final stage of the journey to Jerusalem), and two blind men who were sitting by the roadside, hearing that it was Jesus who was passing by, cried out, "Have pity on us, Lord, you Son of David!" The crowd tried to hush them up, but this only made them cry out more loudly still, "Have pity on us, Lord, you Son of David!"

Jesus stood quite still and called out to them, "What do you want me to do for you?"

"Lord, let us see again!"

And Jesus, deeply moved with pity, touched their eyes. At once their sight was restored, and they followed him.

TOWARDS THE END Spring c AD30

Matthew 21:1-46

THE FINAL ENTRY OF JESUS INTO JERUSALEM
(also Mark 11:1-11; Luke 19:28-44; John 12:12-19)

Matthew 21:1-11 - As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage and the Mount of Olives (or Olivet), Jesus sent two disciples ahead telling them, "Go into the village in front of you and you will at once find there an ass tethered, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me. Should anyone say anything to you, you are to say, 'The Lord needs them', and he will send them immediately."

All this happened to fulfil the prophet's saying -

'Tell the daughter of Zion, Behold your king is coming to you, lowly, and sitting on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey' (Zechariah 9:9).

Zion - Hebrew name for one of the hills of Jerusalem on which King David built his city. Also a collective name for the Jewish people or religion, and for the Christian Church. The city or Kingdom of God in Heaven -

So the disciples went off and followed Jesus' instructions. They brought the ass and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and Jesus took his seat. Then most of the crowd spread their own cloaks on the road, while others cut down branches from the trees and spread them in his path. The crowds who went in front of him and the crowds who followed him all shouted, "God save the Son of David!

'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!' (Psalm 118:26)

God save him from on high!"

And as he entered Jerusalem a shock ran through the whole city. "Who is this?" men cried. "This is Jesus the prophet," replied the crowd, "the man from Nazareth in Galilee!"

JESUS DRIVES THE BUYERS AND SELLERS FROM THE TEMPLE
(also Mark 11:15-19; Luke 19:45-48)

- This is the second recorded incident of this nature. The first came in John 2:12-25 at the start of Jesus' three year ministry:

Matthew 21:12-17 - Then (after his final entry into Jerusalem) Jesus went into the Temple and drove out all the buyers and sellers there. He overturned the tables of the money-changers and the benches of those who sold doves, crying - "It is written,

'My house shall be called a house of prayer' (Isaiah 56:7).

But you have turned it into a

'den of thieves!' (Jeremiah 7:11)"

And there in the Temple the blind and the lame came to him and he healed them. But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things he had done, and that children were shouting in the Temple the words, "God save the Son of David", they were highly indignant. "Can't you hear what these children are saying?" they asked Jesus.

"Yes," he replied, "and haven't you ever read the words,

'Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants you have perfected praise'? (Psalm 8:2)"

And he turned on his heel and went out of the city to Bethany, where he spent the night.

THE CURSED FIG-TREE THAT WITHERS AWAY
(also Mark 11:12-14,20-26)

- Another strange story at odds with Jesus' usual character, especially as he knew it was not the season for figs. It is partly parable on the power of faith and prayer, but also a prophecy appropriate to the time and situation. If the fig-tree represents the Jewish nation, then in rejecting Jesus as the Christ, it will be barren of fruit. And in its withering away, Jesus was prophesying the destruction of Jerusalem three or four decades hence:

Matthew 21:18-22 - In the morning (after throwing over the money-changers' tables in the Temple, and staying overnight in nearby Bethany) he came back early to the city and felt hungry. He saw a fig-tree growing by the side of the road, but when he got to it he discovered there was nothing on it but leaves.

"No more fruit shall ever grow on you!" he said to it, and all at once the fig-tree withered away. When the disciples saw this happen they were simply amazed. "How on earth did the fig-tree wither away quite suddenly like that?" they asked.

"Believe me," replied Jesus, "if you have faith and have no doubts in you heart, you will not only do this to a fig-tree but even if you should say to this hill, 'Get up and throw yourself into the sea', it will happen! Everything you ask for in prayer, if you have faith, you will receive."

THE AUTHORITY OF JESUS IS QUESTIONED
(also Mark 11:27-33; Luke 20:1-8)

Matthew 21:23-27 - Then when he had entered the Temple (after cursing the fig-tree) and was in the act of teaching, the chief priests and Jewish elders came up to him and said, "What authority have you for what you're doing, and who gave you that authority?"

"I am also going to ask you one question," Jesus replied to them, "and if you answer it I will tell you what authority I have for what I do. John (the Baptist)'s baptism, now, did it come from Heaven or was it purely human?"

At this they began arguing among themselves, "If we say, 'it came from Heaven', he will say to us, 'Then why didn't you believe in him?' If on the other hand we should say, 'It was purely human' - well, frankly, we are afraid of the people - for all of them consider John was a prophet."

So they answered Jesus, "We do not know."

"Then I will not tell you by what authority I do these things!" returned Jesus.

THOSE WHO WON'T ACCEPT GOD: "THE TWO SONS CALLED TO WORK"

Matthew 21:28-32 - (Jesus is in the Temple and the chief priests and elders question his authority. He responds .....) "But what is your opinion about this? There was a man with two sons. He went to the first and said, 'Go and work in my vineyard today, my son,' he said, 'All right, sir' - but he never went near it. Then his father approached the second son with the same request. He said, 'I won't.' But afterwards he changed his mind and went. Which of these two did what their father wanted?"

"The second one," they replied.

"Yes, and I tell you that tax-collectors and prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God in front of you!" retorted Jesus. "For John (the Baptist) came to you as a saint, and you did not believe him - yet the tax-collectors and the prostitutes did! And, even after seeing that, you would not change your minds and believe him."

THOSE WHO WON'T ACCEPT GOD: "THE WICKED TENANTS OF THE VINEYARD". Also "THE REJECTED STONE" (also Mark 12:1-12; Luke 20:9-19)

Matthew 21:33-46 - "Now listen to another story (after the one about the two sons called to work). There was once a man, a land-owner,

who planted a vineyard, fenced it round, dug out a hole for the wine-press and built a watch-tower. Then he let it out to farm-workers and went abroad. When the vintage-time approached he sent his servants to the farm-workers to receive his share of the proceeds. But they took the servants. beat up one, killed another, and drove off a third with stones. Then he sent some more servants, a larger party than the first, but they treated them in just the same way. Finally he sent his own son, thinking, 'They will respect my son.' Yet when the farm-workers saw the son they said to each other, 'This fellow is the future owner. Come on, let's kill him and we shall get everything that he would have had!' So they took him, threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. Now when the owner of the vineyard returns, what will he do to those farm-workers?"

"He will kill those scoundrels without mercy," they replied, "and will let the vineyard out to other tenants, who will give him the produce at the right season."

"And have you never read these words of scripture," said Jesus to them:

'The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This was the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes?' (Psalm 118:22,23)

"Here, I tell you, lies the reason why the kingdom of God is going to be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its proper fruit."

When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables they realised that he was speaking about them. They longed to get their hands on him, but they were afraid of the crowds, who regarded him as a prophet.

Matthew 22:1-46

"INVITATIONS TO THE BANQUET FOR THE KING'S SON"

- This parable is similar to Luke's invitation to the great banquet (15.21):

Matthew 22:1-14 - Then (after the story of the wicked tenants of the vineyard) Jesus began to talk to them again in parables.

"The kingdom of Heaven," he said, "is like a king who arranged a wedding for his son. He sent his servants to summon those who had been invited to the festivities, but they refused to come. Then he tried again; he sent some more servants, saying to them, 'Tell those who have been invited, "Here is my wedding-breakfast all ready, my bullocks and fat cattle have been slaughtered and everything is prepared. Come along to the festivities."' But they took no notice of this and went off, one to his farm, and another to his business. As for the rest, they got hold of the servants, treated them disgracefully, and finally killed them. At this the king was very angry and sent his troops and killed those murderers and burned down their city. Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding feast is quite ready, but those who were invited were not good enough for it. So go off now to all the street corners and invite everyone you find there to the feast.' So the servants went out on to the streets and collected together all those whom they found, bad and good alike. And the hall became filled with guests. But when the king came in to inspect the guests, he noticed among them a man not dressed for a wedding. 'How did you come in here, my friend,' he said to him, 'without being properly dressed for the wedding?'

And the man had nothing to say. Then the king said to the ushers, 'Tie him up and throw him into the darkness outside. There he can weep and regret his folly!' For many are invited but few are chosen."

THE PHARISEES AND HERODIANS QUESTION HIM - PAYING TAXES
(also Mark 12:13-17; Luke 20:20-26)

Matthew 22:15-22 - Then (after Jesus had told the parable of the banquet for the king's son) the Pharisees went off and discussed how they could trap him in argument. Eventually they sent their disciples with some of the Herod-party (or Herodians, supporters of the Herod dynasty) to say this, "Master, we know that you are an honest man who teaches the way of God faithfully and that you don't

care for human approval. Now tell us - 'is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not'?"

But Jesus knowing their evil intention said, "Why try this trick on me, you frauds? Show me the money you pay the tax with." They handed him a coin, and he said to them, "Whose face is this and whose name is in the inscription?"

"Caesar's," they said.

"Then give to Caesar," he replied, "what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God!"

This reply staggered them and they went away and let him alone.

THE SADDUCEES QUESTION HIM - RISING FROM DEATH (also Mark 12:18-27; Luke 20:27-40)

Matthew 22:23-33 - On the same day (the Pharisees tried to trap Jesus with a question about paying taxes) some Sadducees (who deny that there is any resurrection) approached Jesus with this question: "Master, Moses said if a man should die without any children, his brother should marry his widow and raise up a family for him. Now, we have a case of seven brothers. The first one married and died, and since he had no family he left his wife to his brother. The same thing happened with the second and the third, right up to the seventh. Last of all the woman herself died. Now in this 'resurrection', whose wife will she be of these seven men - for she belonged to all of them?"

"You are very wide of the mark," replied Jesus to them, "for you are ignorant of both the scriptures and the power of God. For in the resurrection there is no such thing as marrying or being given in marriage - men live like the angels in Heaven. And as for the matter of the resurrection of the dead, haven't you ever read what was once said to you by God himself,

'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob'? (Exodus 3:6,15)

God is not God of the dead but of living men!" When the crowds heard this they were astounded at his teaching.

A TEACHER OF THE LAW (OR SCRIBE) QUESTIONS HIM - THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT
(also Mark 12:28-34)

Matthew 22:34-40 - When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees (who had questioned Jesus about resurrection) they came up to him in a body, and one of them, an expert in the Law, put this test-question: "Master, what are we to consider the Law's greatest commandment?"

Jesus answered him, "

'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind' (Deuteronomy 6:5).

This is the first and great commandment. And there is a second like it:

'You shall love your neighbour as yourself' (Leviticus 19:18).

The whole of the Law and the Prophets depends on these two commandments."

JESUS IN RETURN, ASKS A QUESTION - ABOUT THE EXPECTED MESSIAH
(also Mark 12:35-37; Luke 20:41-44)

Matthew 22:41-46 - Then (having answered their questions) Jesus asked the assembled Pharisees this question: "What is your opinion about Christ? Whose son is he?

"The Son of David," they answered.

"How then," returned Jesus, "does David when inspired by the (Holy) Spirit call him Lord? He says -

'The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool?' (Psalm 110:1)

If David then calls him Lord, how can he be his son?"

Nobody was able to answer this and from that day on no one dared to ask him any further questions.

Matthew 23:1-39

JESUS CRITICISES THE TEACHERS OF THE LAW (OR SCRIBES) AND THE PHARISEES
(also Mark 12:38-40; Luke 20:45-47)

Matthew 23:1-39 - Then (after his debates with the Pharisees, Sadducees, and scribes) Jesus addressed the crowds and his disciples. "The scribes and the Pharisees speak with the authority of Moses," he told them, "so you must do what they tell you and follow their instructions. But you must not imitate their lives! For they preach but do not practise. They pile up back-breaking burdens and lay them on other men's shoulders - yet they themselves will not raise a finger to move them. Their whole lives are planned with an eye to effect. They increase the size of their phylacteries (small boxes containing short passages from the Law that were tied on the forehead and upper arm during prayer) and lengthen the tassels of their robes; they love seats of honour at dinner parties and front places in the synagogues. They love to be greeted with respect in public places and to have men call them 'rabbi!' Don't you ever be called 'rabbi' - you have only one teacher, and all of you are brothers. And don't call any human being 'father' - for you have one Father and he is in Heaven. And you must not let people call you 'leaders' - you have only one leader, Christ! The only 'superior' among you is the one who serves the others. For every man who promotes himself will be humbled, and every man who learns to be humble will find promotion. (Here follow seven "woes":)

(1) "But alas for you, you scribes and Pharisees, play-actors that you are! You lock the door of the kingdom of Heaven in men's faces; you will not go in yourselves neither will you allow those at the door to go inside.

(2) "Alas for you, you scribes and Pharisees, play-actors! You scour sea and land to make a single convert, and then you make him twice as ripe for destruction as you are yourselves.

(3) "Alas for you, you blind leaders! You say, 'if anyone swears by the Temple it amounts to nothing, but if he swears by the gold of the Temple he is bound by his oath.' You blind fools, which is the more important, the gold or the Temple which sanctifies the gold? And you say, 'If anyone swears by the altar it doesn't matter, but if he swears by the gift placed on the altar he is bound by his oath.' Have you no eyes - which is more important, the gift, or the altar which sanctifies the gift? Any man who swears by the altar is swearing by the altar and whatever is offered upon it; and anyone who swears by the Temple is swearing by the Temple and by him who dwells in it; and anyone who swears by Heaven is swearing by the throne of God and by the one who sits upon that throne.

(4) "Alas for you, scribes and Pharisees, you utter frauds! For you pay your tithe on mint and aniseed and cummin, and neglect the things which carry far more weight in the Law (of Moses) - justice, mercy and good faith. These are the things you should have observed - without neglecting the others. You call yourselves leaders, and yet you can't see an inch before your noses, for you filter out the mosquito and swallow the camel.

(5) "What miserable frauds you are, you scribes and Pharisees! You clean the outside of the cup and the dish, while the inside is full of greed and self-indulgence. Can't you see, Pharisee? First wash the inside of a cup, and then you can clean the outside.

(6) "Alas for you, you hypocritical scribes and Pharisees! You are like white-washed tombs, which look fine on the outside but inside are full of dead men's bones and all kinds of rottenness. For you appear like good men on the outside - but inside you are a mass of pretence and wickedness.

(7) "What miserable frauds you are, you scribes and Pharisees! You build tombs for the prophets, and decorate monuments for good men of the past, and then say, 'If we had lived in the times of our ancestors we should never have joined in the killing of the prophets.' Yes, 'your ancestors' - that shows you to be sons indeed of those who murdered the prophets. Go ahead then, and finish off what your ancestors tried to do! You serpents, you viper's brood, how do you

think you are going to avoid being condemned to the rubbish-heap? Listen to this: I am sending you prophets and wise and learned men; and some of these you will kill and crucify, others you will flog in your synagogues and hunt from town to town. So that on your hands is all the innocent blood spilt on this earth, from the blood of Abel the good (the son of Adam and Eve killed by his brother Cain) to the blood of Zachariah (or Zechariah, prophet and author of the Old Testament book of that name), Barachiah's son, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar. Yes, I tell you that all this will be laid at the doors of this generation.

Jesus mourns over Jerusalem, and foretells its destruction

"Oh, Jerusalem, Jerusalem! You murder the prophets and stone the messengers that are sent to you. How often have I longed to gather your children round me like a bird gathering her brood together under her wing - and you would never have it. Now all you have left is your house. I tell you that you will never see me again till the day when you cry,

'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!' (Psalm 118:26)"

Matthew 24:1-51

JESUS DESCRIBES THE END-TIMES AND HIS RETURN
(also Mark 13:1-37; Luke 17:20-37; Luke 21:5-38)

Matthew 24:1-41 - The start of Matthew's Fifth and final Discourse, "The End-times and the Second Coming" concluding at verse 26:1 with "When Jesus had finished ...":

Then (after warning the people about the scribes and Pharisees) Jesus went out of the Temple, and was walking away when his disciples came up and drew his attention to its buildings. "You see all these?" replied Jesus. "I tell you every stone will be thrown down till there is not a single one left standing upon another."

And as he was sitting on the slope of the Mount of Olives his disciples came to him privately and said, "Tell us, when will this

happen? What will be the signal for your coming and the end of this world?"

"Be careful that no one misleads you," returned Jesus, "for many men will come in my name saying 'I am christ', and they will mislead many. You will hear of wars and rumours of wars - but don't be alarmed. Such things must indeed happen, but that is not the end. For one nation will rise in arms against another, and one kingdom against another, and there will be famines and earthquakes in different parts of the world. But all that is only the beginning of the birth-pangs. For then comes the time when men will hand you over to persecution, and kill you. And all nations will hate you because you bear my name. Then comes the time when many will lose their faith, and will betray and hate each other. Yes, and many false prophets will arise, and will mislead many people. Because of the spread of wickedness the love of most men will grow cold, though the man who holds out to the end will be saved. This good news of the kingdom will be proclaimed to men all over the world as a witness to all the nations, and the end will come.

Jesus prophesies a future of suffering

"When the time comes, then, that you see the

'abomination of desolation' (Daniel 9:27; 11:31; 12:11)

prophesied by Daniel 'standing in the sacred place' - the reader should note this - then is the time for those in Judea to escape to the hills. A man on his house-top must not waste time going into his house to collect anything; a man at work in the fields must not go back home to fetch his clothes. Alas for the pregnant, alas for those with tiny babies at that time! Pray God that you may not have to make your escape in the winter or on the Sabbath day, for then there will be great misery, such as has never happened from the beginning of the world until now, and will never happen again! Yes, if those days had not been cut short no human being would survive. But for the sake of God's people those days are to be shortened.

"If anyone says to you then, 'Look, here is Christ!' or 'There he is!' don't believe it. False christs and false prophets are going to appear

and will produce great signs and wonders to mislead, if it were possible, even God's own people. Listen, I am warning you. So that if people say to you, 'There he is, in the desert!' you are not to go out there. If they say, 'Here he is, in this inner room!' don't believe it. For as lightning flashes across from east to west so will the Son of Man's coming be. 'Wherever there is a dead body, there the vultures will flock.'

At the end of time the Son of Man will return

"Immediately after the misery of those days

'the sun will be darkened, the moon will fail to give her light, the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of heaven will be shaken' (Isaiah 13:10; 34:4).

Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will wring their hands as they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky in power and great splendour. And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet-call and they will gather his chosen from the four winds - from one end of the heavens to the other.

"Learn what the fig-tree can teach you. As soon as its branches grow full of sap and produce leaves you know that summer is near. So when you see all these things happening you may know that he is near, at your very door! Believe me, this generation will not disappear till all this has taken place. Earth and sky will pass away, but my words will never pass away! But about that actual day and time no one knows - not even the angels of Heaven, nor the Son, only the Father. For just as life went on in the days of Noah so will it be at the coming of the Son of Man. In those days before the flood people were eating, drinking, marrying and being given in marriage until the very day that Noah went into the ark, and knew nothing about the flood until it came and destroyed them all. So will it be at the coming of the Son of Man. Two men will be in the field; one is taken and one is left behind. Two women will be grinding at the hand-mill; one is taken and one is left behind.

BEING PREPARED FOR THE END-TIMES AND THE RETURN OF JESUS: "THE THIEF AND THE HOUSEHOLDER"

Matthew 24:42-44 - (Teaching about the end-times, Jesus gives his listeners a second short parable .....) "You must be on the alert then, for you do not know when your master is coming. You can be sure of this, however, that if the householder had known what time of night the burglar would arrive, he would have been ready for him and would not have allowed his house to be broken into. That is why you must always be ready, for you do not know what time the Son of Man will arrive."

BEING PREPARED FOR THE END-TIMES AND THE RETURN OF JESUS: "THE FAITHFUL SERVANTS AND THE RETURNING MASTER"
(also Mark 13:34-37)

- Similar to the parable in Luke on the servants and the returning master (15.18):

Matthew 24:45-51 - (Jesus concludes his main teaching about the end-times with a third short parable ....) "Who then is the faithful and sensible servant whom his master put in charge of his household to give others their food at the proper time? Well, he is fortunate if his master finds him doing that duty on his return! Believe me, he will promote him to look after all his property. But if he should be a bad servant who says to himself, 'My master takes his time about returning', and should begin to beat his fellow-servants and eat and drink with drunkards, that servant's master will return suddenly and unexpectedly, and will punish him severely and send him off to share the penalty of the unfaithful - to his bitter sorrow and regret!

Matthew 25:1-46

BEING PREPARED FOR THE END-TIMES AND THE RETURN OF JESUS: "THE TEN BRIDESMAIDS"

- Matthew follows Jesus' main teaching about the end-times in chapter 24 with three final parables in chapter 25:

Matthew 25:1-13 - "In those days (when the Temple is destroyed as prophesied by Jesus) the kingdom of Heaven will be like ten bridesmaids who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were sensible and five were foolish. The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. But the sensible ones brought their lamps and oil in their flasks as well. Then, as the bridegroom was a very long time, they all grew drowsy and fell asleep. But in the middle of the night there came a shout, 'Wake up, here comes the bridegroom! Out you go to meet him!" Then up got the bridesmaids and attended to their lamps. The foolish ones said to the sensible ones, 'Please give us some of your oil - our lamps are going out!' 'Oh no,' returned the sensible ones, 'there might not be enough for all of us. Better go to the oil-shop and buy some for yourselves.' But while they had gone off to buy the oil the bridegroom arrived, and those bridesmaids who were ready went in with him for the festivities and the door was shut behind them. Later on the rest of the bridesmaids came and said, 'Oh, please, sir, open the door for us!' But he replied, 'I tell you I don't know you!' So be on the alert - for you do not know the day or the time.

BEING PREPARED FOR THE END-TIMES AND THE RETURN OF JESUS: "THE TALENTS OF MONEY "

- Similar to Luke's earlier parable on "the ten pounds or minas" (15.31).

Talents - In money value: 1 talent = 60 minas, 1 mina = 100 drachmas, and 1 drachma, the standard Greek silver coin = one Roman denarius, a day's pay.

One talent was thus a considerable sum of money - 6,000 drachmas or 16 years pay!

Matthew 25:14-30 - "It is just like a man going abroad who called his household servants together before he went and handed his property to them to manage. He gave one five thousand pounds, another two thousand and another one thousand - according to their respective abilities. Then he went away.

"The man who had received five thousand pounds went out at once and by doing business with this sum he made another five thousand. Similarly the man with two thousand pounds made another two thousand. But the man who had received one thousand pounds went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.

"Some years later the master of these servants arrived and went into the accounts with them. The one who had the five thousand pounds came in and brought him an additional five thousand with the words, 'You gave me five thousand pounds, sir; look, I've increased it by another five thousand.' 'Well done!' said his master, 'you're a sound, reliable servant. You've been trustworthy over a few things, now I'm going to put you in charge of much more. Come in and share your master's rejoicing.' Then the servant who had received two thousand pounds came in and said, 'You gave me two thousand pounds, sir; look, here's two thousand more that I've managed to make by it.' 'Well done!' said his master, 'you're a sound, reliable servant. You've been trustworthy over a few things, now I'm going to put you in charge of many. Come in and share your master's pleasure.'

"Then the man who had received the one thousand pounds came in and said, 'Sir, I always knew you were a hard man, reaping where you never sowed and collecting where you never laid out - so I was scared and I went off and hid your thousand pounds in the ground. Here is your money, intact.'

"'You're a wicked, lazy servant!' his master told him. 'You say you knew that I reap where I never sowed and collect where I never laid out? Then you ought to have put my money in the bank, and when I came out I should at any rate have received what belongs to me with interest. Take his thousand pounds away from him and give it to the man who now has the ten thousand!' (For the man who has something will have more given to him and will have plenty. But as for the man who has nothing, even his 'nothing' will be taken away.) 'And throw this useless servant into the darkness outside, where he can weep and wail over his stupidity.'

BEING PREPARED FOR THE END-TIMES AND THE RETURN OF JESUS: "THE SHEEP AND THE GOATS"

Matthew 25:31-46 - "But when the Son of Man comes in his splendour with all his angels with him, then he will take his seat on his glorious throne. All the nations will be assembled before him and he will separate men from each other like a shepherd separating sheep from goats. He will place the sheep on his right hand and the goats on his left.

"Then the king will say to those on his right 'Come, you who have won my Father's blessing! Take your inheritance - the kingdom reserved for you since the foundation of the world! For I was hungry and you gave me food. I was thirsty and you gave me a drink. I was lonely and you made me welcome. I was naked and you clothed me. I was ill and you came and looked after me. I was in prison and you came to see me there."

"Then the true men will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and give you food? When did we see you thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you lonely and make you welcome, or see you naked and clothe you, or see you ill or in prison and go to see you?'

"And the king will reply, 'I assure you that whatever you did for the humblest of my brothers you did for me.'

"Then he will say to those on his left, 'Out of my presence, cursed as you are, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels! For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink. I was lonely and you never made me welcome. When I was naked you did nothing to clothe me; when I was sick and in prison you never cared about me.'

"Then they too will answer him, 'Lord, when did we ever see you hungry, or thirsty, or lonely, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and fail to look after you?'

"Then the king will answer them with these words, 'I assure you that whatever you failed to do to the humblest of my brothers you failed to do to me.'

"And these will go off to eternal punishment, but the true men to eternal life."

Matthew 26:1-75

JESUS TEACHES ABOUT HIS DEATH AND RESURRECTION BEFORE HIS ANOINTING AT BETHANY

Matthew 26:1-2 - When Jesus had finished all this teaching (at the close of Matthew's Fifth and final Discourse, "The End-times and the Second Coming") he spoke to his disciples, "Do you realise that the Passover will begin in two days' time; and the Son of Man is going to be betrayed and crucified?"

THE PLOT TO KILL JESUS
(also Mark 14:1-2; Luke 22:1-2; John 11:45-57)

Matthew 26:3-5 - At that very time (as Jesus was describing the end-times and again predicting his death) the chief priests and elders of the people had assembled in the court of Caiaphas, the High Priest, and were discussing together how they might get hold of Jesus by some trick and kill him. But they kept saying, "It must not be during the (Passover) festival or there might be a riot."

THE ANOINTING OF JESUS AT BETHANY
(also Mark 14:3-9; John 12:1-8)

- In this account, Mary the sister of Martha anoints Jesus. An earlier story in Luke 7:36-50 (included in the parable of "The Two Debtors") is generally considered a different incident perhaps involving Mary of Magdala, otherwise known as Mary Magdalene:

Matthew 26:6-13 - Back in Bethany (after Jesus had finished teaching about the end-times and as the chief priests and elders plot to kill him ....), while Jesus was in the house of Simon the leper, a woman came to him with an alabaster flask of most expensive perfume, and poured it on his head as he was at table. The disciples were indignant when they saw this, and said, "What is the point of such wicked waste? Couldn't this perfume have been sold for a lot of money which could be given to the poor?" Jesus knew what they were saying and spoke to them, "Why must you make this woman feel uncomfortable? She has done a beautiful thing for me. You have the poor with you always, but you will not always have me. When

she poured this perfume on my body, she was preparing it for burial. I assure you that wherever the Gospel is preached throughout the whole world, this deed of hers will also be recounted, as her memorial to me."

JUDAS ISCARIOT DECIDES TO BETRAY HIM
(also Mark 14:10-11; Luke 22:3-6)

Matthew 26:14-16 - After this (the anointing of Jesus at Bethany), one of the twelve (apostles), Judas Iscariot by name, approached the chief priests. "What will you give me," he said to them, "if I hand him over to you?" They settled with him for thirty silver coins (traditionally the price of a slave), and from then on he looked for a convenient opportunity to betray Jesus.

THE LAST SUPPER
(also Mark 14:12-25; Luke 22:7-30; John 13:1-30; 1 Corinthians 11:23-25)

Matthew 26:17-29 - (Judas has now agreed to betray Jesus.....) On the first day of unleavened bread (a reminder during Passover of the Jew's hasty departure from Egypt during the Exodus) the disciples came to Jesus with the question, "Where do you want us to make our preparations for you to eat the Passover?"

"Go into the city," Jesus replied, "to a certain man there and say to him, 'The Master says, "My time is near. I am going to keep the Passover with my disciples at your house (traditionally the Upper Room of the house of Mary, mother of John Mark who later wrote Mark's Gospel).'" The disciples did as Jesus had instructed them and prepared the Passover. Then late in the evening he took his place at table with the twelve and during the meal he said, "I tell you plainly that one of you is going to betray me." They were deeply distressed at this and each began to say to him in turn, "Surely, Lord, I am not the one?" And his answer was, "The man who has dipped his hand into the dish with me is the man who will betray me. It is true that the Son of Man will follow the road foretold by the scriptures, but alas for the man through whom he is betrayed! It would be better for that man if had never been born." And Judas, who actually betrayed him, said, "Master, am I the one?"

"As you say!" replied Jesus.

The Body and Blood of Christ - Jesus now institutes the most important, mysterious and holy act of worship of the Christian church - Communion, the Holy Eucharist, Holy Communion, Mass, taking Bread and Wine, the Lord's Supper .... in which the believer in Christ receives his body and blood -

In the middle of the meal Jesus took a loaf and after blessing it he broke it into pieces and gave it to the disciples. "Take and eat this," he said, "it is my body." Then he took a cup and after thanking God, he gave it to them with the words, "Drink this, all of you, for it is my blood, the blood of the new agreement shed to set many free from their sins. I tell you I will drink no more wine until I drink it fresh with you in my Father's kingdom."

THE LAST NIGHT CONTINUED AND THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE

(also Mark 14:26-42; Luke 22:31-46; John 13:31-38; 18:1-2)

Matthew 26:30-46 - Then (after the Last Supper) they sang a hymn (probably a Passover psalm) together and went out to the Mount of Olives (or Olivet). There Jesus said to them, "Tonight every one of you will lose his faith in me. For the scripture says,

'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered' (Zechariah 13:7).

But after I have risen I shall go before you into Galilee!"

At this Peter exclaimed, "Even if everyone should lose his faith in you, I never will!"

"I tell you, Peter," replied Jesus, "that tonight, before the cock crows, you will disown me three times."

"Even if it means dying with you I will never disown you," said Peter. And all the disciples made the same protest.

The prayer in Gethsemane

Then Jesus came with the disciples to a place called Gethsemane and said to them, "Sit down here while I go over there and pray."

Then he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee (James and John) and began to be in terrible distress and misery. "My heart is nearly breaking," he told them, "stay here and keep watch with me." Then he walked on a little way and fell on his face and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible let this cup pass from me - yet it must not be what I want, but what you want."

Then he came back to the disciples and found them fast asleep. He spoke to Peter, "Couldn't you three keep awake with me for a single hour? Watch and pray, all of you, that you may not have to face temptation. Your spirit is willing, but human nature is weak." Then he went away a second time and prayed, "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to pass from me without my drinking it, then your will must be done." And he came and found them asleep again, for they could not keep their eyes open. So he left them and went away again and prayed for the third time using the same words as before. Then he came back to his disciples and spoke to them, "Are you still going to sleep and take your ease? In a moment you will see the Son of Man betrayed into the hands of evil men. Wake up, let us be going! Look, here comes my betrayer (Judas Iscariot)!"

JESUS IS BETRAYED AND ARRESTED
(also Mark 14:43-52; Luke 22:47-54a; John 18:3-12)

Matthew 26:47-56 - And while the words were still on his lips ("Look, here comes my betrayer!"), Judas, one of the twelve appeared (in the Garden of Gethsemane) with a great crowd armed with swords and staves, sent by the chief priests and Jewish elders. (The traitor himself had given them a sign, "The one I kiss will be the man. Get him!")

Without any hesitation he walked up to Jesus. "Greetings, Master!" he cried and kissed him affectionately. "Judas, my friend," replied Jesus, "why are you here?"

Then the others came up, seized hold of Jesus and held him. Suddenly one of Jesus' disciples drew his sword, slashed at the High Priest's servant (whose name was Malchus) and cut off his ear. At this Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back into its proper place. All those who take the sword die by the sword. Do you imagine that I

could not appeal to my Father, and he would at once send more than twelve legions of angels to defend me? But then, how would the scriptures be fulfilled which say that all this must take place?" And then Jesus spoke to the crowds around him: "So you've come out with your swords and staves to capture me like a bandit, have you? Day after day I sat teaching in the Temple and you never laid a finger on me. But all this is happening as the prophets said it would." And at this point all the disciples deserted him and made their escape.

After his arrest Jesus appears before three separate authorities:

(1) Annas still a "chief priest", and the Sanhedrin of which Caiaphas is the High Priest;

(2) Pontius Pilate, Roman procurator of Judea and Samaria; and

(3) Herod Antipas, Jewish tetrarch of Galilee and Perea visiting Jerusalem at that time.

Pontius Pilate actually sentences Jesus to death by crucifixion

JESUS IS TRIED BEFORE THE JEWISH AUTHORITIES; PETER BETRAYS HIM
(also Mark 14:53-15:1; Luke 22:54b-23:1; John 18:13-28)

Matthew 26:57-27:2 - The men (servants of the High Priest, and members of the armed crowd ....) who had seized Jesus took him off to Caiaphas the High Priest in whose house the scribes and elders were assembled. Peter followed him at a safe distance right up to the High Priest's courtyard. Then he went inside and sat down with the servants and waited to see the end.

Meanwhile the chief priests and the whole council (the Sanhedrin) ....

Sanhedrin - From the Greek "to sit together", "a seat". The highest Jewish court of justice, and supreme religious and civil council in Jerusalem with 71 members. With the High Priest as president, it was composed of chief priests, scribes or lawyers, and elders. These in turn were affiliated to the Sadducees, Pharisees, and other religious or political groups -

.... did all they could to find false evidence against Jesus to get him condemned to death. They failed completely. Even after a number of perjurers came forward they still failed. In the end two of these stood up and said, "This man said, 'I can pull down the Temple of God and rebuild it in three days.'"

Then the High Priest rose to his feet and addressed Jesus, "Have you no answer? What about the evidence of these men against you?" But Jesus was silent. Then the High Priest said to him, "I command you by the living God, to tell us on your oath if you are Christ, the Son of God." Jesus said to him, "I am. Yes, and I tell you that in the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power and coming on the clouds of Heaven."

At this the High Priest tore his robes and cried, "That was blasphemy! Where is the need for further witnesses? Look, you've heard the blasphemy - what's your verdict now?" And they replied, "he deserves to die."

Then they spat in his face and knocked him about, and some slapped him, crying, "Prophesy, you Christ, who was that who hit you?"

Peter disowns his master

All this time Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard, and a maidservant came up to him and said, "Weren't you with Jesus, the man from Galilee?" But he denied it before them all, saying "I don't know what you're talking about." Then when he had gone out into the porch, another maid caught sight of him and said to those who were there, "This man was with Jesus of Nazareth." And again he denied it with an oath - "I don't know the man"! A few minutes later those who were standing about came up to Peter and said to him, "You certainly are one of them, you know; it's obvious from your (Galilean)accent." At that he began to curse and swear - "I tell you I don't know the man!" Immediately the cock crew, and the words of Jesus came back into Peter's mind - "Before the cock crows you will disown me three times." And he went outside and wept bitterly.

Matthew 27:1-66

(Chapter 27 ....) When the morning came, all the chief priests and elders of the people met in council (the Sanhedrin) to decide how they could get Jesus executed. Then they marched him off with his hands tied, and handed him over to Pilate the governor.

JUDAS ISCARIOT COMMITS SUICIDE
(also Acts 1:18-19)

Matthew 27:3-10 - Then (as Jesus was being handed over to Pilate) Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that he was condemned and in his remorse returned the thirty silver coins to the chief priests and elders, with the words, "I was wrong - I have betrayed an innocent man to death."

"And what has that got to do with us?" they replied. "That's your affair."

And Judas flung down the silver in the Temple and went outside and hanged himself. But the chief priests picked up the money and said, "It is not legal to put this into the Temple treasury. It is, after all, blood-money." So, after a further consultation, they purchased with it the Potter's Field to be a burial-ground for foreigners, which is why it is called "the Field of Blood" to this day. And so the words of Jeremiah the prophet came true:

'And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the value of him who was priced, whom they of the children of Israel priced, and gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord directed them' (Zechariah 11:12,13; Jeremiah 32:6-9).

JESUS BEFORE THE ROMAN PONTIUS PILATE; THE SENTENCE
(also Mark 15:2-15; Luke 23:2-25; John 18:29-19:16a)

- In Luke's account Jesus is also taken before Herod Antipas, Jewish tetrarch of Galilee and Perea:

Matthew 27:11-26 - Meanwhile (as Judas Iscariot was committing suicide) Jesus stood in front of the governor (Pilate), who asked him,

"Well, you - are you the King of the Jews?"

"Yes, I am," replied Jesus.

But while the chief priests and elders (of the Sanhedrin) were making their accusations, he made no reply at all. So Pilate said to him, "Can you not hear the evidence they're bringing against you?" And to the governor's amazement, Jesus did not answer a single one of their accusations.

Now it was the custom at festival-time for the governor to release any prisoner whom the people chose. And it happened that at this time they had a notorious prisoner called Barabbas (possibly a Zealot, one of the groups dedicated to the violent overthrow of Roman rule. He was a "Sicarii" or dagger-man arrested for insurrection and murder). So when they assembled to make the usual request, Pilate said to them, "Which one do you want me to set free, Barabbas or Jesus called Christ?" For he knew very well that the latter had been handed over to him through sheer malice. And indeed while he was actually sitting on the Bench his wife sent a message to him - "Don't have anything to do with that man! I went through agonies dreaming about him last night!" But the chief priests and elders persuaded the mob to ask for Barabbas and demand Jesus' execution. Then the governor spoke to them, "Which of these two are you asking me to release?"

"Barabbas!" they cried. "Then what am I to do with Jesus who is called Christ?" asked Pilate.

"Have him crucified!" they all cried. At this Pilate said, "Why, what is his crime?" But their voices rose to a roar, "Have him crucified!" When Pilate realised that nothing more could be done but that there would soon be a riot, he took a bowl of water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, "I take no responsibility for the death of this man. You must see to that yourselves."

To this the whole crowd replied, "Let his blood be on us and on our children!" Whereupon Pilate released Barabbas for them, but he had Jesus flogged and handed over for crucifixion.

Crucifixion - A particularly cruel and shameful form of capital punishment reserved mainly for rebellion and for slaves guilty of robbery. Victims could suffer in agony for days before death released them. This could be hastened by deliberately breaking their legs so they could not support their bodies. Suffocation soon followed.

JESUS IS ILL-TREATED AND TORTURED
(also Mark 15:15b-20; Luke 22:63-65; John 19:1-3)

Matthew 27:27-31 - Then the (Roman) governor's soldiers took Jesus into the governor's palace and collected the whole guard around him. There they stripped him and put a scarlet cloak upon him. They twisted some thorn-twigs into a crown and put it on his head and put a stick into his right hand. They bowed low before him and jeered at him with the words, "Hail, your majesty, king of the Jews!" Then they spat on him, took the stick and hit him on the head with it. And when they had finished their fun, they stripped the cloak off again, put his own clothes upon him and led him off for crucifixion.

HIS CRUCIFIXION AND DEATH
(also Mark 15:21-37; Luke 23:26-46; John 19:16b-30)

Matthew 27:32-50 - On their way out of the city they (the Roman soldiers) met a man called Simon, a native of Cyrene (modern day Libya) in Africa, and they compelled him to carry Jesus' cross.

The Crucifixion

Then when they came to a place called Golgotha (Aramaic and Hebrew for "skull"; in Latin, "calvaria" or "Calvary" - which means Skull Hill) they offered him a drink of wine mixed with some bitter drug (or vinegar mixed with gall or myrrh in other versions of the New Testament), but when he had tasted it he refused to drink. And when they had nailed him to the cross they shared out his clothes by drawing lots.

Then they sat down to keep guard over him. And over his head they put a placard with the charge against him: THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS.

Now two bandits (robbers or thieves, and possibly Zealots) were crucified with Jesus at the same time, one on either side of him. The passers-by nodded knowingly and called out to him, in mockery, "Hi, you who could pull down the Temple and build it up again in three days - why don't you save yourself? If you are the Son of God, step down from the cross!" The chief priests also joined the scribes and elders in jeering at him, saying, "He saved others, but he can't save himself! If this is the king of Israel, why doesn't he come down from the cross now, and we'll believe him! He trusted in God ... let God rescue him if He will have anything to do with him! For he said, 'I am God's son'." Even the bandits who were crucified with him hurled abuse at him.

Then from midday until three o'clock darkness spread over the whole countryside, and then Jesus cried with a loud voice,

'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' (Psalm 22:1)

Some of those who were standing there heard these words which Jesus spoke in Aramaic - Eli (or Eloi), Eli lama sabachthani?, and said, "This man is calling for Elijah!" And one of them ran off and fetched a sponge, soaked it in vinegar and put it on a long stick and held it up for him to drink. But the others said, "Let him alone! Let's see if Elijah will come and save him." But Jesus gave one more great cry, and died.

SUPERNATURAL EVENTS AS JESUS DIES
(also Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45)

Matthew 27:51-53 - And the sanctuary curtain in the Temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The ground shook, rocks split and graves were opened. (A number of bodies of holy men who were asleep in death rose again. They left their graves after Jesus' resurrection and entered the holy city and appeared to many people.)

SOME OF THE PEOPLE PRESENT
(also Mark 15:39-41; Luke 23:47-49; John 19:25-26a)

- The identity of all the women has not been completely solved:

Matthew 27:54-56 - When the (Roman) centurion and his company who were keeping guard over Jesus saw the earthquake and all that was happening they were terrified. "Indeed he was the son of God!" they said.

There were many women at the scene watching from a distance. They had followed Jesus from Galilee to minister to his needs. Among them was:

(1) Mary of Magdala (or Mary Magdalene),

(2) Mary the mother of James (possibly the apostle James the Younger, son of Alphaeus) and Joseph (or Joses), and

(3) The mother (probably Salome) of Zebedee's sons (the apostles James and John).

HIS BURIAL
(also Mark 15:42-47; Luke 23:50-56; John 19:31-42)

Matthew 27:57-66 - That evening, Joseph (a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin), a wealthy man from Arimathaea (traditionally on the coastal plain not far from Jerusalem), who was himself a disciple of Jesus, went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus, and Pilate gave orders for the body to be handed over to him. So Joseph took it, wrapped it in clean linen and placed it in his own new tomb which had been hewn in the rock. Then he rolled a large stone across the doorway of the tomb and went away. But Mary from Magdala and the other Mary (the mother of the apostle James the Younger)remained there, sitting in front of the tomb.

Next day (the Saturday), which was the day after the Preparation (for the Passover festival), the chief priests and the Pharisees went in a body to (the Roman) Pilate and said, "Sir, we have remembered that while this impostor was alive, he said, 'After three days I shall rise again.' Will you give the order then to have the grave closely guarded until the third day, so that there can be no chance of his disciples' coming and stealing the body and telling people that he has risen from the dead? We should then be faced with a worse fraud than the first one."

"You have a guard," Pilate told them. "Go and make it as safe as you think necessary." And they went and made the grave secure, putting a seal on the stone and leaving the soldiers on guard.

THE NEW BEGINNING Spring cAD30

Matthew 28:1-20

THE EMPTY TOMB
(also Mark 16:1-8; Luke 24:1-12; John 20:1-13)

Matthew 28:1-8 - When the Sabbath (Saturday) was over, just as the first day of the week (Sunday) was dawning ...

- The Sunday morning after the Good Friday of the Crucifixion. In Jewish reckoning, Friday is day one, Saturday day two, and Sunday day three - hence the three days between crucifixion and resurrection -

... Mary from Magdala and the other Mary (mother of James the Younger and Joseph) went to look at the tomb. At that moment there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from Heaven, went forward and rolled back the stone and took his seat upon it. His appearance was dazzling like lightning and his clothes were white as snow. The guards shook with terror at the sight of him and collapsed like dead men. But the angel spoke to the women, "Do not be afraid. I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here - he is risen, just as he said he would. Come and look at the place where he was lying. Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead. And, listen, he goes before you into Galilee! You will see him there! Now I have told you my message."

Then the women went away quickly from the tomb, their hearts filled with awe and great joy, and ran to give the news to his disciples. ...

- In verses 9 and 10 following Jesus stands before them in his first appearance, and tells the women he will see his disciples in Galilee:

THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS AND HIS APPEARANCES TO HIS DISCIPLES

(also Mark 16:9-14; Luke 24:13-44; John 20:14-21:14; Acts 1:1-5; 1 Corinthians 15:3-8)

Matthew 28:9-10 - But quite suddenly (as Mary from Magdala and the other Mary ran from the empty tomb), Jesus stood before them in their path, and said, "Peace be with you!" And they went forward to meet him and, clasping his feet, worshipped him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go now and tell my brothers to go into Galilee and they shall see me there"

THE EMPTY TOMB - Concluded

Matthew 28:11-15 - And while they were on their way, some of the sentries went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened. They got together with the elders, and after consultation gave the soldiers a considerable sum of money and told them, "Your story must be that his disciples came after dark, and stole him away while you were asleep. If by any chance this reaches the (Roman) governor's ears, we will put it right with him and see that you do not suffer for it." So they took the money and obeyed their instructions. The story was spread and is current among the Jews to this day.

THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS AND HIS APPEARANCES TO HIS DISCIPLES - Continued

Matthew 28:16-17 - But the eleven (remaining apostles) went to the hill-side in Galilee where Jesus had arranged to meet them, and when they had seen him they worshipped him, though some of them were doubtful.

HIS COMMISSION TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO THE WORLD (also Mark 16:15-18; Luke 24:45-50; John 21:15-23; Acts 1:6-8)

Matthew 28:18-20 - But Jesus (after he met the eleven in Galilee) came and spoke these words to them, "All power in Heaven and on earth has been given to me. You, then, are to go and make disciples of all the nations and baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Teach them to observe

all that I have commanded you and, remember, I am with you always, even to the end of the world."

In a short time, the disciples, totally demoralised by the death of Jesus are transformed. They are soon taking the Gospel of Jesus Christ fearlessly to much of the known world and often in the face of every form of opposition, persecution, and soon, brutality, torture and death.

The Acts of the Apostles and the Letters of the New Testament reveal part of this early story that continues to the present day.

The Acts of the Apostles carries on after the four Gospels.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MARK

With people, places, definitions ...

Writer: John Mark, son of Mary of Jerusalem and cousin of Barnabas. Mark accompanied Paul and Barnabas at the start of the First Missionary Journey. He was traditionally a companion and the "interpreter of Peter", and the apostle Peter probably provided Mark with much of the material for this Gospel;

Date: Traditionally the second Gospel to be written; perhaps c AD53-63, the year 53 being the earliest date Mark could have joined Peter in Rome;

Where written: Rome;

Readers: To appeal to the Roman world, and particularly Gentile Christians. The Gospel has few references to Old Testament prophecy, and explains Jewish words and customs;

Why written: To show Jesus Christ is not only the active and powerful Son of God, but also the servant, saviour and redeemer (or ransomer) of sinful man.

According to Some Modern Scholarship: The first Gospel to be written using material provided to John Mark by Peter, but at a later date - perhaps AD65-75. This would have been around the time of the destruction of Jerusalem. It was then used by Matthew and Luke in writing their Gospels.

THE BEGINNINGS - FROM THE BIRTH OF JESUS TO THE START OF HIS MINISTRY c 6BC-AD27

Mark 1:1-45

PROLOGUE
(also Luke 1:1-4, John 1:1-5)

Mark 1:1 - The Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God .....

Gospel - Old English for "Good news" or "story". The teaching and revelation of Jesus. Also the record of Jesus' life and teaching in the first four books of the New Testament - the Gospels according to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John;

Jesus - The Greek form of the Hebrew "Joshua" or in full "Jehoshua" - God or Jehovah is salvation, help, deliverance, "the Saviour";

Christ or Messiah - Christ, "the anointed one" in Greek; Messiah, "anointed" in Hebrew. "Christ" was the title given to Jesus of Nazareth as the one who fulfilled Old Testament prophecies about the coming of the Messiah, the promised deliverer of the Jewish people. "Christ" is only used in the New Testament. The Hebrew version of Christ - the "Messiah", or the "anointed one" - is found a number of times in the Old Testament, and occasionally in the New;

Son of God - "God" from the Germanic "guth". "Son of God" is found only in the New Testament as a title for Jesus. It is mainly used by the writers of the Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, and the Letters themselves. But not by Jesus when referring to himself.

APPEARANCE OF JOHN THE BAPTIST
(also Matthew 3:1-12; Luke 3:1-20; John 1:6-28)

Mark 1:2-8 - ("The Gospel of Jesus Christ" .....) begins with the fulfilment of this prophecy of Isaiah -

'Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you' (Malachi 3:1).

'The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight' (Isaiah 40:3).

For John came and began to baptise men in the desert, proclaiming baptism as the mark of a complete change of heart and of the forgiveness of sins. All the people of the Judean countryside and

everyone in Jerusalem went out to him in the desert and received his baptism in the river Jordan, publicly confessing their sins.

John himself was dressed in camel-hair, with a leather belt round his waist, and he lived on locusts and wild honey. The burden of his preaching was, "There is someone coming after me who is stronger than I - indeed I am not good enough to kneel down and undo his shoes. I have baptised you with water, but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit."

BAPTISM OF JESUS
(also Matthew 3:13-17; Luke 3:21-23a; John 1:29-34)

Mark 1:9-11 - It was in those days (during the ministry of John the Baptist) that Jesus arrived from the Galilean village of Nazareth and was baptised by John in the Jordan. All at once, as he came up out of the water, he saw the heavens split open, and the Spirit coming down upon him like a dove. A voice came out of Heaven, saying, "You are my dearly-beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased!"

JESUS' TEMPTATION BY THE DEVIL
(also Matthew 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13)

Mark 1:12-13 - Then (after his baptism) the Spirit sent him out at once into the desert, and there he remained for forty days while Satan tempted him. During this time no one was with him but wild animals, and only the angels were there to care for him.

HIS TRAVELS AND ACTS c AD27-30

HOW JESUS STARTS HIS MINISTRY ACCORDING TO MARK
(also Matthew 4:12-17; Luke 4:14-15; John 1:35-36)

Mark 1:14-15 - It was after John (the Baptist's) arrest that Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the Gospel of God, saying, "The time has come at last - the kingdom of God has arrived. You must change your hearts and minds and believe the good news."

THE CALLING OF SIMON PETER, ANDREW, JAMES AND JOHN
(also Matthew 4:18-22; Luke 5:1-11)

Mark 1:16-20 - As he walked along the shore of the Lake of Galilee, he saw two fishermen, Simon and his brother Andrew, casting their nets into the water. "Come and follow me, and I will teach you to catch men!" he cried.

At once they dropped their nets, and followed him.

Then he went a little further along the shore and saw James the son of Zebedee, aboard a boat with his brother John, overhauling their nets. At once he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and went off after him.

THE MADMAN IN THE SYNAGOGUE AT CAPERNAUM (also Luke 4:31-37)

Mark 1:21-28 - They (Simon Peter, Andrew, James and John - the newly called disciples) arrived at Capernaum, and on the Sabbath day (the Saturday) Jesus walked straight into the synagogue and began teaching. They were amazed at his way of teaching, for he taught with the ring of authority - quite unlike the scribes. All at once, a man in the grip of an evil spirit appeared in the synagogue shouting out, "What have you got to do with us, Jesus from Nazareth? Have you come to kill us? I know who you are - you're God's holy one!"

But Jesus cut him short and spoke sharply, "Hold your tongue and get out of him!"

At this the evil spirit convulsed the man, let out a loud scream and left him. Everyone present was so astounded that people kept saying to each other, "What on earth has happened? This new teaching has authority behind it. Why he even gives his orders to evil spirits and they obey him!"

And his reputation spread like wild-fire through the whole Galilean district.

PETER'S MOTHER-IN-LAW'S FEVER: JESUS ALSO HEALS MANY OTHERS THAT EVENING (also Matthew 8:14-17; Luke 4:38-41)

Mark 1:29-34 - Then (after healing the madman according to Mark's Gospel) he got up and went straight from the synagogue to the house of Simon (Peter) and Andrew, accompanied by James and John. Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a high fever, and they lost no time in telling Jesus about her. He went up to her, took her hand and helped her to her feet. The fever left her, and she began to see to their needs.

Late that evening, after sunset, they kept bringing to him all who were sick or troubled by evil spirits. The whole population of the town (of Capernaum) gathered round the doorway. And he healed great numbers of people who were suffering from various forms of disease. In many cases he expelled evil spirits; but he would not allow them to say a word, for they knew perfectly well who he was.

JESUS CONTINUES PREACHING AND HEALING
(also Matthew 4:23-25; Luke 4:42-44)

Mark 1:35-39 - Then (after calling the first four disciples and healing Simon Peter's mother-in-law.....), in the early morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a deserted place, and there he prayed. Simon and his companions went in search of him, and when they found him, they said, "Everyone is looking for you."

"Then we will go somewhere else, to the neighbouring towns," he replied, "so that I may give my message there too - that is why I have come."

So he continued preaching in their synagogues and expelling evil spirits throughout the whole of Galilee.

THE LEPER
(also Matthew 8:1-4; Luke 5:12-16)

Mark 1:40-45 - Then a leper came to Jesus (as he continued preaching and healing throughout Galilee), knelt in front of him and appealed to him, "If you want to, you can make me clean."

Jesus was filled with pity for him, and stretched out his hand and placed it on the leper, saying, "Of course I want to - be clean!"

At once the leprosy left him and he was quite clean. Jesus sent him away there and then with the strict injunction, "Mind you say nothing at all to anybody. Go straight off and show yourself to the priest, and make the offerings for your cleansing which Moses prescribed, as public proof of your recovery."

But he went off and began to talk a great deal about it in public, spreading his story far and wide. Consequently, it became impossible for Jesus to show his face in the towns and he had to stay outside in lonely places. Yet the people still came to him from all quarters.

Mark 2:1-28

THE PARALYSED MAN
(also Matthew 9:1-8; Luke 5:17-26)

Mark 2:1-12 - When he re-entered Capernaum some days later (after curing the leper, and staying away from the towns because of his popularity), a rumour spread that he was in somebody's house. Such a large crowd collected that while he was giving them his message (of the Gospel) it was impossible even to get near the doorway. Meanwhile, a group of people arrived to see him, bringing with them a paralytic whom four of them were carrying. And when they found it was impossible to get near him because of the crowd, they removed the tiles from the roof over Jesus' head and let down the paralytic's bed through the opening. And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the man on the bed, "My son, your sins are forgiven."

But some of the scribes were sitting there silently asking themselves, "Why does this man talk such blasphemy? Who can possibly forgive sins but God?"

Jesus realised instantly what they were thinking, and said to them, "why must you argue like this in your minds? Which do you suppose is easier - to say to a paralysed man, 'Your sins are forgiven', or 'Get up, pick up your bed and walk'? But to prove to you that the Son of Man has full authority to forgive sins on earth, I say to you," - and

here he spoke to the paralytic - "Get up, pick up your bed and go home."

At once the man sprang to his feet, picked up his bed and walked off in full view of them all. Everyone was amazed, praised God, and said, "We have never seen anything like this before."

CALLING OF MATTHEW THE TAX COLLECTOR (also Matthew 9:9-13; Luke 5:27-32)

Mark 2:13-16 - Then Jesus went out (from Capernaum) again by the lake-side (of the Sea of Galilee) and the whole crowd came to him, and he continued to teach them.

As Jesus went on his way, he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at his desk in the tax office ....

Levi - Otherwise Matthew (Hebrew, Mattathias) according to most commentators. He was possibly a brother of the apostle James, also son of an Alphaeus -

.... and he said to him, "Follow me!"

Levi got up and followed him. Later, when Jesus was sitting at dinner in Levi's house, a large number of tax-collectors and disreputable folk came in and joined him and his disciples. For there were many such people among his followers. When the scribes and Pharisees saw him eating in the company of tax-collectors and outsiders, they remarked to his disciples, "Why does he eat with tax-collectors and sinners?"

JESUS HAS COME TO SAVE THOSE WHO ARE LOST - "THE DOCTOR AND THE SICK" (also Matthew 9:12-13; Luke 5:31-32)

Mark 2:17 - When Jesus heard this, he said to them, "It is not the fit and flourishing who need the doctor, but those who are ill. I did not come to invite the 'righteous', but the 'sinners'.

THE PRESENCE OF JESUS SHOULD MEAN JOY - "THE WEDDING GUESTS AND THE BRIDEGROOM" (also Matthew 9:14-15; Luke 5:33-35)

Mark 2:18-20 - The disciples of John and those of the Pharisees were fasting. They came and (as in Matthew) said to Jesus, "Why do those who follow John or the Pharisees keep fasts but your disciples do nothing of the kind?"

Jesus told them, "Can you expect wedding-guest to fast in the bridegroom's presence? Fasting is out of the question as long as they have the bridegroom with them. But the day will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them - that will be the time for them to fast.

THE TEACHING OF JESUS AND THE OLD WAYS CAN NOT BE MIXED - "THE NEW CLOTH SEWN ONTO THE OLD" and "THE NEW WINE POURED INTO OLD WINESKINS" (also Matthew 9:16-17; Luke 5:36-39)

Mark 2:21-22 - "Nobody," he continued, "sews a patch of unshrunken cloth on to an old coat. If he does, the new patch tears away from the old and the hole is worse than ever. And nobody puts new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the new wine bursts the skins, the wine is spilt and the skins are ruined. No, new wine must go into new wineskins."

THE DISCIPLES PICK CORN ON THE SABBATH - "THE SABBATH IS MADE FOR MAN" (also Matthew 12:1-8; Luke 6:1-5)

Mark 2:23-28 - One day (after Jesus had called Matthew to be a disciple ....) he happened to be going through the cornfields on the Sabbath day. And his disciples, as they made their way along, began to pick the ears of corn. The Pharisees said to him, "Look at that! Why should they do what is forbidden on the Sabbath day?"

Then he spoke to them.

"Have you never read what David did, when he and his companions were hungry? Haven't you read how he went into the house of God when Abiathar (the son of Ahimelech) was High Priest, and ate the presentation loaves (... according to 1 Samuel, it was Ahimelech who actually gave David the bread), which nobody is allowed to eat, except the priests - and gave some of the bread to his companions?

The Sabbath," he continued, "was made for man's sake; man was not made for the sake of the Sabbath. That is why the Son of Man is master even of the Sabbath."

Mark 3:1-35

THE MAN WITH THE SHRIVELLED HAND
(also Matthew 12:9-14; Luke 6:6-11)

Mark 3:1-6 - On another occasion (after the cornfield incident) when he went into the synagogue, there was a man there whose hand was shrivelled, and they (the Pharisees) were watching Jesus closely to see whether he would heal him on the Sabbath day, so that they might bring a charge against him. Jesus said to the man with the shrivelled hand, "Stand up and come out here in front!"

Then he said to them, "Is it right to do good on the Sabbath day, or to do harm? Is it right to save life or to kill?"

There was a dead silence. Then Jesus, deeply hurt as he sensed their inhumanity, looked round in anger at the faces surrounding him (in contrast to the "meek and mild" image in which Jesus is often portrayed), and said to the man, "Stretch out your hand!"

And he stretched it out, and the hand was restored as sound as the other one. The Pharisees walked straight out and discussed with Herod's party how they could have Jesus put out of the way.

Herod's party (or Herodians) - A political, not a religious party; supporters of the Herod dynasty. In the time of Jesus' ministry, this included Herod Antipas, tetrarch of Galilee and Perea, and Philip, tetrarch of Iturea and Trachonitis.

JESUS CONTINUES HEALING MANY
(also Matthew 12:15-21; Luke 6:17-19)

Mark 3:7-12 - Jesus now retired to the lake-side (of the Sea of Galilee) with his disciples (again after healing the man with the shrivelled hand). A huge crowd of people followed him, not only from Galilee, but from Judea, Jerusalem and Idumea, some from the district beyond the Jordan and from the neighbourhood of Tyre and

Sidon. This vast crowd came to him because they had heard about the sort of things he was doing. So Jesus told his disciples to have a small boat kept in readiness for him, in case the people should crowd him too closely. For he healed so many people that all those who were in pain kept pressing forward to touch him with their hands. Evil spirits, as soon as they saw him, acknowledged his authority and screamed, "You are the Son of God!"

But he warned them repeatedly that they must not make him known.

CHOOSING THE TWELVE APOSTLES
(also Matthew 10:1-4; Luke 6:12-16)

Mark 3:13-19 - Later (sometime after Jesus healed the man with the shrivelled hand, and withdrawn to continue his ministry around the Sea of Galilee) he went up on to the hill-side and summoned the men whom he wanted, and they went up to him. He appointed a band of twelve to be his companions, whom he could send out to preach, with power to drive out evil spirits. These were the twelve he appointed (the numbers represent the order used by Matthew):

1. Peter (which was the new name he gave Simon),
3. James the son of Zebedee, and
4. John his brother (He gave them the name of Boanerges, which meansthe "Thunderers".)
2. Andrew (the brother of Peter),
5. Philip,
6. Bartholomew (or Nathanael),
8. Matthew (or Levi),
7. Thomas,
9. James the son of Alphaeus,
10. Thaddaeus (or Judas, son of James),
11. Simon the Patriot, and

12. Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

JESUS AND HIS OWN FAMILY - THE INITIAL DIVISIONS BETWEEN THEM
(also Matthew 12:46-50; Mark 3:31-35; Luke 8:19-21)

Mark 3:20-21 - Then (after calling the twelve apostles) he went indoors, but again such a crowd collected that it was impossible for them even to eat a meal. When his relatives heard of this, they set out to take charge of him, for people were saying, "He must be mad!"

JESUS IS ACCUSED OF USING THE POWER OF THE DEVIL TO HEAL
(also Matthew 12:22-32; Luke 11:14-23; 12:8-10)

Mark 3:22-30 - (Jesus has just appointed his twelve apostles; his family hear that people are saying "he must be mad" .....) The scribes who had come down from Jerusalem were saying that he was possessed by Beelzebub, and that he drove out devils because he was in league with the prince of devils. So Jesus called them to him and spoke to them in a parable - "How can Satan be the one who drives out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, it cannot last either. And if Satan leads a rebellion against Satan - his days are certainly numbered. No one can break into a strong man's house and steal his property, without first tying up the strong man hand and foot. But if he did that, he could ransack the whole house.

"Believe me, all men's sins can be forgiven and their blasphemies. But there can never be any forgiveness for blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. That is an eternal sin."

He said this because they were saying, "He is in the power of an evil spirit."

JESUS AND HIS OWN FAMILY - "WHO IS MY MOTHER? WHO ARE MY BROTHERS?"
(also Matthew 12:46-50; Luke 8:19-21)

Mark 3:31-35 - Then his mother and his brothers arrived. They stood outside the house and sent a message asking him to come out to them. There was a crowd sitting round him when the message was

brought telling him, "Your mother and your brothers are outside looking for you."

Jesus replied, "And who are really my mother and my brothers?"

And he looked round at the faces of those sitting in a circle about him.

"Look!" he said, "my mother and my brothers are here. Anyone who does the will of God is brother and sister and mother to me."

Mark 4:1-41

LISTENING AND RESPONDING TO THE GOSPEL OF JESUS - "SOWING THE SEED" (also Matthew 13:1-9; Luke 8:4-8)

Mark 4:1-9 - Then once again (as in Matthew) he began to teach them by the lake-side. A bigger crowd than ever collected around him so that he got into the little boat on the lake and sat down, while the crowd covered the ground right up to the water's edge. He taught them a great deal in parables, and in the course of his teaching he said, "Listen! A man once went out to sow his seed and as he sowed, some seed fell by the roadside and the birds came and gobbled it up. Some of the seed fell among the rocks where there was not much soil, and sprang up very quickly because there was no depth of earth. But when the sun rose it was scorched, and because it had no root, it withered away. And some of the seed fell among thorn-bushes and the thorns grew up and choked the life out of it, and it bore no crop. And there was some seed which fell on good soil, and when it grew, produced a crop which yielded thirty or sixty or even a hundred times as much as the seed."

Then he added, "Every man who has ears should use them!"

WHY JESUS SPOKE IN PARABLES (also Matthew 13:10-17; Luke 8:9-10)

Mark 4:10-12 - Then when they were by themselves (again after Jesus had told the parable about sowing the seed), his close

followers and the twelve asked him about the parables, and he told them.

"The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those who do not know the secret, everything remains in parables, so that,

'seeing they may see and not perceive, and hearing they may hear and not understand; lest they should turn, and their sins be forgiven them'" (Isaiah 6:9,10).

LISTENING AND RESPONDING TO THE GOSPEL OF JESUS: "SOWING THE SEED" - Concluded (also Matthew 13:18-23; Luke 8:11-15)

Mark 4:13-20 - Then he continued, "Do you really not understand this parable? Then how are you going to understand all the other parables? The man who sows, sows the message. As for those who are by the roadside where the message is sown, as soon as they hear it Satan comes at once and takes away what has been sown in their minds. Similarly, the seed sown among the rocks represents those who hear the message without hesitation and accept it joyfully. But they have no real roots and do not last - when trouble or persecution arises because of the message, they give up their faith at once. Then there are the seeds which were sown among thorn-bushes. These are the people who hear the message, but the worries of this world and the false glamour of riches and all sorts of other ambitions creep in and choke the life out of what they have heard, and it produces no crop in their lives. As for the seed sown on good soil, this means the men who hear the message and accept it and do produce a crop - thirty, sixty, even a hundred times as much as they received."

LIVING AS WITNESSES TO JESUS CHRIST - "LIGHT, AND THE LAMP ON THE STAND" (also Matthew 5:14-16; Luke 8:16-17; 11:33)

Mark 4:21-23 - Then he said to them, "Is a lamp brought into the room to be put under a bucket or underneath the bed? Surely its place is on the lamp-stand! There is nothing hidden which is not

meant to be made perfectly plain one day, and there are no secrets which are not meant one day to be common knowledge. If a man has ears he should use them!"

THE PRICE OF CRITICISM AND TREATING OTHERS BADLY - "MEASURE FOR MEASURE"
(also Matthew 7:1-2; Luke 6:37-38; 8:18)

Mark 4:24-25 - "Be careful how you listen," he said to them. "Whatever measure you use will be used towards you, and even more than that. For the man who has something will receive more. As for the man who has nothing, even his nothing will be taken away."

LISTENING AND RESPONDING TO THE GOSPEL OF JESUS: HOW THE SEED OF FAITH GROWS - "THE GROWING SEED"

Mark 4:26-29 - Then (after the "sowing the seed") he said, "The kingdom of God is like a man scattering seed on the ground and then going to bed each night and getting up every morning, while the seed sprouts and grows up, though he has no idea how it happens. The earth produces a crop without any help from anyone: first a blade, then the ear of corn, then the full-grown grain in the ear. And as soon as the crop is ready, he sends his reapers in without delay, for the harvest-time has come."

LISTENING AND RESPONDING TO THE GOSPEL OF JESUS: "THE TINY MUSTARD SEED THAT GROWS INTO A GREAT TREE"
(also Matthew 13:31-32; Luke 13:18-19)

Mark 4:30-32 - Then he continued, "What can we say the kingdom of God is like? How shall we put it in a parable? It is like a tiny grain of mustard-seed which, when it is sown, is smaller than any seed that is ever sown. But after it is sown in the earth, it grows up and becomes bigger than any other plant. It shoots out great branches so that birds can come and nest in its shelter."

WHY JESUS SPOKE IN PARABLES - Concluded
(also Matthew 13:34-35; Luke 8:9-10)

Mark 4:33-34 - So he taught them his message with many parables such as their minds could take in. He did not speak to them at all without using parables, although in private he explained everything to his disciples.

CALMING THE STORM
(also Matthew 8:23-27; Luke 8:22-25)

Mark 4:35-41 - On the evening of that day (after teaching in parables), he said to them, "Let us cross over to the other side of the lake."

So they sent the crowd home and took him with them in the little boat in which he had been sitting, accompanied by other small craft. Then came a violent squall of wind which drove the waves aboard the boat until it was almost swamped. Jesus was in the stern asleep on the cushion. They awoke him with the words, "Master, don't you care that we're drowning?"

And he woke up, rebuked the wind, and said to the waves, "Hush now! Be still!"

The wind dropped and everything was very still.

"Why are you so frightened? What has happened to your faith?! he asked them.

But sheer awe swept over them and they kept saying to each other, "Who ever can he be? - even the wind and the waves do what he tells them!"

Mark 5:1-43

THE MADMAN AND THE GADARENE PIGS
(also Matthew 8:28-34; Luke 8:26-39)

Mark 5:1-20 - So they arrived on the other side of the lake in the country of the Gerasenes (again after calming the storm). As Jesus was getting out of the boat, a man in the grip of an evil spirit rushed to meet him from among the tombs where he was living. It was no longer possible for any human being to restrain him even with a chain. Indeed he had frequently been secured with fetters and

lengths of chain, but he had simply snapped the chains and broken the fetters in pieces. No one could do anything with him. All through the night as well as in the day-time he screamed among the tombs and on the hill-side, and cut himself with stones. Now, as soon as he saw Jesus in the distance, he ran and knelt before him, yelling at the top of his voice, "What have you got to do with me, Jesus, Son of the most high God? For God's sake, don't torture me!"

For Jesus had already said, "Come out of this man, you evil spirit!"

Then he asked him, "What is your name?"

"My name is legion," he replied, "for there are many of us."

Then he begged and prayed him not to send "them" out of the country.

A large herd of pigs was grazing there on the hill-side, and the evil spirits implored him, "Send us over to the pigs and we'll get into them!"

So Jesus allowed them to do this, and they came out of the man, and made off and went into the pigs. The whole herd of about two thousand stampeded down the cliff into the lake and was drowned. The swineherds took to their heels and spread their story in the city and all over the countryside. Then the people came to see what had happened. As they approached Jesus, they saw the man who had been devil-possessed sitting there properly clothed and perfectly sane - the same man who had been possessed by "legion" - and they were really frightened. Those who had seen the incident told them what had happened to the devil-possessed man and about the disaster to the pigs. Then they began to implore Jesus to leave their district. As he was embarking on the small boat, the man who had been possessed begged that he might go with him. But Jesus would not allow this.

"Go home to your own people," he told him, "And tell them what the Lord has done for you, and how kind he has been to you!"

So the man went off and began to spread throughout the Ten Towns (the federated "Ten Cities" of the Decapolis) the story of what

Jesus had done for him. And they were all simply amazed.

THE WOMAN WITH THE HAEMORRHAGE and THE RAISING OF JAIRUS' DAUGHTER
(also Matthew 9:18-26; Luke 8:40-56)

Mark 5:21-43 - When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side of the lake (after the incident of the madman and the Gadarene swine), a great crowd collected around him as he stood on the shore. Then came a man called Jairus, one of the synagogue presidents. And when he saw Jesus, he knelt before him, pleading desperately for his help.

"My little girl is dying," he said. "Will you come and put your hands on her - then she will get better and live."

Jesus went off with him, followed by large crowds jostling at his elbow. Among them was a woman who had a haemorrhage for twelve years and who had gone through a great deal at the hands of many doctors (or physicians), spending all her money in the process. She had derived no benefit from them but, on the contrary, was getting worse. This woman had heard about Jesus and came up behind him under cover of the crowd, and touched his cloak, "For if I can only touch his clothes," she said, "I shall be all right."

The haemorrhage stopped immediately, and she knew in herself that she was cured of her trouble. At once Jesus knew intuitively that power had gone out of him, and he turned round in the middle of the crowd and said, "Who touched my clothes?"

His disciples replied, "You can see this crowd jostling you. How can you ask, 'Who touched me?'"

But he looked all round at their faces to see who had done so. Then the woman, scared and shaking all over because she knew that she was the one to whom this thing had happened, came and flung herself before him and told him the whole story. But he said to her, "Daughter, it is your faith that has healed you. Go home in peace, and be free from your trouble."

While he was still speaking, messengers arrived from the synagogue president's house, saying, "Your daughter is dead - there is no need to bother the master any further."

But when Jesus heard this, he said, "Now don't be afraid, just go on believing!"

Then he allowed no one to follow him except Peter and James and John, James's brother. ...

- Peter, James and John appear to have become the more "senior" apostles:

... They arrived at the president's house and Jesus noticed the hubbub and all the weeping and wailing, and as he went in, he said to the people in the house, "Why are you making such a noise with your crying? The child is not dead; she is fast asleep."

They greeted this with a scornful laugh. But Jesus turned them all out, and taking only the father and mother and his own companions with him, went into the room where the child was. Then he took the little girl's hand and said to her in Aramaic (the language in general use in Palestine alongside Hebrew), "Little girl, I tell you to get up!"

At once she jumped to her feet and walked around the room, for she was twelve years old. This sight sent the others nearly out their minds with joy. But Jesus gave them strict instructions not to let anyone know what had happened - and ordered food to be given to the little girl.

Mark 6:1-56

JESUS IS REJECTED IN NAZARETH FOR THE SECOND TIME (also Matthew 13:53-58)

Mark 6:1-6a - Then (according to Mark, after Jesus has raised Jairus' daughter) he left that district (Capernaum) and came into his own native town followed by his disciples. When the Sabbath day came, he began to teach in the synagogue. The congregation was astonished and remarked, "Where does he get all this? What is this wisdom that he has been given - and what about these marvellous

things that he can do? He's only the carpenter, Mary's son, the brother of James, Joses, Judas and Simon; and his sisters are living here with us!" And they were deeply offended with him. But Jesus said to them, "No prophet goes unhonoured - except in his native town or with his own relations or in his own home!"

And he could do nothing miraculous there apart from laying his hands on a few sick people and healing them; their lack of faith astonished him.

THE TWELVE APOSTLES ARE SENT OUT TO PREACH AND HEAL
(also Matthew 10:5-15; Luke 9:1-6)

Mark 6:6b-13 - Then (after Jesus had raised Jairus' daughter, and again been rejected in his own town of Nazareth) he made his way round the villages, continuing his teaching. He summoned the twelve, and began to send them out in twos, giving them power over evil spirits. He instructed them to take nothing for the road except a staff - no satchel, no bread and no money in their pockets. They were to wear sandals and not to take more than one coat. And he told them, "Wherever you are, when you go into a house, stay there until you leave that place. And wherever people will not welcome you or listen to what you have to say, leave them and shake the dust off your feet as a protest against them!"

So they went out and preached that men should change their whole outlook. They expelled many evil spirits and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them.

DEATH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST
(also Matthew 14:1-12; Luke 9:7-9)

Mark 6:14-29 - "All this (preaching and healing of the twelve apostles) came to the ears of king Herod, for Jesus' reputation was spreading, and people were saying that John the Baptist had risen from the dead, and that was why he was showing such miraculous powers. Others maintained that he was Elijah, and others that he was one of the prophets of the old days come back again. But when

Herod heard of all this, he said, "It must be John whom I beheaded, risen from the dead!"

For Herod himself had sent and arrested John and had him bound in prison, all on account of Herodias, wife of his brother Philip. He had married her, though John used to say to Herod, "It is not right for you to possess your own brother's wife." Herodias herself was furious with him for this and wanted to have him executed, but she could not do it, for Herod had a deep respect for John, knowing that he was a just and holy man, and protected him. He used to listen to him and be profoundly disturbed, and yet he enjoyed hearing him.

Then a good opportunity came, for Herod gave a birthday party for his courtiers and army commanders and for the leading people in Galilee. Herodias' daughter came in and danced, to the great delight of Herod and his guests. The king said to the girl, "Ask me anything you like and I will give it to you!" And he swore to her, "I will give you whatever you ask me, up to half of my kingdom!"

And she went and spoke to her mother, "What shall I ask for?" And she said, "The head of John the Baptist!"

The girl rushed back to the king's presence, and made her request. "I want you to give me, this minute, the head of John the Baptist on a dish!" she said.

Herod was aghast, but because of his oath and the presence of his guests, he did not like to refuse her. So he sent one of the palace guardsman straightaway to bring him John's head. He went off and beheaded him in the prison, brought back his head on the dish, and gave it to the girl who handed it to her mother. When his disciples heard what had happened, they came and took away the body and put it in a tomb."

FEEDING THE FIVE THOUSAND
(also Matthew 14:13-21; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-15)

Mark 6:30-44 - The apostles returned to Jesus (after preaching and healing, and following the report of John the Baptist's execution) and reported to him every detail of what they had done and taught. "Now come along to some quiet place by yourselves, and rest for a little

while," said Jesus, for there were people coming and going incessantly so that they had not even time for meals. They went off in the boat to a quiet place by themselves, but a great many saw them go and recognised them, and people from all the towns hurried around the shore on foot to forestall them. When Jesus disembarked he saw the large crowd and his heart was touched with pity for them because they seemed to him like sheep without a shepherd. And he settled down to teach them about many things. As the day wore on, his disciples came to him and said, "We are right in the wilds here and it is getting late. Let them go now, so that they can buy themselves something to eat from the farms and villages around here"

But Jesus replied, "You give them something to eat!"

"You mean we're to go and spend ten pounds on bread (equivalent to six month's wages)? Is that how you want us to feed them?"

"What bread have you got?" asked Jesus. "Go and have a look."

And when they found out, they told him, "We have five loaves and two fish."

Jesus miraculously feeds five thousand people

Then Jesus directed the people to sit down in parties on the fresh grass. And they threw themselves down in groups of fifty and a hundred. Then Jesus took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to Heaven. thanked God, broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to distribute to the people. And he divided the two fish among them all. Everybody ate and was satisfied. Afterwards they collected twelve baskets full of pieces of bread and fish that were left over. There were five thousand men (and women and children) who ate the loaves.

WALKING ON WATER
(also Matthew 14:22-33; John 6:16-24)

Mark 6:45-52 - Directly after this (the feeding of the five thousand), Jesus made his disciples get aboard the boat and go on ahead to Bethsaida on the other side of the lake, while he himself

sent the crowds home. And when he had sent them all on their way, he went off to the hill-side to pray. When it grew late, the boat was in the middle of the lake, and he was by himself on land. He saw them straining at the oars, for the wind was dead against them. And in the small hours he went towards them, walking on the waters of the lake, intending to come alongside them. But when they saw him walking on the water, they thought he was a ghost, and screamed out. For they all saw him and they were absolutely terrified. But Jesus at once spoke quietly to them, "It's all right, it is I myself; don't be afraid!"

And he climbed aboard the boat with them, and the wind dropped. But they were scared out of their wits. They had not had the sense to learn the lesson of the loaves. Even that miracle had not opened their eyes to see who he was.

JESUS HEALS THE SICK AT GENNESARET
(also Matthew 14:34-36)

Mark 6:53-56 - And when (again after Jesus had walked on the water) they had crossed over to the other side of the lake, they landed at Gennesaret and tied up there. As soon as they came ashore, the people recognised Jesus and rushed all over the countryside and began to carry the sick around on their beds to wherever they heard that he was. Wherever he went, in villages or towns or farms, they laid down their sick right in the road-way and begged him that they might "just touch the edge of his cloak". And all those who touched him were healed.

Mark 7:1-37

JESUS AND THE SCRIBES AND PHARISEES - "WHAT REALLY MAKES A PERSON CLEAN"
(also Matthew 15:1-20)

Mark 7:1-23 - And now Jesus was approached by the Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem. They had noticed that his disciples ate their meals with "common" hands - meaning that they had not gone through a ceremonial washing. (The Pharisees, and indeed all the Jews, will never eat unless they have

washed their hands in a particular way, following a traditional rule. And they will not eat anything bought in the market until they have first performed their "sprinkling". And there are many other things which they consider important, concerned with the washing of cups, jugs and basins - here, Mark is explaining a Jewish custom for his predominantly Gentile readers.) So the Pharisees and the scribes put this question to Jesus, "Why do your disciples refuse to follow the ancient tradition, and eat their bread with 'common' hands?"

Jesus replied, "You hypocrites, Isaiah described you beautifully when he wrote -

'This people honours me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. And in vain they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men' (Isaiah 29:13).

You are so busy holding on to the traditions of men that you let go the commandment of God!"

Then he went on, "It is wonderful to see how you can set aside the commandment of God to preserve your own tradition! For Moses said,

'Honour your father and your mother' (Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16) and

'He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death' (Exodus 21:17; Leviticus 20:9).

But you say, 'if a man says to his father or his mother, Korban (or Corban - Hebrew for a gift or an offering dedicated to God, again explained by Mark for his readers) - meaning, I have given God whatever duty I owed to you', then he need not lift a finger any longer for his father or mother, so making the word of God invalid for the sake of the tradition which you hold. And this is typical of much of what you do."

Then he called the crowd close to him again, and spoke to them, "Listen to me now, all of you, and understand this, There is nothing outside a man which can enter into him and make him 'common'. It is the things which come out of a man that make him 'common'!"

Later, when he had gone indoors away from the crowd, his disciples asked him about this parable.

"Oh, are you as dull as they are?" he said. "Can't you see that anything that goes into a man from outside cannot make him 'common' or unclean? You see, it doesn't go into his heart, but into his stomach, and passes out of the body altogether, so that all food is clean enough. But," he went on, "whatever comes out of a man, that is what makes a man 'common' or unclean. For it is from inside, from men's hearts and minds, that evil thoughts arise - lust, theft, murder, adultery, greed, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, arrogance and folly! All these evil things come from inside a man and make him unclean!"

THE SICK DAUGHTER OF THE SYROPHOENICIAN WOMAN (also Matthew 15:21-28)

Mark 7:24-30 - Then (as in Matthew's account) he got up and left that place and went off to the neighbourhood of Tyre. There he went into a house and wanted no one to know where he was. But it proved impossible to remain hidden. For no sooner had he got there, than a woman who had heard about him, and who had a daughter possessed by an evil spirit, arrived and prostrated herself before him. She was a Greek, a Syrophoenician by birth, and she asked him to drive the evil spirit out of her daughter. Jesus said to her, "You must let the children have all they want first. It is not right, you know, to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs."

But she replied, "Yes, Lord, I know, but even the dogs under the table eat what the children leave."

"If you can answer like that," Jesus said to her, "you can go home! The evil spirit has left your daughter."

And she went back home and found the child lying quietly on her bed, and the evil spirit gone.

THE DEAF AND DUMB MAN IN THE DECAPOLIS

Mark 7:31-37 - Once more (after healing the daughter of the Syrophoenician woman) Jesus left the neighbourhood of Tyre and

passed through Sidon towards the Lake of Galilee, and crossed the Ten Towns territory (the Decapolis). They brought to him a man who was deaf and unable to speak intelligibly, and they implored him to put his hand upon him. Jesus took him away from the crowd by himself. He put his fingers in the man's ears and touched his tongue with his own saliva. Then, looking up to Heaven, he gave a deep sigh and said to him in Aramaic (the common language of the Middle East), "Open!"

And his ears were opened and immediately whatever had tied his tongue came loose and he spoke quite plainly. Jesus gave instructions that they should tell no one about this happening, but the more he told them, the more they broadcast the news. People were absolutely amazed, and kept saying, "How wonderful he has done everything! He even makes the deaf hear and the dumb speak."

Mark 8:1-38

FEEDING THE FOUR THOUSAND
(also Matthew 15:29-39)

Mark 8:1-10 - About this time (after Jesus had returned from the Tyre and Sidon area, and healed the deaf and dumb man in the Decapolis) it happened again that a large crowd collected and had nothing to eat. Jesus called the disciples over to him and said, "My heart goes out to this crowd; they have been with me three days now and they have no food left. If I send them off home without anything, they will collapse on the way - and some of them have come from a distance."

His disciples replied, "Where could anyone find the food to feed them here in this deserted spot?"

"How many loaves have you got?" Jesus asked them.

"Seven," they replied.

So Jesus told the crowd to settle themselves on the ground. Then he took the seven loaves into his hands, and with a prayer of thanksgiving broke them, and gave them to the disciples to distribute

to the people; and this they did. They had a few small fish as well, and after blessing them, Jesus told the disciples to give these also to the people. They ate and they were satisfied. Moreover, they picked up seven baskets full of pieces left over. The people numbered about four thousand. Jesus sent them home, and then he boarded the boat at once with his disciples and went on to the district of Dalmanutha.

THE SCRIBES AND PHARISEES DEMAND MORE SIGNS FROM JESUS
(also Matthew 16:1-4; Luke 12:54-56)

Mark 8:11-12 - Now (after feeding the 4,000) the Pharisees came out and began an argument with him, wanting a sign from Heaven. Jesus gave a deep sigh, and then said, "What makes this generation want a sign? I can tell you this, they will certainly not be given one!"

THE YEAST OF THE PHARISEES
(also Matthew 16:5-12; Luke 12:1)

Mark 8:13-21 - Then he left them and got aboard the boat again, and crossed the lake.

The disciples had forgotten to take any food and had only one loaf with them in the boat. Jesus spoke seriously to them, "Keep your eyes open! Be on your guard against the 'yeast' of the Pharisees and the 'yeast' of Herod!" And this sent them into an earnest consultation among themselves because they had brought no bread. Jesus knew it and said to them, "Why all this discussion about bringing no bread? Don't you understand or grasp what I say even yet? Are you like the people who 'having eyes, do not see, and having ears, do not hear'? Have your forgotten - when I broke five loaves for five thousand people, how many baskets full of pieces did you pick up?"

"Twelve," they replied.

"And then there were seven loaves for four thousand people, how many baskets of pieces did you pick up?"

"Seven," they said.

"And does that still mean nothing to you?" he said.

THE BLIND MAN OF BETHSAIDA

Mark 8:22-26 - So (after going on to the Dalmanutha/Magadan area, and Jesus has refused to give the Pharisees a sign from heaven) they arrived at Bethsaida where a blind man was brought to him, with the earnest request that he should touch him. Jesus took the blind man's hand and led him outside the village. Then he moistened his eyes with saliva and putting his hands on him, asked, "Can you see at all?"

The man looked up and said, "I can see people. They look like trees - only they are walking about."

Then Jesus put his hands on his eyes once more and his sight came into focus. And he recovered and saw everything sharp and clear. And Jesus sent him off to his own house with the words, "Don't even go into the village."

"WHO DO PEOPLE SAY I AM?" ASKS JESUS
(also Matthew 16:13-20; Luke 9:18-21)

Mark 8:27-30 - (In Mark's account after healing the blind man in Bethsaida .....) Jesus then went away with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, "Who are men saying that I am?"

"John the Baptist," they answered. "But others say that you are Elijah or, some say, one of the prophets."

Then he asked them, "But what about you - who do you say that I am?"

"You are Christ!" answered Peter.

Then Jesus impressed it upon them that they must not mention this to anyone.

JESUS TEACHES ABOUT HIS DEATH AND RESURRECTION FOR A FIRST TIME
(also Matthew 16:21-23; Luke 9:22)

Mark 8:31-33 - And (after Peter's declaration that Jesus was the Christ) he (Jesus) began to teach them that it was inevitable that the

Son of Man should go through much suffering and be utterly repudiated by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He told them all this quite bluntly.

This made Peter draw him on one side and take him to task about what he had said. But Jesus turned and faced his disciples and rebuked Peter.

"Out of my way, Satan!" he said. "Peter, you are not looking at things from God's point of view, but from man's!"

CARRYING THE CROSS OF JESUS
(also Matthew 16:24-28; Luke 9:23-27)

Mark 8:34-38 - Then (as in Matthew's account) he called his disciples and the people around him, and said to them, "If anyone wants to follow in my footsteps, he must give up all right to himself, take up his cross and follow me. The man who tries to save his life will lose it; it is the man who loses his life for my sake and the Gospel's who will save it. What good can it do a man to gain the whole world at the price of his own soul? What can a man offer to buy back his soul once he has lost it? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this unfaithful and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in the Father's glory with the holy angels around him."

Mark 9:1-50

CARRYING THE CROSS OF JESUS - Concluded

Mark 9:1 - Then he added, "Believe me, there are some of you standing here who will know nothing of death until you have seen the kingdom of God coming in its power!"

THE TRANSFIGURATION OF JESUS
(also Matthew 17:1-13; Luke 9:28-36)

Mark 9:2-13 - Six days later, Jesus took Peter and James and John with him and led them high up on a hill-side where they were entirely alone. His whole appearance changed before their eyes, while his clothes became white, dazzling white - whiter than any earthly

bleaching could make them. Elijah and Moses appeared to the disciples and stood there in conversation with Jesus. Peter burst out to Jesus, "Master, it is wonderful for us to be here! Shall we put up three shelters - one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah?"

He really did not know what to say, for they were very frightened. Then came a cloud which overshadowed them and a voice spoke out of the cloud, "This is my dearly-loved Son. Listen to him!"

Then, quite suddenly they looked all round them and saw nobody at all with them but Jesus. And as they came down the hill-side, he warned them not to tell anybody what they had seen till "the Son of Man should have risen again from the dead". They treasured this remark and tried to puzzle out among themselves what "Rising from the dead" could mean. Then they asked him this question, "Why do the scribes say that Elijah must come before Christ?"

"It is quite true," he told them, "that Elijah does come first, and begins the restitution of all things. But what does the scripture say about the Son of Man? This: that he must go through much suffering and be treated with contempt! I tell you that not only has Elijah come already (as John the Baptist) but they have done to him exactly what they wanted - just as the scripture says of him."

THE EPILEPTIC BOY
(also Matthew 17:14-21; Luke 9:37-43a; 17:5-6)

Mark 9:14-29 - Then as they rejoined the other disciples (also after the Transfiguration), they saw that they were surrounded by a large crowd, and that some of the scribes were arguing with them. As soon as the people saw Jesus, they ran forward excitedly to welcome him.

"What is the trouble?" Jesus asked them.

A man from the crowd answered, "Master, I brought my son to you because he has a dumb spirit. Wherever he is, it gets hold of him, throws him down on the ground and there he foams at the mouth and grinds his teeth. It's simply wearing him out. I did speak to your disciples to get them to drive it out, but they hadn't the power to do it."

Jesus answered them, "Oh, what a faithless people you are! How long must I be with you, how long must I put up with you? Bring him here to me."

So they brought the boy to him, and as soon as the spirit saw Jesus, it convulsed the boy, who fell to the ground and writhed there, foaming at the mouth.

"How long has he been like this?" Jesus asked the father.

"Ever since he was a child," he replied. "Again and again it has thrown him into the fire or into water to finish him off. But if you can do anything, please take pity on us and help us."

"If you can do anything!" retorted Jesus. "Everything is possible to the man who believes."

"I do believe," the boy's father burst out. "Help me to believe more!"

When Jesus noticed that a crowd was rapidly gathering, he spoke sharply to the evil spirit, with the words, "I command you, deaf and dumb spirit, come out of this boy, and never go into him again!"

The spirit gave a loud scream and after a dreadful convulsion left him. The boy lay there like a corpse, so that most of the bystanders said, "He is dead."

But Jesus grasped his hands and lifted him up, and then he stood on his own feet. When he had gone home, Jesus' disciples asked him privately, "Why were we unable to drive it out?"

"Nothing can drive out this kind of thing except prayer," replied Jesus.

JESUS TEACHES ABOUT HIS DEATH AND RESURRECTION FOR A SECOND TIME
(also Matthew 17:22-23; Luke 9:43b-45)

Mark 9:30-32 - Then they left that district (Caesarea Philippi or Galilee) and went straight through Galilee (towards Capernaum). Jesus kept this journey secret for he was teaching his disciples that the Son of Man would be betrayed into the power of men, that they would kill him and that three days after his death he

would rise again. But they were completely mystified by this saying, and were afraid to question him about it.

"WHO IS THE GREATEST?"
(also Matthew 18:1-5; Luke 9:46-48)

Mark 9:33-37 - So (sometime after healing the epileptic boy) they came to Capernaum. And when they were indoors he asked them, "What were you discussing as we came along?"

They were silent, for on the way they had been arguing about who should be the greatest. Jesus sat down and called the twelve, and said to them, "If any man wants to be first, he must be last and servant of all."

Then he took a little child and stood him in front of them all, and putting his arms round him, said to them, "Anyone who welcomes one little child like this for my sake is welcoming me. And the man who welcomes me is welcoming not only me but the one who sent me!"

THE MAN NOT AGAINST JESUS IS FOR HIM!
(also Luke 9:49-50)

Mark 9:38-41 - Then (after Jesus had dealt with an argument about which disciple was the greatest) John said to him, "Master, we saw somebody driving out evil spirits in your name, and we stopped him, for he is not one who follows us."

But Jesus replied, "You must not stop him. No one who exerts such power in my name would readily say anything against me. For the man who is not against us is on our side. In fact, I assure you that the man who gives you a mere drink of water in my name, because you are followers of mine, will most certainly be rewarded."

LEADING OTHERS INTO SIN - "THE MILLSTONE AROUND THE NECK"
(also Matthew 18:6-7; Luke 17:1-3a)

Mark 9:42 - "... I tell you too, that the man who disturbs the faith of one of the humblest of those who believe in me would be better off if

he were thrown into the sea with a great mill-stone hung round his neck!"

GETTING RID OF TEMPTATION - "THE OFFENDING "EYE", "HAND", "FOOT""
(also Matthew 5:29-30;18:8-9)

Mark 9:43-49 - "Indeed, if it is your own hand that spoils your faith, you must cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than to keep both your hands and go to the rubbish-heap, If your foot spoils your faith, you must cut it off. It is better to enter life on one foot than to keep both your feet and be thrown on to the rubbish-heap. And if your eye leads you astray, pluck it out. It is better for you to go one-eyed into the kingdom of God than to keep both eyes and be thrown on to the rubbish-heap, where

'their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched' (Isaiah 66:24).

For everyone will be salted by fire."

LIVING AS WITNESSES TO JESUS CHRIST - "SALT, AND THE SALT OF THE EARTH"
(also Matthew 5:13; Luke 14:34-35)

Mark 9:50 - "Salt is a very good thing; but if it should lose its saltiness, what can you do to restore its flavour? You must have salt in yourselves, and live at peace with each other."

Mark 10:1-52

THE PHARISEES AND DIVORCE
(also Matthew 19:1-12)

Mark 10:1-12 - Then (in Mark's Gospel, after healing the epileptic boy) he got up and left Galilee and went off to the borders of Judea and beyond the Jordan. Again great crowds assembled to meet him, and again, according to his custom, he taught hem. Then some Pharisees arrived to ask him this test-question.

"Is it right for a man to divorce his wife?"

Jesus replied by asking them, "What has Moses commanded you to do?"

"Moses allows men to write a divorce-notice and then to dismiss her," they said.

"Moses gave you that commandment," returned Jesus, "because you know so little of the meaning of love. But from the beginning of the creation, God

'made them male and female' (Genesis 1:27; 5:2).

'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh' (Genesis 2:24).

So that in body they are no longer two people but one. That is why man must never separate what God has joined together."

On reaching the house, his disciples questioned him again about this matter.

"Any man who divorces his wife and marries another woman," he told them, "commits adultery against his wife. And if she herself divorces her husband and marries someone else, she commits adultery."

ACCEPTING THE KINGDOM OF GOD LIKE A CHILD
(also Matthew 19:13-15; Luke 18:15-17)

Mark 10:13-16 - Then (again after being questioned about divorce) some people came to him bringing little children for him to touch. The disciples tried to discourage them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant and told them, "You must let little children come to me - never stop them! For the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Indeed, I assure you that the man who does not accept the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." Then he took the children in his arms and laid his hands on them and blessed them.

POSSESSIONS AS A POSSIBLE BARRIER TO FOLLOWING JESUS - "THE RICH YOUNG MAN"
(also Matthew 19:16-30; Luke 18:18-30)

Mark 10:17-31 - As he began to take the road again (after welcoming the children), a man came running up and fell at his feet, and asked him, "Good Master, what must I do to be sure of eternal life?"

"I wonder why you call me good," returned Jesus. "No one is good - only God. You know the commandments,

'Do not commit adultery,' 'Do not murder', 'Do not steal,' 'Do not bear false witness,' 'Do not defraud,' 'Honour your father and your mother' (Exodus 20:12-16; Deuteronomy 5:16-20)."

"Master," he replied, "I have kept carefully all these since I was quite young."

Jesus looked steadily at him, and his heart warmed towards him. Then he said, "There is one thing you still want. Go and sell everything you have, give the money away to the poor - you will have riches in Heaven. And then come back and follow me."

At these words his face fell and he went away in deep distress, for he was very rich. Then Jesus looked round at them all, and said to his disciples, "How difficult it is for those who have great possessions to enter the kingdom of God!"

The disciples were staggered at these words, but Jesus continued, "Children, you don't know how hard it can be to get into the kingdom of Heaven. Why, a camel could more easily squeeze through the eye of a needle than a rich man get into the kingdom of God."

At this their astonishment knew no bounds, and they said to each other, "Then who can possibly be saved?"

Jesus looked straight at them and said, "Humanly speaking it is impossible, but not with God. Everything is possible with God."

Then Peter burst out, "But look, we have left everything and followed you!"

"I promise you," returned Jesus, "nobody leaves home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or property for my sake and the Gospel's without getting back a hundred times over, now in this

present life, homes and brothers and sisters, mothers and children and land - though not without persecution - and in the next world eternal life. But many who are first now will then be last, and the last now will then be first."

JESUS TEACHES ABOUT HIS DEATH AND RESURRECTION FOR A THIRD TIME
(also Matthew 20:17-19; Luke 18:31-34)

Mark 10:32-34 - They were now on their way up to Jerusalem and Jesus walked on ahead. The disciples were dismayed at this, and those who followed were afraid. Then once more he took the twelve aside and began to tell them what was going to happen to him.

"We are now going up to Jerusalem," he said, "as you can see. And the Son of Man will be betrayed into the power of the chief priests and scribes. They are going to condemn him to death and hand him over to pagans who will jeer at him and spit at him and flog him and kill him. But after three days he will rise again."

JESUS COMES TO SERVE - JOHN AND JAMES WANT TO BE FIRST!
(also Matthew 20:20-28)

Mark 10:35-45 - Then Zebedee's two sons James and John approached him, saying "Master, we want you to grant us a special request."

"What do you want me to do for you?" answered Jesus.

"Give us permission to sit one on each side of you in the glory of your kingdom!"

"You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said to them.

"Can you drink the cup I have to drink? Can you go through the baptism I have to bear?"

"Yes, we can," they replied.

Then Jesus told them, "You will indeed drink the cup I am drinking, and you will undergo the baptism which I have to bear! But as for

sitting on either side of me, that is not for me to give - such places belong to those for whom they are intended."

When the other ten heard about this, they began to be highly indignant with James and John; so Jesus called them all to him, and said, "You know that the so-called rulers in the heathen world lord it over them, and their great men have absolute power. But it must not be so among you. No, whoever among you wants to be great must become the servant of you all, and if he wants to be first among you he must be the slave of all men! For the Son of Man himself has not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life to set many others free."

THE BLIND MAN NEAR JERICHO
(also Matthew 20:29-34; Luke 18:35-43)

Mark 10:46-52 - Then (as in Matthew's Gospel) they came to Jericho, and as he was leaving it accompanied by his disciples and a large crowd, Bartimeus (that is, the son of Timaeus), a blind beggar, was sitting in his usual place by the side of the road. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth he began to call out, "Jesus, Son of David, have pity on me!"

Many of the people told him sharply to keep quiet, but he shouted all the more, "Son of David, have pity on me!"

Jesus stood quite still and said, "Call him here."

So they called the blind man, saying, "It's all right now, get up, he's calling you!"

At this he threw off his coat, jumped to his feet and came to Jesus.

"What do you want me to do for you?" he asked him.

"Oh, Master, let me see again!"

"Go on your way then," returned Jesus, "your faith has healed you."

And he recovered his sight at once and followed Jesus along the road.

TOWARDS THE END Spring c AD30

Mark 11:1-33

THE FINAL ENTRY OF JESUS INTO JERUSALEM
(also Matthew 21:1-11; Luke 19:28-44; John 12:12-19)

Mark 11:1-11 - When they were approaching Jerusalem and had come to Bethphage and Bethany on the slopes of the Mount of Olives, he sent off two of his disciples with these instructions, "Go into the village just ahead of you and as soon as you enter it you will find a tethered colt on which no one has yet ridden. Untie it, and bring it here. If anybody asks you, 'Why are you doing this?', just say, 'The Lord needs it, and will send it back immediately.'"

So they went off and found the colt tethered by a doorway outside in the open street, and they untied it. Some of the bystanders did say, "What are you doing, untying this colt?", but they made the reply Jesus told them to make, and the men raised no objection. So they brought the colt to Jesus, threw their coats on its back, and he took his seat upon it.

Many of the people spread out their coats in his path as he rode along, and others put down straw which they had cut from the fields. The whole crowd, both those who were in front and those who were behind Jesus, shouted, "God save him! -

'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!' (Psalm 118:26)

God bless the coming kingdom of our father David! God save him from on high!"

Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the Temple and looked round on all that was going on. And then, since it was already late in the day, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.

THE CURSED FIG-TREE THAT WITHERS AWAY
(also Matthew 21:18-22)

Mark 11:12-14 - On the following day (after his triumphal entry into Jerusalem), when they had left Bethany, Jesus felt hungry. He noticed a fig-tree in the distance covered with leaves, and he walked up to it to see if he could find any fruit on it. But when he got to it, he

could find nothing but leaves, for it was not yet time for the figs. Then Jesus spoke to the tree, "May nobody ever eat fruit from you!"

And the disciples heard him say it.

JESUS DRIVES THE BUYERS AND SELLERS FROM THE TEMPLE
(also Matthew 21:12-17; Luke 19:45-48)

This is the second recorded incident of this nature. The first came in John 2:12-25 at the start of Jesus' three year ministry

Mark 11:15-19 - Then (after cursing the fig-tree on the short journey from Bethany) they came into Jerusalem and Jesus went into the Temple and began to drive out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money-changers and the benches of the dove-sellers, and he would not allow people to carry their water-pots through the Temple. And he taught them and said, "Doesn't the scripture say,

'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations?' (Isaiah 56:7).

But you have turned it into a

'den of thieves!' (Jeremiah 7:11)"

The chief priests and scribes heard him say this and tried to find a way of getting rid of him. But they were in fact afraid of him, for his teaching had captured the imagination of the people. And every evening he left the city.

THE CURSED FIG-TREE THAT WITHERS AWAY - Concluded

Jesus talks of faith, prayer and forgiveness

Mark 11:20-26 (Verse 20 ....) One morning (after Jesus had overturned the money-changer's tables, and returned to Jerusalem as he did every day .....) as they were walking along, they noticed that the fig-tree had withered away to the roots. Peter remembered it, and said, "Master, look, the fig-tree that you cursed is all shrivelled up!"

"Have faith in God," replied Jesus to them. "I tell you that if anyone should say to this hill, 'Get up and throw yourself into the sea', and without any doubt in his heart believe that what he says will happen, then it will happen! That is why I tell you, whatever you pray about and ask for, believe that you have received it and it will be yours. And whenever you stand praying, you must forgive anything that you are holding against anyone else, and your Heavenly Father will forgive you your sins."

- Some manuscripts add a verse 26 to Mark's account - "But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in Heaven forgive your sins."

THE AUTHORITY OF JESUS IS QUESTIONED
(also Matthew 21:23-27; Luke 20:1-8)

Mark 11:27-33 - So they came once more to Jerusalem, and while Jesus was walking in the Temple (after teaching about the cursed fig-tree that had withered away), the chief priests, elders and scribes approached him, and asked, "What authority have you for what you're doing? And who gave you permission to do these things?"

"I am going to ask you a question," replied Jesus, "and if you answer me, I will tell you what authority I have for what I do. The baptism of John, now - did it come from Heaven or was it purely human? Tell me that."

At this they argued with each other, "If we say from Heaven, he will say, 'then why didn't you believe in him?' but if we say it was purely human, well ..." For they were frightened of the people, since all of them believed that John was a real prophet.

So they answered Jesus, "We do not know."

"Then I cannot tell you by what authority I do these things," returned Jesus.

Mark 12:1-44

THOSE WHO WON'T ACCEPT GOD: "THE WICKED TENANTS OF THE VINEYARD"
(also Matthew 21:33-46; Luke 20:9-19)

Mark 12:1-12 - Then he began to talk to them (... the chief priests, elders and scribes in the Jerusalem Temple) in parables.

"A man once planted a vineyard," he said, "fenced it round, dug out the hole for the wine-press and built a watch-tower. Then he let it out to some farm-workers and went abroad. At the end of the season he sent a servant to the tenants to receive his share of the vintage. But they got hold of him, knocked him about and sent him off empty-handed. The owner tried again. He sent another servant to them, but this one they knocked on the head and generally insulted. Once again he sent them another servant, but him they murdered. He sent many others and some they beat up and some they murdered. He had one man left - his own son who was very dear to him. He sent him last of all to the tenants, saying to himself, 'They will surely respect my own son.' But they said to each other, 'This fellow is the future owner - come on, let's kill him, and the property will be ours! So they got hold of him and murdered him, and threw his body out of the vineyard. What do you suppose the owner of the vineyard is going to do? He will come and destroy the men who were working his vineyard and will hand it over to others. Have you never read this scripture -

'The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This was the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes?' (Psalm 118:22,23)"

Then they tried to get their hands on him, for they knew perfectly well that he had aimed this parable at them - but they were afraid of the people. So they left him and went away.

THE PHARISEES AND HERODIANS QUESTION HIM - PAYING TAXES
(also Matthew 22:15-22; Luke 20:20-26)

Mark 12:13-17 - Later (after Jesus had finished the parable of the wicked tenants of the vineyard) they sent some of the Pharisees and some of the Herod-party to trap him in an argument. They came up and said to him, "Master, we know that you are an honest man and that you are not swayed by men's opinion of you. Obviously you

don't care for human approval but teach the way of God with the strictest regard for truth - is it right to pay tribute to Caesar or not: are we to pay or not to pay?"

But Jesus saw through their hypocrisy and said to them, "Why try this trick on me? Bring me a coin and let me look at it."

So they brought one to him.

"Whose face is this?" asked Jesus, "and whose name is in the inscription?"

"Caesar's," they replied. And Jesus said, "Then give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and to God what belongs to God!" - a reply which staggered them.

THE SADDUCEES QUESTION HIM - RISING FROM DEATH (also Matthew 22:23-33; Luke 20:27-40)

Mark 12:18-27 - Then (after the Pharisees' question on taxes) some of the Sadducees (a party which maintains that there is no resurrection) approached him, and put this question to him, "Master, Moses instructed us that if a man's brother dies leaving a widow but no child, then the man should marry the woman and raise children for his brother. Now there were seven brothers, and the first one married and died without leaving issue. Then the second one married the widow and died leaving no issue behind him. The same thing happened with the third, and indeed the whole seven died without leaving any child behind them. Finally the woman died. Now in this 'resurrection', when men will rise up again, whose wife is she going to be - for she was the wife of all seven of them?"

Jesus replied, "Does not this show where you go wrong - and how you fail to understand both the scriptures and the power of God? When people rise from the dead they neither marry nor are they given in marriage; they live like the angels in Heaven. But as for this matter of the dead being raised, have you never read in the book of Moses, in the passage about the bush, how God spoke to him in these words,

'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? (Exodus 3:6,15)

God is not God of the dead but of living men! That is where you make your great mistake!"

A TEACHER OF THE LAW (OR SCRIBE) QUESTIONS HIM - THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT
(also Matthew 22:34-40)

Mark 12:28-34 - Then one of the scribes approached him. He had been listening to the discussion (between the Sadducees and Jesus about resurrection from the dead), and noticing how well Jesus had answered them, he put this question to him, "What are we to consider the greatest commandment of all?"

"The first and most important one is this," Jesus replied -

'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your mind, and with all your strength' (Deuteronomy 6:4,5).

The second is this,

'You shall love your neighbour as yourself' (Leviticus 19:18).

No other commandment is greater than these."

"I am well answered," replied the scribe. "You are absolutely right when you say that there is one God and no other God exists but him; and to love him with the whole of our hearts, the whole of our intelligence and the whole of our energy, and to love our neighbours as ourselves is infinitely more important than all these burnt-offerings and sacrifices."

Then Jesus, noting the thoughtfulness of his reply, said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God!"

After this nobody felt like asking him any more questions.

JESUS IN RETURN, ASKS A QUESTION - ABOUT THE EXPECTED MESSIAH
(also Matthew 22:41-46; Luke 20:41-44)

Mark 12:35-37 - Later (after the debate on the greatest commandment), while Jesus was teaching in the Temple he remarked, "How can the scribes make out that Christ is David's son, for David himself, inspired by the Holy Spirit, said,

'The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool' (Psalm 110:1).

David is himself calling Christ 'Lord' - where do they get the idea that he is his son?"

The vast crowd heard this with great delight.

JESUS CRITICISES THE TEACHERS OF THE LAW (OR SCRIBES) AND THE PHARISEES (also Matthew 23:1-39; Luke 20:45-47)

Mark 12:38-40 - .... and (at the end of his debate with the scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees) Jesus continued in his teaching, "Be on your guard against these scribes who love to walk about in long robes and to be greeted respectfully in public and to have the front seats in the synagogue and the best places at dinner-parties! These are the men who grow fat on widow's property and cover up what they are doing by making lengthy prayers. They are only adding to their own punishment!"

JESUS COMPARES THE RICH MAN'S GIVING WITH THE WIDOW'S OFFERING! (also Luke 21:1-4)

Mark 12:41-44 - Then (after warning the people to be on their guard against the scribes) Jesus sat down opposite the Temple almsbox and watched the people putting their money into it. A great many rich people put in large sums. Then a poor widow came up and dropped in two little coins, worth together about a halfpenny. Jesus called his disciples to his side and said to them, "Believe me, this poor widow has put in more than all the others. For they have all put in what they can easily afford, but she in her poverty who needs so much, has given away everything, her whole living!"

Mark 13:1-37

JESUS DESCRIBES THE END-TIMES AND HIS RETURN
(also Luke 17:20-37; Matthew 24:1-51; Luke 21:5-38)

Mark 13:1-27 - Then as Jesus was leaving the Temple (after his debates with the Pharisees and Sadducees), one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Master, what wonderful stonework, what a size these building are!"

Jesus replied, "You see these great buildings? Not a single stone will be left standing on another; every one will be thrown down!"

Then while he was sitting on the slope of the Mount of Olives facing the Temple, (the apostles) Peter, James, John and Andrew said to him privately, "Tell us, when will these things happen? What sign will there be that all these things are going to be accomplished?"

So Jesus began to tell them: "Be very careful that no one deceives you. Many are going to come in my name and say, 'I am he', and will lead many astray. When you hear of wars and rumours of wars, don't be alarmed. such things are bound to happen, but the end is not yet. Nation will take up arms against nation and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in different places and terrible famines. But this is only the beginnings of 'the pains'. You yourselves must keep your wits about you, for men will hand you over to their councils, and will beat you in their synagogues. You will have to stand in front of rulers and kings for my sake to bear your witness to them - for before the end comes the Gospel must be proclaimed to all nations. But when they are taking you off to trial, do not worry beforehand about what you are going to say - simply say the words you are given when the time comes. For it not really you who will speak, but the Holy Spirit.

Jesus foretells utter misery

"A brother is going to betray his own brother to death, and a father his own child. Children will stand up against their parents and condemn them to death. There will come a time when the whole

world will hate you because you are known as my followers. Yet the man who holds out to the end will be saved.

"But when you see

'the abomination of desolation' (Daniel 9:27; 11:31; 12:11)

standing where it ought not - (let the reader take note of this) - then those who are in Judea must fly to the hills! The man on his house-top must not go down nor go into his house to fetch anything out of it, and the man in the field must not turn back to fetch his coat. Alas for the women who are pregnant at that time, and alas for those with babies at their breasts! Pray God that it may not be winter when that time comes, for there will be such utter misery in those days as had never been from the creation until now - and never will be again. Indeed, if the Lord did not shorten those days, no human beings could survive. But for the sake of the people whom he has chosen he has shortened those days.

He warns against false christs, and commands vigilance

"If anyone tells you at that time, 'Look, here is Christ', or 'Look, there he is', don't believe it! For false christs and false prophets will arise and will perform signs and wonders, to deceive, if it be possible, even the men of God's choice. You must keep your eyes open! I am giving you this warning before it happens.

"But when that misery is past,

'the light of the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give her light; stars will be falling from the sky and the powers of heaven will rock on their foundations' (Isaiah 13:10; 34:4).

Then men shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory. And then shall he send out his angels to summon his chosen together from every quarter, from furthest earth to highest heaven.

BEING PREPARED FOR THE END-TIMES AND THE RETURN OF JESUS: "THE LESSON OF THE FIG-TREE"
(also Matthew 24:32-35; Luke 21:29-33)

Mark 13:28-33 - "Let the fig-tree illustrate this for you: when its branches grow tender and produce leaves, you know that summer is near, at your very doors! I tell you that this generation will not have passed until all these things have come true. Earth and sky will pass away, but what I have told you will never pass away! But no one knows the day or the hour of this happening, not even the angels in Heaven, no, not even the Son - only the Father. Keep your eyes open, keep on the alert, for you do not know when the time will be.

BEING PREPARED FOR THE END-TIMES AND THE RETURN OF JESUS: "THE FAITHFUL SERVANTS AND THE RETURNING MASTER"
(Matthew 24:45-51)

Mark 13:34-37 -"It is as if a man who is travelling abroad had left his house and handed it over to be managed by his servants. He has given each one his work to do and has ordered the doorkeeper to be on the look-out for his return. Just so must you keep a look-out, for you do not know when the master of the house will come - it might be late evening, or midnight, or cock-crow, or early morning - otherwise he might come unexpectedly and find you sound asleep. What I am saying to you I am saying to all; keep on the alert!"

Mark 14:1-72

THE PLOT TO KILL JESUS
(also Matthew 26:3-5; Luke 22:1-2; John 11:45-57)

Mark 14:1-2 - In two days' time (after Jesus had spoken of the end-times and his second coming) the festival of the Passover and of unleavened bread was due. Consequently, the chief priests and the scribes were trying to think of some trick by which they could get Jesus into their power and have him executed. "But it must not be during the festival," they said, "or there will be a riot."

THE ANOINTING OF JESUS AT BETHANY
(also Matthew 26:6-13; John 12:1-8)

In this account, Mary the sister of Martha anoints Jesus. An earlier story in Luke 7:36-50 (included in the parable of "The Two Debtors")

is generally considered a different incident perhaps involving Mary of Magdala, otherwise known as Mary Magdalene:

Mark 14:3-9 - Jesus himself (again after teaching about the end-times) was now in Bethany in the house of Simon the leper. As he was sitting at table, a woman approached him with an alabaster flask of very costly spikenard (or nard) perfume. She broke the neck of the flask and poured the perfume on Jesus' head. Some of those present were highly indignant and muttered, "What is the point of such wicked waste of perfume? It could have been sold for over thirty pounds (traditionally a year's wages) and the money could have been given to the poor." And there was a murmur of resentment against her. But Jesus said, "Let her alone, why must you make her feel uncomfortable? She has done a beautiful thing for me. You have the poor with you always and you can do good to them whenever you like, but you will not always have me. She has done all she could - for she has anointed my body in preparation for burial. I assure you that wherever the Gospel is preached throughout the whole world, this deed of hers will also be recounted, as her memorial to me."

JUDAS ISCARIOT DECIDES TO BETRAY HIM
(also Matthew 26:14-16; Luke 22:3-6)

Mark 14:10-11 - Then (after the anointing of Jesus) Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went off to the chief priests to betray Jesus to them. And when they heard what he had to say, they were delighted and undertook to pay him for it. So he looked out for a convenient opportunity to betray him.

THE LAST SUPPER
(also Matthew 26:17-29; Luke 22:7-30; John 13:1-30; 1 Corinthians 11:23-25)

Mark 14:12-25 - On the first day of unleavened bread (again, as Judas prepares to betray Jesus), the day when the Passover was sacrificed, Jesus' disciples said, "Where do you want us to go and make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?"

Jesus sent off two of them (Peter and John) with these instructions, "Go into the town and you will meet a man carrying a pitcher of water (an unusual sight as only women usually carried water). Follow him and say to the owner of the house to which he goes, 'The Master says, where is the room for me to eat the Passover with my disciples?' And he will show you a large upstairs room all ready with the furnishings that we need. That is the place where you are to make our preparations."

So the disciples set off and went into the town, found everything as he had told them, and prepared for the Passover.

The last supper together: the mysterious bread and wine

Late in the evening he arrived with the twelve. And while they were sitting there, right in the middle of the meal, Jesus remarked, "Believe me, one of you is going to betray me - someone who is now having his supper with me."

This shocked and distressed them and one after another they began to say to him, "Surely, I'm not the one?"

"It is one of the twelve," Jesus told them, "a man who is dipping his hand into the dish with me. It is true that the Son of Man will follow the road foretold by the scriptures, but alas for the man through whom he is betrayed! It would be better for that man if he had never been born."

And while they were still eating Jesus took a loaf, blessed it and broke it and gave it to them with the words, "Take this, it is my body."

Then he took a cup, and after thanking God, he gave it to them, and they drank from it, and he said to them "This is my blood which is shed for many in the new agreement. I tell you truly I will drink no more wine until the day comes when I drink it fresh in the kingdom of God!"

THE LAST NIGHT CONTINUED AND THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE

(also Matthew 26:30-46; Luke 22:31-46; John 13:31-38; 18:1-2)

Mark 14:26-42 - Then (after the Last Supper) they sang a hymn and went out to the Mount of Olives.

"Every one of you will lose your faith in me," Jesus told them, "As the scripture says:

'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered' (Zechariah 13:7).

Yet after I have risen, I shall go before you into Galilee!"

Peter's bold word - and Jesus' reply

Then Peter said to him, "Even if everyone should lose faith, I never will."

Believe me, Peter," returned Jesus, "this very night before the cock crows twice, you will disown me three times."

But Peter protested violently, "Even if it means dying with you, I will never disown you!" And they all made the same protest.

The last desperate prayer in Gethsemane

Then they arrived at a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to the disciples, "Sit down here while I pray."

He took with him Peter, James and John, and began to be horror-stricken and desperately depressed.

"My heart is nearly breaking," he told them. "Stay here and keep watch for me."

Then he walked forward a little way and flung himself on the ground, praying that, if it were possible, he might not have to face the ordeal.

"Dear Father," he said, "all things are possible to you. Please - let me not have to drink this cup! Yet it is not what I want but what you want."

Then he came and found them fast asleep. He spoke to Peter, "Are you asleep, Simon? Couldn't you manage to watch for a single hour? Watch and pray, all of you, that you may not have to face temptation. Your spirit is willing, but human nature is weak."

Then he went away again and prayed in the same words, and once more he came and found them asleep. they could not keep their eyes open and they did not know what to say for themselves. When he came back for the third time, he said "Are you still going to sleep and take your ease? All right - the moment has come: now you are going to see the Son of Man betrayed into the hands of evil men! Get up, let us be going! Look, here comes my betrayer!"

JESUS IS BETRAYED AND ARRESTED
(also Matthew 26:47-56; Luke 22:47-54a; John 18:3-12)

Mark 14:43-52 - And indeed, while the words ("here comes my betrayer!) were still on his lips, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived with a mob armed with swords and staves, sent by the chief priests and scribes and elders. The betrayer had given them a sign; he had said, "The one I kiss will be the man. Get hold of him and you can take him away without any trouble." So he walked straight up to Jesus, cried, "Master!" and kissed him affectionately. And so they got hold of him and held him. Somebody present drew his sword and struck at the High Priest's servant, slashing off his ear. Then Jesus spoke to them "So you've come out with your swords and staves to capture me like a bandit, have you? Day after day I was with you in the Temple, teaching, and you never laid a finger on me. But the scriptures must be fulfilled."

Then all the disciples deserted him and made their escape. There happened to be a young man among Jesus' followers who wore nothing but a linen shirt. They seized him, but he left the shirt in their hands and took to his heels stark naked (traditionally the young John Mark, author of this Gospel who would vividly remember such a small yet personal detail).

After his arrest Jesus appears before three separate authorities:

(1) Annas still a "chief priest", and the Sanhedrin of which Caiaphas is the High Priest;

(2) Pontius Pilate, Roman procurator of Judea and Samaria; and

(3) Herod Antipas, Jewish tetrarch of Galilee and Perea visiting Jerusalem at that time.

Pontius Pilate actually sentences Jesus to death by crucifixion

JESUS IS TRIED BEFORE THE JEWISH AUTHORITIES; PETER BETRAYS HIM
(also Matthew 26:57-27:2; Luke 22:54b-23:1; John 18:13-28)

Mark 14:53-72 - So they (members of the armed crowd) marched Jesus away to the High Priest in whose presence all the chief priests and elders and scribes had assembled. (Peter followed him at a safe distance, right up to the High Priest's courtyard. There he sat in the firelight with the servants, keeping himself warm.) Meanwhile, the chief priests and the whole council were trying to find some evidence against Jesus which would warrant the death penalty. But they failed completely. There were plenty of people ready to give false testimony against him, but their evidence was contradictory. Then some more perjurers stood up and said, "We heard him say, 'I will destroy this Temple that was built by human hands and in three days I will build another made without human aid.'"

But even so their evidence conflicted. So the High Priest himself got up and took the centre of the floor.

"Have you no answer to make?" he asked Jesus. "What about all this evidence against you?"

But Jesus remained silent and offered no reply. Again the High Priest asked him, "Are you Christ, Son of the blessed one?"

And Jesus said, "I am! Yes, you will all see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power, coming in the clouds of heaven."

Then the High Priest tore his robes and cried, "Why do we still need witnesses? You heard the blasphemy; what is your opinion now?"

And their verdict was that he deserved to die. Then some of them began to spit at him. They blindfolded him and then slapped him, saying, "Now prophesy who hit you!"

Even the servants who took him away slapped his face.

Peter, in fear, disowns his master

In the meantime, while Peter was in the courtyard below, one of the High Priest's maids came and saw him warming himself. She looked closely at him, and said, "You were with the Nazarene too - with Jesus!"

But he denied it, saying, "I don't understand. I don't know what you're talking about." And he walked out into the gateway, and a cock crew.

Again the maid who had noticed him began to say to the men standing there, "This man is one of them!"

But he denied it again. A few minutes later the bystanders themselves said to Peter, "You certainly are one of them. Why, you're a Galilean!"

But he started to curse and swear, "I tell you I don't know the man you're talking about!"

Immediately the cock crew for the second time, and back into Peter's mind came the words of Jesus, "Before the cock crows twice, you will disown me three times."

And he broke down and wept.

Mark 15:1-47

JESUS IS TRIED BEFORE THE JEWISH AUTHORITIES - Concluded

Jesus before Pilate

Mark 15:1 The moment daylight came the chief priests called together a meeting of elders, scribes and members of the whole council, bound Jesus and took him off and handed him over to Pilate.

JESUS BEFORE THE ROMAN PONTIUS PILATE; THE SENTENCE
(also Matthew 27:11-26; Luke 23:2-25; John 18:29-19:16a)

Mark 15:2-15 - (Jesus has been taken to Pilate by the chief priests and members of the Sanhedrin .....) Pilate asked him straight out, "Well, you - are you the king of the Jews?"

"Yes, I am," he replied.

The chief priests brought many accusations. So Pilate questioned him again, "Have you nothing to say? Listen to all their accusations!"

But Jesus made no further answer - to Pilate's astonishment.

Now it was Pilate's custom at festival-time to release a prisoner - anyone they asked for. There was in the prison at the time, with some other rioters who had committed murder in a recent outbreak, a man called Barabbas. The crowd surged forward and began to demand that Pilate should do what he usually did for them. So he spoke to them, "Do you want me to set free the king of the Jews for you?"

For he knew perfectly well that the chief priests had handed Jesus over to him through sheer malice. But the chief priests worked upon the crowd to get them to demand Barabbas' release instead. So Pilate addressed them once more, "Then what am I to do with the man whom you call the king of the Jews?"

They shouted back, "Crucify him!"

But Pilate replied, "Why, what crime has he committed?"

But their voices rose to a roar, "Crucify him!"

And as Pilate wanted to satisfy the crowd, he set Barabbas free for them, and after having Jesus flogged handed him over to be crucified.

JESUS IS ILL-TREATED AND TORTURED
(also Matthew 27:27-31; Luke 22:63-65; John 19:1-3)

Mark 15:16-20 - Then the (Roman) soldiers marched him away inside the courtyard of the governor's residence and called their whole company together. They dressed Jesus in a purple robe, and twisting some thorn twigs into a crown, they put it on his head. Then they began to greet him, "Hail, your majesty - king of the Jews!"

They hit him on the head with a stick and spat at him, and then bowed low before him on bended knee. And when they had finished their fun with him, they took off the purple cloak and dressed him again in his own clothes. Then they led him outside to crucify him.

HIS CRUCIFIXION AND DEATH
(also Matthew 27:32-50; Luke 23:26-46; John 19:16b-30)

Mark 15:21-37 - They compelled Simon, a native of Cyrene in Africa (the father of Alexander and Rufus), who was on his way from the fields at the time, to carry Jesus' cross.

Alexander and Rufus - Both men possibly became Christians and friends of Mark. Some 25 years later, a Rufus is included in the apostle Paul's greetings at the end of his Letter to the Romans. Only a few years later, Mark was probably writing his Gospel in Rome where this same Rufus could still have been living -

The crucifixion

They took him to a place called Golgotha (which means Skull Hill) and they offered him some drugged wine, but he would not take it. Then they crucified him, and shared out his garments, drawing lots to see what each of them would get. It was about nine o'clock in the morning when they nailed him to the cross. Over his head the placard of his crime read, "THE KING OF THE JEWS." They also crucified two bandits at the same time, one on each side of him. And the passers-by jeered at him, shaking their heads in mockery, saying, "Hi, you! You could destroy the Temple and build it up again in three days, why not come down from the cross and save yourself?"

The chief priests also made fun of him among themselves and the scribes, and said, "He saved others, he cannot save himself. If only this Christ, the king of Israel, would come down now from the cross, we should see it and believe!"

And even the men who were crucified with him hurled abuse at him.

At midday darkness spread over the whole countryside and lasted until three o'clock in the afternoon, and at three o'clock Jesus cried

out in a loud voice,

'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' (Psalm 22:1)

Some of the bystanders heard these words which Jesus spoke in Aramaic - Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?, and said, "Listen, he's calling for Elijah!"

One man ran off and soaked a sponge in vinegar, put it on a stick, and held it up for Jesus to drink, calling out, "Let him alone! Let's see if Elijah will come and take him down!"

But Jesus let out a great cry, and died.

SUPERNATURAL EVENTS AS JESUS DIES
(also Matthew 27:51-53; Luke 23:44-45)

Mark 15:38 - The curtain of the Temple sanctuary was split in two from top to the bottom.

SOME OF THE PEOPLE PRESENT
(also Matthew 27:54-56; Luke 23:47-49; John 19:25-26a)

- The identity of all the women has not been completely solved:

Mark 15:39-41 - And when the centurion who stood in front of Jesus saw how he died, he said, "This man was certainly a son of God!"

There were some women there looking on from a distance, among them (using the number order from Matthew above):

(1) Mary of Magdala,

(2) Mary the mother of the younger James and Joses (or Joseph), and

(3) Salome (probably the wife of Zebedee).

These were the women who used to follow Jesus as he went about in Galilee and look after him. And there were many other women there who had come up to Jerusalem with them.

HIS BURIAL
(also Matthew 27:57-66; Luke 23:50-56; John 19:31-42)

Mark 15:42-47 - When the evening came, because it was the day of preparation, that is the day before the Sabbath, Joseph from Arimathaea, a distinguished member of the council, who himself prepared to accept the kingdom of God, went boldly into Pilate's presence and asked for the body of Jesus. Pilate was surprised that he should be dead already and he sent for the centurion and asked whether he had been dead long. On hearing the centurion's report, he gave Joseph the body of Jesus. So Joseph brought a linen winding-sheet, took Jesus down and wrapped him in it, and then put him in a tomb which had been hewn out of the solid rock, rolling a stone over the entrance to it. Mary of Magdala and Mary the mother of Joses (or Joseph, brother of the apostle James the Younger) were looking on and saw where he was laid.

The life and ministry of Jesus on earth is over - tortured to death on a Roman cross and consigned to the grave. Everything he did, no matter how wonderful or wise - his miracles, his parables, the Sermon on the Mount - mark him as a superb teacher, a miracle-worker, a man of unsurpassed personality, but still a man. And sometimes,almost a madman from his seemingly more outrageous statements and claims.

In evidence of failure, his followers are desolate, mostly scattered and without hope. The few that remain prepare to give him a proper burial. There seems nothing left to suggest the birth, 2,000 years ago of a life and world-changing religion that claims to be unique, to come directly from the creator God of the universe, and which is offered freely to all the people of Earth and perhaps beyond.

THE NEW BEGINNING Spring cAD30

Mark 16:1-20

THE EMPTY TOMB
(also Matthew 28:1-8,11-15; Luke 24:1-12; John 20:1-13)

Mark 16:1-8 - When the Sabbath was over, Mary of Magdala, Mary the mother of James (the Younger), and Salome (mother of the apostles James and John) bought spices so that they could go and anoint him. And very early in the morning on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb, just as the sun was rising.

"Who is going to roll the stone back from the doorway of the tomb?" they asked each other.

And then as they looked closer, they saw that the stone, which was a very large one, had been rolled back. So they went into the tomb and saw a young man in a white robe sitting on the right-hand side, and they were simply astonished. But he said to them, "There is no need to be astonished. He has risen; he is not here. Look, here is the place where they laid him. But now go and tell his disciples, and Peter, that he will be in Galilee before you. You will see him there just as he told you."

And they got out of the tomb and ran away from it. They were trembling with excitement. They did not dare to breathe a word to anyone.

- Mark's Gospel ends here in most of the early manuscripts.

THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS AND HIS APPEARANCES TO HIS DISCIPLES

(also Matthew 28:9-10,16-17; Luke 24:13-44; John 20:14-21:14; Acts 1:1-5; 1 Corinthians 15:3-8)

Mark 16:9-14 - (The Gospel now continues with possibly an ancient addition to Mark's account .....) When Jesus rose early on that first day of the week (the Sunday), he appeared first of all to Mary of Magdala, from whom he had driven out seven evil spirits. And she went and reported this to his sorrowing and weeping followers. They heard her say that he was alive and that she had seen him, but they did not believe it.

Later, he appeared in a different form to two of them (disciples, but not apostles of Jesus) who were out walking, as they were on their way to the country (on the road to Emmaus). These two came back and told the others, but they did not believe them either. Still later he

appeared to the eleven themselves as they were sitting at table and reproached them for their lack of faith, and reluctance to believe those who had seen him after he had risen.

HIS COMMISSION TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO THE WORLD
(also Matthew 28:18-20; Luke 24:45-50; John 21:15-23; Acts 1:6-8)

Mark 16:15-18 - Then (after his appearances to Mary of Magdala, the two disciples on the Emmaus Road, and the eleven apostles, and continuing the ancient addition to Mark ....) he said to them, "You must go out to the whole world and proclaim the Gospel to every creature. He who believes it and is baptised will be saved, but he who disbelieves it will be condemned. These signs will follow those who do believe: they will drive out evil spirits in my name; they will speak with new tongues; they will pick up snakes, and if they drink anything poisonous it will do them no harm; they will lay their hands upon the sick and they will recover."

JESUS ASCENDS TO HEAVEN
(also Luke 24:51-53; Acts 1:9-11)

Mark 16:19-20 - After these words to them (the commission to preach the Gospel to the world, Mark's Gospel concludes .....), the Lord Jesus was taken up into Heaven and was enthroned at the right hand of God. They went out and preached everywhere. The Lord worked with them, confirming their message by the signs that followed.

In a short time, the disciples, totally demoralised by the death of Jesus are transformed. They are soon taking the Gospel of Jesus Christ fearlessly to much of the known world and often in the face of every form of opposition, persecution, and soon, brutality, torture and death.

The Acts of the Apostles and the Letters of the New Testament reveal part of this early story that continues to the present day.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO LUKE

With people, places, definitions ...

Writer: Luke, a Gentile and the "beloved physician", a friend and travelling companion of the apostle Paul;

Date: Traditionally the third Gospel, written in c AD62, before the Acts of the Apostles which finishes around the time of Paul's first Roman captivity. Some commentators propose c AD58-60 in Caesarea when Paul was in prison. Perhaps some of the material for the Gospel and for Acts was collected at this time;

Where written: Possibly Achaia in southern Greece, or drafted in Caesarea;

Readers: The unknown Theophilus, but more generally aimed at the Greek world and Gentile Christians. Jewish customs are explained, and sometimes Greek words substituted for the Hebrew;

Why written: To give an orderly account of the life of Jesus using eye-witness accounts.

According to Some Modern Scholarship: Written by Luke as late as c AD80-85 using the Gospel of Mark, and other collections amongst his main sources.

THE BEGINNINGS - FROM THE BIRTH OF JESUS TO THE START OF HIS MINISTRY c 6BC-AD27

Luke 1:1-80

PROLOGUE
(also Mark 1:1, John 1:1-5)

Luke 1:1-4 - Dear Theophilus ....

Theophilus - "Beloved of God". A senior Roman official who was already a Christian. Some commentators believe it is a symbolic name for the whole Gentile Church -

.... Many people have already written an account of the events which have happened among us, basing their work on the evidence of those whom we know were eye-witnesses as well as teachers of the message. I have therefore decided, since I have traced the course of these happenings carefully from the beginning, to set them down for you myself in their proper order, so that you may have reliable information about the matters in which you have already had instruction.

THE COMING BIRTH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST IS ANNOUNCED

Luke 1:5-25 - The story begins in the days when Herod (the Great) was king of Judea with a priest called Zacharias (who belonged to the Abijah section of the priesthood), whose wife Elisabeth was, like him, a descendant of Aaron (Israel's first high priest, sometimes referred to as Moses' brother). They were both truly religious people, blamelessly observing all God's commandments and requirements. They were childless through Elisabeth's infertility, and both of them were getting on in years. One day, while Zacharias was performing his priestly functions (it was the turn of his division to be on duty - in the Jerusalem Temple), it fell to him to go into the sanctuary and burn the incense. The crowded congregation outside was praying at the actual time of the incense-burning, when an angel of the Lord appeared on the right side of the incense-altar. When Zacharias saw him, he was terribly agitated and a sense of awe swept over him. But the angel spoke to him,

"Do not be afraid, Zacharias; your prayers have been heard. Elisabeth your wife will bear you a son, and you are to call him John. ...

John (Hebrew Johannes) - Five John's appear in the New Testament:

In the Gospels:

This John, later the Baptist, and the baptiser of Jesus;

The apostle John, son of Zebedee who is traditionally the same man as the disciple "whom Jesus loved" in John's Gospel; the author of John's Gospel; the writer of the First Letter of John; the Elder, writer of the Second and Third Letters of John; and St. John the Divine, author of the Book of Revelations;

Jonah or John, father of the apostle Peter.

In the Acts of the Apostles:

John, a member of the Jewish council or Sanhedrin; and

John Mark, author of Mark's Gospel, first introduced by name in Acts 12 -

....This (the birth of John) will be joy and delight to you and many more will be glad because he is born. He will be one of God's great men; he will touch neither wine nor strong drink and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit from the moment of his birth. He will turn many of Israel's children to the Lord their God. He will go out before God in the spirit and power of Elijah (the great prophet of the divided kingdom of Israel c 850BC) - to reconcile fathers and children, and bring back the disobedient to the wisdom of good men - and he will make a people fully ready for their Lord."

But Zacharias replied to the angel, "How can I know that this is true? I am an old man myself and my wife is getting on in years ..."

"I am Gabriel," the angel answered. "I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and tell you this good news. Because you do not believe what I have said, you shall live in silence, and you shall be unable to speak a word until the day that it happens. But be sure that everything that I have told you will come true at the proper time."

Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zacharias, wondering why he stayed so long in the sanctuary. But when he came out and was unable to speak a word to them - for although he kept making signs, not a sound came from his lips - they realised that he had seen a vision in the Temple. Later, when his days of duty were over, he went

back home, and soon afterwards his wife Elisabeth became pregnant and kept herself secluded for five months.

"How good the Lord is to me," she would say, "now that he has taken away the shame that I have suffered."

THE COMING BIRTH OF JESUS IS ANNOUNCED (also Matthew 1:18-24a)

Luke 1:26-56 - Then, six months after Zacharias' vision (in which he was told of the coming birth of his son John), the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a Galilean town, Nazareth by name, to a young woman who was engaged to a man called Joseph (a descendant of David). The girl's name was Mary. The angel entered her room and said,

"Greetings to you, Mary. O favoured one! - the Lord be with you!" (the "Ave Maria" taken from Luke 1:28b. A more traditional rendering is "Rejoice highly favoured one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women")

Mary was deeply perturbed at these words and wondered what such a greeting could possibly mean. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; God loves you dearly. You are going to be the mother of a son, and you will call him Jesus. He will be great and will be known as the Son of the most high. The Lord God will give him the throne of his forefather, David, and he will be king over the people of Jacob for ever. His reign shall never end." (Jacob, c 1,700BC, the grandson of Abraham, was later known as Israel, ancestor of the twelve tribes of Israel).

Then Mary spoke to the angel, "How can this be," she said, "I am not married!"

But the angel made this reply to her - "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, the power of the most high will overshadow you. Your child will therefore be called holy - the Son of God. Your cousin Elisabeth has also conceived a son, old as she is. Indeed, this is the sixth month for her, a woman who was called barren. For no promise of God can fail to be fulfilled."

"I belong to the Lord, body and soul," replied Mary, "let it happen as you say." And at this the angel left her.

With little delay Mary got ready and hurried off to the hillside town in Judea where Zacharias and Elisabeth lived. She went into their house and greeted her cousin. When Elisabeth heard her greeting, the unborn child stirred inside her and she herself was filled with the Holy Spirit, and cried out, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is your child! What an honour it is to have the mother of my Lord come to see me! Why, as soon as your greeting reached my ears, the child within me jumped for joy! Oh, how happy is the woman who believes in God, for he does make his promises to her come true."

Then Mary said,

"My heart is overflowing with praise of my Lord, my soul is full of joy in God my Saviour. For he has deigned to notice me, his humble servant and, after this, all the people who ever shall be will call me the happiest of women! The one who can do all things has done great things for me - oh, holy is his Name! Truly, his mercy rests on those who fear him in every generation. He has shown the strength of his arm, he has swept away the high and mighty. He has set kings down from their thrones and lifted up the humble. He has satisfied the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away with empty hands. Yes, he has helped Israel, his child: he has remembered the mercy that he promised to our forefathers, to Abraham and his sons for evermore!" (Luke 1:46b-55, a canticle, or song using Biblical text, known as "The Magnificat" in Christian prayer-books. The full title in Latin is "Magnificat anima mea Dominum" - "My soul magnifies the Lord".)

So Mary stayed with Elisabeth about three months, and then went back to her own home.

BIRTH AND CHILDHOOD OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

Luke 1:57-80 - Then came the time for Elisabeth's child to be born, and she gave birth to a son. Her neighbours and relations heard of the great mercy the Lord had shown her and shared her joy.

When the eighth day came, they were going to circumcise the child and call him Zacharias, after his father, but his mother said, "Oh, no! He must be called John."

Circumcision - From the Latin "to cut around". Cutting the male foreskin was widely practised throughout the Middle East to mark the transition from child to man. With the Jews, it was performed when boys were only eight days old as an outward sign they belonged to God and had become members of his chosen people. Older converts were circumcised no matter what their age. The custom was introduced in Abraham's time - Genesis 17:10 - as a sign of God's covenant, or agreement with Abraham, that he would be the "father of many nations" -

"But none of your relations is called John," they replied. And they made signs to his father to see what name he wanted the child to have. He beckoned for a writing-tablet and wrote the words, "His name is John", which greatly surprised everybody. Then his power of speech suddenly came back, and his first words were to thank God. The neighbours were awe-struck at this, and all these incidents were reported in the hill-country of Judea. People turned the whole matter over in their hearts, and said, "What is this child's future going to be?" For the Lord's blessing was plainly upon him.

Then Zacharias, his father, filled with the Holy Spirit and speaking like a prophet, said,

"Blessings on the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has turned his face towards his people and has set them free! And he has raised up for us a standard of salvation in his servant David's house! Long, long ago, through the words of his holy prophets, he promised to do this for us, so that we should be safe from our enemies and secure from all who hate us. So does he continue the mercy he showed to our forefathers. So does he remember the holy agreement he made with them and the oath which he swore to our father Abraham, to make us this gift: that we should be saved from the hands of our enemies, and in his presence should serve him unafraid in holiness and righteousness all our lives.

"And you (John), little child, will be called the prophet of the most high, for you will go before the Lord to prepare the way for his coming. It will be for you to give his people knowledge of their salvation through the forgiveness of their sins. Because the heart of our God is full of mercy towards us, the first light of Heaven shall come to visit us - to shine on those who lie in darkness and under the shadow of death, and to guide our feet into the path of peace." (Luke 1:68-79, a canticle known as "The Benedictus" in Christian prayer-books. The full title is "Benedictus Dominus Deus Israel" - "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel".)

The little child grew up and became strong in spirit. He lived in lonely places until the day came for him to show himself to Israel.

Luke 2:1-52

BIRTH OF JESUS
(also Matthew 1:24b-25)

Luke 2:1-38 - At that time (of the birth of John the Baptist) a proclamation was made by Caesar Augustus (Roman emperor 27BC-AD14) that all the inhabited world should be registered. This was the first census, undertaken while Cyrenius was governor of Syria ....

Cyrenius (or Quirinius) was governor of Syria when the first Roman census of Judea took place. But this was in AD6 when Judea was incorporated into Syria after the removal of Archelaus the Jewish ethnarch. As Luke is generally a careful historian, various reasons for this discrepancy have been proposed. One is that Cyrenius held another office in Syria at this earlier date, and that Herod the Great (who died 4BC) had been ordered by his Roman masters to hold a census in Judea -

.... and everybody went to the town of his birth to be registered. Joseph went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to David's town, Bethlehem, in Judea, because he was a direct descendant of (King) David, to be registered with his future wife, Mary, now in the later stages of her pregnancy. So it happened that it was while they

were there in Bethlehem that she came to the end of her time. She gave birth to her first child, a son. And as there was no place for them inside the inn, she wrapped him up and laid him in a manger.

A vision comes to shepherds on the hill-side

There were some shepherds living in the same part of the country, keeping guard throughout the night over their flocks in the open fields. Suddenly an angel of the Lord stood by their side, the splendour of the Lord blazed around them, and they were terror-stricken. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid! Listen, I bring you glorious news of great joy which is for all the people. This very day, in David's town, a Saviour has been born for you. He is Christ, the Lord. Let this prove it to you: you will find a baby, wrapped up and lying in a manger."

And in a flash there appeared with the angel a vast host of the armies of Heaven, praising God, saying,

"Glory to God in the highest Heaven! Peace upon earth among men of goodwill!" (Luke 2:14, a hymn of praise in prayer-books, known as "The Gloria in Excelsis Deo" - "Glory be to God in the Highest")

When the angels left them and went back into Heaven, the shepherds said to each other, "Now let us go straight to Bethlehem and see this thing which the Lord has made known to us."

So they came as fast as they could and they found Mary and Joseph - and the baby lying in the manger. And when they had seen this sight, they told everybody what had been said to them about the little child. And those who heard them were amazed at what the shepherds said. But Mary treasured all these things and turned them over in her mind. The shepherds went back to work, glorifying and praising God for everything that they had heard and seen, which had happened just as they had been told.

Mary and Joseph bring their newly-born son to the Temple

At the end of the eight days, the time came for circumcising the child and he was called Jesus, the name given to him by the angel before his conception.

When the "purification" time (required for a woman after childbirth as ...), stipulated by the Law of Moses (Leviticus 12), was completed, they brought Jesus to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord. This was to fulfil a requirement of the Law -

'Every male who opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord' (Exodus 13:2,12,15)

They also offered the sacrifice prescribed by the Law -

'A pair of turtle doves, or two young pigeons' (Leviticus 12:8)

In Jerusalem was a man by the name of Simeon .....

Simeon - Three Simeons appear in the New Testament:

(1) This Simeon who blesses the infant Jesus;

(2) The apostle Simon Peter is sometimes called Simeon; and

(3) Simeon surnamed Niger, a leader of the church in Syrian Antioch 50 years later, when the apostle Paul sets out on his First Missionary Journey -

.... He (Simeon) was an upright man, devoted to the service of God, living in expectation of the "salvation of Israel". His heart was open to the Holy Spirit, and it had been revealed to him that he would not die before he saw the Lord's Christ. He had been led by the Spirit to go into the Temple, and when Jesus' parents brought the child in to have done to him what the Law required, he took him up in his arms, blessed God, and said -

"At last, Lord, you can dismiss your servant in peace, as you promised! For with my own eyes I have seen your salvation which you have made ready for every people - a light to show truth to the Gentiles and bring glory to your people Israel." (Luke 2:29-32, a canticle known as the "Nunc Dimittis" - "now let depart")

Gentiles - Latin for "family", "nation", "clan". A Jewish term for all non-Jews -

The child's father and mother were still amazed at what was said about him, when Simeon gave them his blessing. He said to Mary, the child's mother, "This child is destined to make many fall and

many rise in Israel and to set up a standard which many will attack - for he will expose the secret thoughts of many hearts. And for you ... your very soul will be pierced by a sword."

There was also present, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel of the tribe of Asher (one of the original twelve tribes of Israel), who was a prophetess. She was a very old woman, having had seven years' married life and was now a widow of eighty-four. She spent her whole life in the Temple and worshipped God night and day with fastings and prayers. She came up at this very moment, praised God and spoke about Jesus to all those in Jerusalem who were expecting redemption.

INFANCY AND CHILDHOOD OF JESUS
(also Matthew 2:1-23)

Luke 2:39-52 - When they (Mary and Joseph) had completed all the requirements of the Law of the Lord (in the Temple at Jerusalem), they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. The child grew up and became strong and full of wisdom. And God's blessing was upon him.

Twelve years later: the boy Jesus goes with his parents to Jerusalem

Every year at the Passover festival ....

Passover - To pass over without touching. The Jewish Spring festival commemorating the Exodus, or escape of the Israelites under Moses from Egyptian slavery -

.... Jesus' parents used to go to Jerusalem. When he was twelve years old they went up to the city as usual for the festival. When it was over they started back home, but the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, without his parents' knowledge. They went a day's journey assuming that he was somewhere in their company, and then they began to look for him among their relations and acquaintances. They failed to find him, however, and turned back to the city, looking for him as they went. Three days later, they found him - in the Temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. All those who heard him were astonished at his powers of comprehension and at the answers that he gave.

When Joseph and Mary saw him, they could hardly believe their eyes, and his mother said to him, "Why have you treated us like this, my son? Here have your father and I been very worried, looking for you everywhere!"

And Jesus replied, "But why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"

But they did not understand his reply. Then he went home with them to Nazareth and was obedient to them. And his mother treasured all these things in her heart. And as Jesus continued to grow in body and mind, he grew also in the love of God and of those who knew him.

Luke 3:1-38

APPEARANCE OF JOHN THE BAPTIST
(also Matthew 3:1-12; Mark 1:2-8; John 1:6-28)

Luke 3:1-20 - In the fifteenth year of the reign of the Emperor Tiberius ....

Emperor's of Rome:

27BC-AD14 - Augustus, during the birth and childhood of Jesus;

AD14-37 - Tiberius, during the ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus;

AD37-41 - Caligula, in the early days when the Church existed mainly in Judea;

AD41-54 - Claudius, at the time of the apostle Paul's First and Second Missionary Journeys;

AD54-68 - Nero, during Paul's Third Journey, his arrest and voyage to Rome. Nero was also responsible for the first Roman persecution of Christians, including the deaths of the apostle's Peter and Paul -

.... (a year when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea ....

Governor's of Judea - Roman "procurators" ruled the territories of Samaria, Judea and Idumea, except for the few occasions when Rome appointed members of the Herod family:

4BC-AD6 - Herod Archelaus, deposed in AD6, when Judea and Samaria were annexed to Roman Syria;

AD6-26 - a number of Roman procurators;

c AD26-36 - Pontius Pilate, fifth Roman procurator, during the ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus;

AD36-41 - Roman procurators;

AD41-44 - Herod Agrippa I;

AD44-52 - Roman procurators;

c AD53-60 - Antonius Felix, Roman procurator during the arrest of Paul in Jerusalem and his imprisonment in Caesarea;

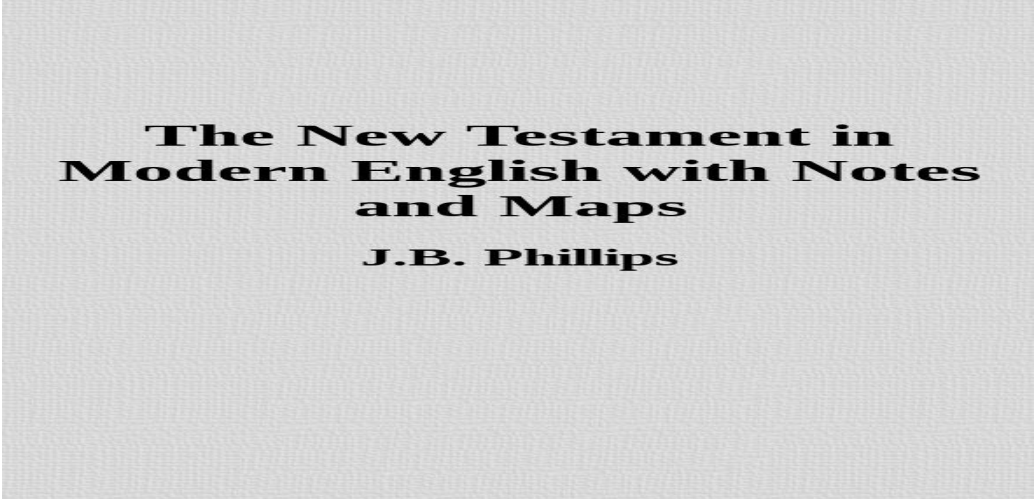
c AD60-62 - Porcius Festus, Roman procurator. Soon after his appointment he held the trial of Paul in Caesarea, during which Paul "appealed to Caesar" and was sent to Rome to stand trial -

.... Herod (Antipas) tetrarch of Galilee, Philip, his brother, tetrarch of the territory of Iturea and Trachonitis ....

The Herod Family (figure 1) - Four generations of the Herod family - the "Herod" dynasty, ruled various parts of Palestine under Roman control. They played important parts in the life and death of Jesus, as well as during the growth of the early Church. Most of the information about them comes from the Jewish historian Josephus:

Figure 1 - Members of the Herod Family

Key: Not all the family members shown are named in the New Testament



FIRST GENERATION

Herod the Great, "king of the Jews" 37-4BC. Ruler of Samaria and Judea, Galilee and Perea, Iturea and Trachonitis. He had many wives and children, some of whom he murdered in his later years. It was this Herod the wise men visited when searching for the new-born Jesus;

SECOND GENERATION

Includes five of the sons of Herod the Great by four of his ten wives:

Aristobulus, mother Mariamne I, who was murdered by his father in 7BC. His son, Agrippa I later ruled the same territories as Herod the Great. Aristobulus' daughter was Herodias;

Philip, mother Mariamne II, a private citizen who married his niece Herodias. Their daughter was Salome;

Archelaus, mother Malthace, ethnarch of Samaria and Judea, 4BC-AD6. He was deposed partly because of his brutality. The territories reverted to the rule of Roman procurators until AD41;

Herod Antipas, mother Malthace, tetrarch of Galilee and Perea 4BC-AD39. His first wife was the daughter of King Aretas of Nabatea. It was this Aretas who ruled Damascus at the time the apostle Paul escaped in a basket (2 Corinthians 11:32).

Antipas later married his niece Herodias after she left his half-brother Philip and taken her daughter Salome with her. It was criticism of this marriage that led Antipas to arrest John the Baptist. In c AD30 Herod Antipas took part in the trial of Jesus;

Philip the tetrarch, mother Cleopatra of Jerusalem, tetrarch of Iturea and Trachonitis 4BC-AD34. He married his great niece Salome;

THIRD GENERATION

The children of Aristobulus included:

Herodias, originally married to her uncle Philip, then married uncle Herod Antipas. It was her daughter Salome who asked Antipas for the head of John the Baptist, c AD29;

Herod Agrippa I, king of the Jews, AD37-44. By AD41 he ruled the same territories as his grandfather, Herod the Great. Agrippa I had the apostle James, son of Zebedee executed, and arrested the apostle Peter;

FOURTH GENERATION

The children of Herod Agrippa I:

Herod Agrippa II was too young to succeed his dead father in AD44, and instead made king of Chalcis in AD50. In AD53 he exchanged this small territory for parts of Galilee and Perea, and Iturea and Trachonitis. He was present at the trial of Paul in Caesarea, c AD60. Siding with the Romans, he survived the Jewish war and died in Rome, c AD100, the last of the Herods;

Bernice - she and her brother Agrippa II had a close, possibly incestuous relationship;

Drusilla married Felix, procurator of Jude Both she and Bernice were present at Paul's trial -

.... and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene ....

Lysanias - Lysanias was ruler of Abilene at this time. In AD53 his territory was handed over to Agrippa II -

.... while Annas and Caiaphas were the High Priests) ....

High Priest - "Priest" from the Greek "presbyter" for an "elder". The head of the Jewish religious, and in earlier times, the civil nation, president of the Sanhedrin or council, and based in the Jerusalem Temple. They were usually appointed from the aristocratic Sadducees by the ruling Herod family, and from AD6-41 directly by the Romans. They included:

AD6-15 - Annas, who was actually deposed in AD15, but continued to rule indirectly through five of his sons and one of his son-in-laws for many years;

AD15-18 - A number of sons of Annas;

AD18-37 - Caiaphas, son-in-law of Annas. He took part in the trial of Jesus, in the questioning of Peter and the apostles after Pentecost, and probably prepared letters allowing Saul (later the apostle Paul) to persecute the Christians in Damascus. Even though Caiaphas had been in his position for many years, Annas exerted such influence he was still considered a "High Priest". Caiaphas was succeeded by another of Annas' sons;

AD37-47 - Various high priests;

AD47-59 - Ananias, the high priest who took part in the trials of Paul after his arrest in Jerusalem. Ananias was later killed in the Jewish War by Jewish Zealots -

.... the word of God came to John, the son of Zacharias, while he was in the desert. He went into the whole country round about the Jordan proclaiming baptism as a mark of a complete change of heart and of the forgiveness of sins, as the book of the prophet Isaiah says -

'The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill brought low; and the crooked places shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God' (Isaiah 40:3-5).

So John used to say to the crowds who came out to be baptised by him, "Who warned you, you serpent's brood, to escape from the wrath to come? See that you do something to show that your hearts are really changed! Don't start thinking that you can say to yourselves, 'We are Abraham's children', for I tell you that God could produce children of Abraham out of these stones! The axe already lies at the root of the tree, and the tree that fails to produce good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."

Then the crowds would ask him, "Then what shall we do?"

And his answer was, "The man who has two shirts must share with the man who has none, and the man who has food must do the same."

Some of the tax-collectors also came to him to be baptised and they asked him, "Master, what are we to do?"

"You must not demand more than you are entitled to," he replied.

And the soldiers asked him, "And what are we to do?"

"Don't bully people, don't bring false charges, and be content with your pay," he replied.

The people were in a great state of expectation and were inwardly discussing whether John could possibly be Christ. But John answered them all in these words, "It is true that I baptise you with water, but the one who follows me is stronger than I am - indeed I am not fit to undo his shoe-laces - he will baptise you with the fire of the Holy Spirit. He will come all ready to separate the wheat from the chaff, and to clear the rubbish from his threshing-floor. The wheat he will gather into his barn and the chaff he will burn with a fire that cannot be put out."

These and many other things John said to the people as he exhorted them and announced the good news. But the tetrarch Herod (Antipas of Galilee and Perea), who had been condemned by John in the affair of Herodias, his brother's wife, as well as for the other evil things that he had done, crowned his misdeeds by putting John in prison.

BAPTISM OF JESUS
(also Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; John 1:29-34)

Luke 3:21-23a - When all the people had been baptised (by John the Baptist), and Jesus was praying after his own baptism, Heaven opened and the Holy Spirit came down upon him in the bodily form of a dove. Then there came a voice from Heaven, saying, "You are my dearly-loved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

Jesus himself was about thirty years old at this time when he began his work

AN ACCOUNT OF THE ANCESTRY OF JESUS
(also Matthew 1:1-17)

Genealogy of Jesus - His two lines of ancestry differ considerably in part, although there are also important similarities. Thus both Matthew and Luke record the descent of Jesus from the patriarch Abraham through King David. Luke then goes further back into Bible history to show that Jesus was a "son of Adam".

Many and varied reasons have been given for the differences in recorded ancestry after King David, none of which are wholly satisfactory. But as the differences are so obvious, and Luke is generally regarded as reliable, the two genealogies have been recorded by the two Gospel writers for no doubt very good reasons. These just happen to escape modern analysis. However it is helpful to know that father can mean "ancestor of", and son, "descended from".

There are many points of note, but one of the most interesting concerns the few women listed - just four. All are Gentile, and not one a model of Jewish virtue:

Tamar - probably a Canaanite, an adulterous and scheming daughter-in-law of Judah;

Rahab - a Canaanite and a prostitute of Jericho who helped the Hebrew spies;

Ruth - from Moab, who schemed more subtly than Tamar, and married Boaz; and

Bathsheba - possibly a Hittite, who committed adultery with King David. He then had her husband Uriah, killed in battle.

Much information can be found in the Old Testament on many of the men, and the women listed in the genealogies. Chapter and verse references are given in the following text:

Luke 3:23b-38 - Luke's genealogy is traced **Down** through King David's son Nathan all the way to Adam, the first man, to emphasise both Jesus' royal descent and his descent from God:

People assumed that ....

Jesus to King David:

.... Jesus was the son of
Joseph (the carpenter), who was the son of
Heli, who was the son of
Matthat, who was the son of
Levi, who was the son of
Melchi, who was the son of
Jannai, who was the son of
Joseph, who was the son of
Mattathias, who was the son of
Amos, who was the son of
Nahum, who was the son of
Esli, who was the son of
Naggai, who was the son of
Maath, who was the son of
Mattathias, who was the son of
Semein, who was the son of
Josech, who was the son of
Joda, who was the son of
Joanan, who was the son of
Rhesa, who was the son of
Zerubbabel, who was the son of (see Matthew's genealogy in reverse)
Shealtiel, who was the son of (see Matthew's genealogy in reverse)
Neri, who was the son of

Melch, who was the son of
Addi, who was the son of
Cosam, who was the son of
Elmadam, who was the son of
Er, who was the son of
Jesus, who was the son of
Eliezer, who was the son of
Jorim, who was the son of
Matthat, who was the son of
Levi, who was the son of
Symeon, who was the son of
Judas, who was the son of
Joseph, who was the son of
Jonam, who was the son of
Eliakim, who was the son of
Melea, who was the son of
Menna, who was the son of
Mattatha, who was the son of
Nathan (brother of Solomon - 2 Samuel 5:14, and both sons of Bathsheba - 1 Chronicles 3:5), who was the son of ....

David to Abraham (Matthew's genealogy in reverse):

.... David, who was the son of
Jesse, who was the son of
Obed, who was the son of
Boaz, who was the son of
Salmon, who was the son of
Nahshon, who was the son of
Amminadab, who was the son of
Arni (or Ram in some manuscripts), who was the son of
Hezron, who was the son of
Perez, who was the son of
Judah, who was the son of
Jacob, who was the son of
Isaac, who was the son of
Abraham, who was the son of ....

Terah to Shem (Genesis 11:10-32 in reverse):

.... Terah, who was the son of
Nahor, who was the son of
Serug, who was the son of
Reu, who was the son of
Peleg, who was the son of
Eber, who was the son of
Shelah, who was the son of
Cainan (who only appears in the Greek Septuagint Old Testament, and not in the original Hebrew Bible), who was the son of
Arphaxad, who was the son of
Shem, who was the son of ....

Noah to Adam (Genesis 5 in reverse):

.... Noah, who was the son of
Lamech, who was the son of
Methuselah, who was the son of
Enoch, who was the son of
Jared, who was the son of
Mahalaleel, who was the son of
Cainan (or Kenan), who was the son of
Enos (or Enosh), who was the son of
Seth, who was the son of
Adam, who was the son of
God.

Luke 4:1-44

JESUS' TEMPTATION BY THE DEVIL
(also Matthew 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-13)

Luke 4:1-13 - Jesus returned from the Jordan (after his baptism) full of the Holy Spirit and he was led by the Spirit to spend forty days in the desert, where he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during that time and afterwards he felt very hungry.

"If you really are the Son of God," the devil said to him, "tell this stone to turn into a loaf."

Jesus answered, "The scripture says,

'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God' (Deuteronomy 8:3)."

Then the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of mankind in a sudden vision, and said to him, "I will give you all this power and magnificence, for it belongs to me and I can give it to anyone I please. It shall all be yours if you will fall down and worship me."

To this Jesus replied, "It is written,

'You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only you shall serve' (Deuteronomy 6:13)."

Then the devil took him to Jerusalem and set him on the highest ledge of the Temple.

"If you really are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down from here, for the scripture says,

'He shall give his angels charge over you, to keep you', and 'In their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone' (Psalm 91:11,12)."

To which Jesus replied, "It is also said,

'You shall not tempt the Lord your God' (Deuteronomy 6:16)."

And when he had exhausted every kind of temptation, the devil withdrew until his next opportunity.

- Throughout the rest of the Gospels, Jesus does not hesitate to identify the devil, or Satan, and his demons as real beings continually trying to thwart the goodness and love of God. They totally oppose Jesus' own teaching and healing.

HIS TRAVELS AND ACTS c AD27-30

HOW JESUS STARTS HIS MINISTRY ACCORDING TO LUKE (also John 1:35-36; Matthew 4:12-17; Mark 1:14-15)

Luke 4:14-15 - And now (after his temptation in the desert) Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news of him spread through all the surrounding district. He taught in their synagogues, to everyone's admiration.

JESUS IS REJECTED IN NAZARETH FOR THE FIRST TIME - "THE PROPHET WITHOUT HONOUR IN HIS OWN TOWN"

Luke 4:16-30 - Then (after his return to Galilee from Judea and Samaria) he came to Nazareth where he had been brought up and, according to his custom, went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day. He stood up to read the scriptures and the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. He opened the book and found the place where these words are written -

'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor. He has sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord' (Isaiah 61:1,2).

Then he shut the book, handed it back to the attendant and resumed his seat. Every eye in the synagogue was fixed upon him and he began to tell them, "This very day this scripture has been fulfilled, while you were listening to it!"

Everybody noticed what he said and was amazed at the beautiful words that came from his lips, and they kept saying, "Isn't this Joseph's son?"

So he said to them, "I expect you will quote this proverb to me, 'Cure yourself, doctor!' Let us see you do in your own country all that we have heard that you did in Capernaum!" Then he added, "I assure you that no prophet is ever welcomed in his own country. I tell you the plain fact that in Elijah's time (c 900BC, the time of King Ahab of Israel), when the heavens were shut up for three and a half years (1 Kings 17:1) and there was a great famine through the whole country, there were plenty of widows in Israel, but Elijah was not sent to any of them. But he was sent to Sarepta (in Gentile Phoenicia; also Zarepheth in the Old Testament), to a widow in the country of

Sidon (1 Kings 17:9). In the time of Elisha the prophet (successor to Elijah), there were a great many lepers in Israel, but not one of them was healed - only Naaman, the (Gentile) Syrian (2 Kings 5)."

But when they heard this, everyone in the synagogue was furiously angry. They sprang to their feet and drove him right out of the town, taking him to the brow of the hill on which it was built, intending to hurl him down bodily. But he walked straight through the whole crowd and went on his way.

THE MADMAN IN THE SYNAGOGUE AT CAPERNAUM (also Mark 1:21-28)

Luke 4:31-37 - So (after preaching in the synagogue in his home town of Nazareth, and being rejected by the people there) he came down to Capernaum, a town in Galilee, and taught them on the Sabbath day. They were astonished at his teaching, for his words had the ring of authority.

There was a man in the synagogue under the influence of some evil spirit and he yelled at the top of his voice, "Hi! What have you got to do with us, Jesus, you Nazarene .....

Nazarene - An inhabitant of Nazareth; an insulting name for early Christians. Not to be confused with Nazarite - people dedicated to sacred service, such as Samson in the Old Testament -

- have you come to kill us? I know who you are all right, you're God's holy one!"

Jesus cut him short and spoke sharply, "Be quiet! Get out of him!"

And after throwing the man down in front of them, the devil did come out of him without hurting him in the slightest. At this everybody present was amazed and they kept saying to each other, "What sort of words are these? He speaks to these evil spirits with authority and power and out they come."

And his reputation spread over the whole surrounding district.

PETER'S MOTHER-IN-LAW'S FEVER: JESUS ALSO HEALS MANY OTHERS THAT EVENING

(also Matthew 8:14-17; Mark 1:29-34)

Luke 4:38-41 - When Jesus got up and left the synagogue (after healing the madman) he went into Simon (Peter)'s house. Simon's mother-in-law was suffering from a high fever, and they asked Jesus about her. He stood over her as she lay in bed, brought the fever under control and it left her. At once she got up and began to see to their needs.

Then, as the sun was setting, all those who had friends suffering from every kind of disease brought them to Jesus and he laid his hands on each one of them separately and healed them. Evil spirits came out of many of these people, shouting, "You are the Son of God!"

But he spoke sharply to them and would not allow them to say any more, for they knew perfectly well that he was Christ.

JESUS CONTINUES PREACHING AND HEALING
(also Matthew 4:23-25; Mark 1:35-39)

Luke 4:42-44 - At daybreak (after healing the madman in the synagogue and Simon Peter's mother-in-law), he went off to a deserted place, but the crowds tried to find him and when they did discover him, tried to prevent him from leaving them. But he told them, "I must tell the good news of the kingdom of God to other towns as well - that is my mission."

And he continued proclaiming his message in the synagogues of Judea.

Luke 5:1-39

THE CALLING OF SIMON PETER, ANDREW, JAMES AND JOHN
(also Matthew 4:18-22; Mark 1:16-20)

Luke 5:1-11 - One day the people were crowding closely round Jesus to hear God's message, as he stood on the shore of Lake Gennesaret (the Sea of Galilee). Jesus noticed two boats drawn up on the beach, for the fishermen had left them there while they were cleaning their nets. He went aboard one of the boats, which

belonged to Simon, and asked him to push out a little from the shore. Then he sat down and continued his teaching of the crowds from the boat.

When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Push out now into deep water and let down your nets for a catch."

Simon replied, "Master! We've worked all night and never caught a thing, but if you say so, I'll let the nets down."

And when they had done this, they caught an enormous shoal of fish - so big that the nets began to tear. So they signalled to their friends in the other boats to come and help them. They came and filled both the boats to sinking point. When Simon Peter saw this, he fell on his knees before Jesus and said, "Keep away from me, Lord, for I'm only a sinful man!"

For he and his companions (including Zebedee's sons, James and John, Simon's partners) were staggered at the haul of fish that they had made.

Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid, Simon. From now on your catch will be men."

So they brought the boats ashore, left everything and followed him.

THE LEPER
(also Matthew 8:1-4; Mark 1:40-45)

Luke 5:12-16 - While he was in one of the towns (of Galilee after the calling of Simon Peter, Andrew, John and James), Jesus came upon a man who was a mass of leprosy. When he saw Jesus, he prostrated himself before him and begged, "If you want to, Lord, you can make me clean."

Jesus stretched out his hand, placed it on the leper, saying, "Certainly I want to. Be clean!"

Immediately the leprosy left him and Jesus warned him not to tell anybody, but to go and show himself to the priest and to make the offerings for his recovery that Moses prescribed, as evidence to the authorities.

Yet the news about him spread all the more, and enormous crowds collected to hear Jesus and to be healed of their diseases. But he slipped quietly away to deserted places for prayer.

THE PARALYSED MAN
(also Matthew 9:1-8; Mark 2:1-12)

Luke 5:17-26 - One day while Jesus was teaching (after curing the leper and going out to lonely places where he could pray), some Pharisees and experts in the Law were sitting near him. They had come out of every village in Galilee and Judea as well as from Jerusalem. God's power to heal people was with him. Soon some men arrived carrying a paralytic and they kept trying to carry him in to put him down in front of Jesus. When they failed to find a way of getting him in because of the dense crowd, they went up on to the top of the house and let him down, bed and all, through the tiles, into the middle of the crowd in front of Jesus. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the man, "My friend, your sins are forgiven."

The scribes and the Pharisees began to argue about this, saying, "Who is this man who talks blasphemy? Who can forgive sins? Only God can do that."

Jesus realised what was going on in their minds and spoke straight to them.

"Why must you argue like this in your minds? Which do you suppose is easier - to say, 'Your sins are forgiven' or to say, 'Get up and walk'? But to make you realise that the Son of Man has full authority on earth to forgive sins - I tell you," he said to the man who was paralysed, "get up, pick up your bed and go home!"

Instantly the man sprang to his feet before their eyes, picked up the bedding on which he used to lie, and went off home, praising God. Sheer amazement gripped every man present, and they praised God and said in awed voices, "We have seen incredible things today."

- Jesus now journeys south from Galilee to Jerusalem for a festival - possibly the second Passover of the Gospels:

CALLING OF MATTHEW THE TAX COLLECTOR
(also Matthew 9:9-11; Mark 2:13-16)

Luke 5:27-30 - Later on (after healing the paralysed man in Capernaum), Jesus went out and looked straight at a tax-collector called Levi, as he sat at his office desk.

"Follow me," he said to him.

And he got to his feet at once, left everything behind and followed him.

Then Levi gave a big reception for Jesus in his own house, and there was a great crowd of tax-collectors and others at table with them. The Pharisees and their companions the scribes kept muttering indignantly about this to Jesus' disciples, saying, "Why do you have your meals with tax-collectors and sinners?"

JESUS HAS COME TO SAVE THOSE WHO ARE LOST - "THE DOCTOR AND THE SICK"
(also Matthew 9:12-13; Mark 2:17)

Luke 5:31-32 - Jesus answered them, "It is not the healthy who need the doctor, but those who are ill. I have not come to invite the 'righteous' but the 'sinners' - to change their ways.

THE PRESENCE OF JESUS SHOULD MEAN JOY - "THE WEDDING GUESTS AND THE BRIDEGROOM"
(also Matthew 9:14-15; Mark 2:18-20)

Luke 5:33-35 - Then (as in Matthew and Mark's accounts) people said to him, "Why is it that John's disciples are always fasting and praying, just like the Pharisees' disciples, but yours both eat and drink?"

Jesus answered, "Can you expect wedding-guests to fast while they have the bridegroom with them? The day will come when they will lose the bridegroom; that will be the time for them to fast!"

THE TEACHING OF JESUS AND THE OLD WAYS CAN NOT BE MIXED - "THE NEW CLOTH SEWN ONTO THE OLD" and "THE

NEW WINE POURED INTO OLD WINESKINS"
(also Matthew 9:16-17; Mark 2:21-22)

Luke 5:36-39 - Then he gave them this illustration (again after the question about fasting).

"Nobody tears a piece from a new coat to patch up an old one. If he does, he ruins the new one and the new piece does not match the old.

"Nobody puts new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the new wine will burst the skins - the wine will be spilt and the skins ruined. No, new wine must be put into new wineskins. Of course, nobody who has been drinking old wine will want the new at once. He is sure to say, 'The old is a good sound wine.'"

Luke 6:1-49

THE DISCIPLES PICK CORN ON THE SABBATH - "THE SABBATH IS MADE FOR MAN"
(also Matthew 12:1-8; Mark 2:23-28)

Luke 6:1-5 - One Sabbath day (as in Mark), as Jesus happened to be passing through the cornfields, his disciples began picking the ears of corn, rubbing them in their hands, and eating them. Some of the Pharisees remarked, "Why are you doing what the Law forbids men to do on the Sabbath day?"

Jesus answered them and said, "Have you never read what David and his companions did when they were hungry? How he went into the house of God, took the presentation loaves, ate some bread himself and gave some to his companions, even though the Law does not permit anyone except the priests to eat it?"

Then he added, "The Son of Man is master even of the Sabbath."

THE MAN WITH THE SHRIVELLED HAND
(also Matthew 12:9-14; Mark 3:1-6)

Luke 6:6-11 - On another Sabbath day (again after the cornfield incident) when he went into a synagogue to teach, there was a man

there whose right hand was wasted away. The scribes and the Pharisees were watching Jesus closely to see whether he would heal on the Sabbath day, which would, of course, give them grounds for an accusation. But he knew exactly what was going on in their minds, and said to the man with the wasted hand, "Stand up and come out in front."

And he got up and stood there. Then Jesus said to them, "I am going to ask you a question. Does the Law command us to do good on Sabbath days or do harm - to save life or destroy it?"

He looked round, meeting all their eyes, and said to the man, "Now stretch out your hand."

He did so, and his hand was restored as sound as the other one. But they were filled with insane fury, and kept discussing with each other what they could do to Jesus.

CHOOSING THE TWELVE APOSTLES
(also Matthew 10:1-4; Mark 3:13-19)

Luke 6:12-16 - It was in those days (after healing the man with the shrivelled hand) that he went up the hill-side to pray, and spent the whole night in prayer to God. When daylight came, he summoned his disciples to him and out of them he chose twelve whom he called apostles. They were (again using the numbers from Matthew's list) .....

1. Simon (whom he called Peter),
2. Andrew, his brother,
3. James,
4. John (the brother of James),
5. Philip,
6. Bartholomew (or Nathanael),
8. Matthew (or Levi),
7. Thomas,
9. James, the son of Alphaeus,
11. Simon, called the patriot,

10. Judas (or Thaddaeus), the son of James and
12. Judas Iscariot, who later betrayed him.

JESUS CONTINUES HEALING MANY (also Matthew 12:15-21; Mark 3:7-12)

Luke 6:17-19 - Then (again after healing the man with the shrivelled hand, but here, in Luke's account, also after Jesus has chosen the twelve apostles ...) he came down with them and stood on a level piece of ground, surrounded by a large crowd of his disciples and a great number of people from all parts of Judea and Jerusalem and the coastal district of Tyre and Sidon, who had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. (And even those who were troubled with evil spirits were cured.) The whole crowd were trying to touch him with their hands, for power was going out from him and he was healing them all.

TRUE HAPPINESS AND SORROW - "THE BEATITUDES" (also Matthew 5:2-12)

Luke 6:20-26 - Then Jesus (after coming down a hillside in Luke's shortened account) looked steadily at his disciples and said,

"How happy are you who own nothing, for the kingdom of God is yours!

"How happy are you who are hungry now, for you will be satisfied!

"How happy are you who weep now, for you are going to laugh!

"How happy you are when men hate you and turn you out of their company; when they slander you and detest all that you stand for because you are loyal to the Son of Man. Be glad when that happens and jump for joy - your reward in Heaven is magnificent. For that is exactly how their fathers treated the prophets.

"But how miserable for you who are rich, for you have had all your comforts!

"How miserable for you who have all you want, for you are going to be hungry!

"How miserable for you who are laughing now, for you will know sorrow and tears!

"How miserable for you when everybody says nice things about you, for that is exactly how their fathers treated the false prophets.

DON'T HATE - "LOVE YOUR ENEMIES" (also Matthew 5:43-48)

Luke 6:27-28 - "But I say to all of you who will listen to me: love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who treat you badly.

DON'T TAKE REVENGE - "TURN THE OTHER CHEEK" (also Matthew 5:38-39)

Luke 6:29a - "As for the man who hits you on one cheek, offer him the other one as well!

DON'T SET LIMITS ON HOW MUCH YOU SERVE - "GO THE EXTRA MILE" (also Matthew 5:40-42)

Luke 6:29b-30 - And if a man is taking away your coat, do not stop him from taking your shirt as well. Give to everyone who asks you, and when a man has taken what belongs to you, don't demand it back."

DOING TO OTHERS AS WE WOULD HAVE THEM DO TO US - "THE GOLDEN RULE" IN THE POSITIVE FORM (also Matthew 7:12)

Luke 6:31 - "Treat men exactly as you would like them to treat you."

DON'T HATE - "LOVE YOUR ENEMIES" (Concluded)

Luke 6:32-36 - "If you love only those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them! And if you do good only to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that, And if you lend only to those from whom you hope to get your money back, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners and expect to get their money back. No, you

are to love your enemies and do good and lend without hope of return. Your reward will be wonderful and you will be sons of the most high. For he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked!

"You must be merciful, as your father in Heaven is merciful."

THE PRICE OF CRITICISM AND TREATING OTHERS BADLY - "MEASURE FOR MEASURE" (also Matthew 7:1-2; Mark 4:24-25)

Luke 6:37-38 - "Don't judge other people and you will not be judged yourselves. Don't condemn and you will not be condemned. Make allowances for others and people will make allowances for you. Give and men will give to you - yes, good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over will they pour into your lap. For whatever measure you use with other people, they will use in their dealings with you."

WE CAN ONLY TEACH WHAT WE KNOW AND PRACTISE - "THE BLIND LEADING THE BLIND" (also Matthew 15:14)

- These verses are included in Luke's Sermon on the Plain, but not Matthew's Sermon on the Mount:

Luke 6:39-40 - Then he gave them an illustration - "Can one blind man be guide to another blind man? Surely they will both fall into the ditch together. A disciple is not above his teacher, but when he is fully trained he will be like his teacher."

THE HYPOCRISY OF JUDGING OTHERS - "THE PLANK OF WOOD IN OUR OWN EYE" (also Matthew 7:3-5)

Luke 6:41-42 - "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and fail to notice the plank in your own? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye' when you cannot see the plank in your own? You fraud, take the plank out of your own eye first and then you can see clearly enough to remove your brother's speck."

BEING KNOWN BY WHAT WE DO AND SAY - "THE GOOD AND BAD FRUIT TREES"
(also Matthew 7:15-20;12:33-37)

Luke 6:43-45 - "It is impossible for a good tree to produce bad fruit - as impossible as it is for a bad tree to produce good fruit. Do not men know what a tree is by its fruit? You cannot pick figs from briars, or gather a bunch of grapes from a blackberry bush! A good man produces good things from the good stored up in his heart, and a bad man produce evil things from his own stores of evil. For a man's words will always express what has been treasured in his heart."

ARE WE REALLY DOING GOD'S WILL? OR WILL JESUS SAY "I NEVER KNEW YOU!" (in part)
(also Matthew 7:21-23)

Luke 6:46 - "And what is the point of calling me, 'Lord, Lord', without doing what I tell you to do?"

THE ONLY REAL SECURITY IS IN JESUS - "THE HOUSE BUILT ON THE ROCK"
(also Matthew 7:24-27)

Luke 6:47-49 - "Let me show you what the man who comes to me, hears what I have to say, and puts it into practice, is really like. He is like a man building a house, who dug down to rock-bottom and laid the foundation of his house upon it. Then when the flood came and flood-water swept down upon that house, it could not shift it because it was properly built. But the man who hears me and does nothing about it is like a man who built his house with its foundation upon the soft earth. When the flood-water swept down upon it, it collapsed and the whole house crashed down in ruins."

Luke 7:1-50

THE ROMAN CENTURION'S SERVANT
(also Matthew 8:5-13)

Luke 7:1-10 - When Jesus had finished these talks (the Sermon on the "Plain" in Luke's Gospel) to the people, he came to Capernaum,

where it happened that there was a man very seriously ill and in fact at the point of death. He was the slave of a centurion who thought very highly of him. When the centurion heard about Jesus, he sent some Jewish elders to him with the request that he would come and save his servant's life. When they came to Jesus, they urged him strongly to grant this request, saying that the centurion deserved to have this done for him. "He loves our nation and has built us a synagogue out of his own pocket," they said.

- The centurion, in common with other "God-fearing" Gentiles who rejected pagan gods, probably attended the local synagogue, but was not a circumcised and practising Jew -

So Jesus went with them, but as he approached the house, the centurion sent some of his personal friends with the message, "Don't trouble yourself, sir! I'm not important enough for you to come into my house - I didn't think I was fit to come to you in person. Just give the order, please, and my servant will recover. I am used to working under orders, and I have soldiers under me. I can say to one, 'Go', and he goes, or I can say to another, 'Come here', and he comes; or I can say to my slave, 'Do this job', and he does it."

These words amazed Jesus and he turned to the crowd who were following behind him, and said, "I have never found faith like this anywhere, even in Israel!"

Then those who had been sent by the centurion returned to the house and found the slave perfectly well.

RAISING THE WIDOW OF NAIN'S DEAD SON

Luke 7:11-17 - Not long afterwards (after healing the centurion's servant), Jesus went into a town called Nain (in Galilee), accompanied by his disciples and a large crowd. As they approached the city gate, it happened that some people were carrying out a dead man, the only son of his widowed mother. The usual crowd of fellow-townsmen was with her. When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, "Don't cry."

Then he walked up and put his hand on the bier while the bearers stood still. Then he said, "Young man, wake up!"

And the dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus handed him to his mother. Everybody present was awe-struck and they praised God, saying, "A great prophet has arisen among us and God has turned his face towards his people."

And this report of him spread through the whole of Judea and the surrounding countryside.

JESUS AND JOHN THE BAPTIST COMPARED - "YET STILL THE PEOPLE WILL NOT REPENT" (also Matthew 11:2-24)

Luke 7:18-35 - John's disciples reported all these happenings to him (such as Jesus raising the widow of Nain's dead son). Then he summoned two of them and sent them to the Lord with this message, "Are you the one who was to come, or are we to look for someone else?"

When the men came to Jesus, they said, "John the Baptist has sent us to you with this message, 'Are you the one who was to come, or are we to look for someone else?'"

At that very time Jesus was healing many people of their diseases and ailments and evil spirits, and he restored sight to many who were blind. Then he answered them, "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard. The blind are recovering their sight, cripples are walking again, lepers being healed, the deaf hearing, dead men are being brought to life again, and the good news is being given to those in need. And happy is the man who never loses his faith in me."

Jesus emphasises the greatness of John - and the greater importance of the kingdom of God

When these messengers had gone back, Jesus began to talk to the crowd about John.

"What did you go out into the desert to look at? Was it a reed waving in the breeze? Well, what was it you went out to see? A man

dressed in fine clothes? But the men who wear fine clothes live luxuriously in palaces. But what did you really go to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, a prophet and far more than a prophet! This is the man of whom the scripture says,

'Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you' (Malachi 3:1).

Believe me, no one greater than John has ever been born, and yet a humble member of the kingdom of God is greater than he.

"All the people, yes, even the tax-collectors, when they heard John, acknowledged God and were baptised by his baptism. But the Pharisees and the experts in the Law frustrated God's purpose for them, for they refused John's baptism.

"What can I say that the men of this generation are like - what sort of men are they? They are like children sitting in the market-place and calling out to each other, 'We played at weddings for you, but you wouldn't dance, and we played at funerals for you, and you wouldn't cry!' For John the Baptist came in the strictest austerity and you say he is crazy. Then the Son of Man came, enjoying life, and you say, 'Look, a drunkard and a glutton, a bosom-friend of the tax-collector and the outsider!' Ah, well, wisdom's reputation is entirely in the hands of her children!"

FORGIVENESS AND WHO LOVES THE MOST - "THE TWO DEBTORS"

Luke 7:36-50 - Then (after Jesus had described the greatness of John the Baptist) one of the Pharisees asked Jesus to a meal with him. When Jesus came into the house, he took his place at the table and a woman, known in the town as a bad woman, found out that Jesus was there and brought an alabaster flask of perfume and stood behind him crying, letting her tears fall on his feet and then drying them with her hair. Then she kissed them and anointed them with the perfume. When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were really a prophet, he would know who this woman is and what sort of a person is touching him. He

would have realised that she is a bad woman." Then Jesus spoke to him, "Simon (the Pharisee), there is something I want to say to you."

Most commentators consider this anointing to be a different incident from the one at Bethany during Jesus' last week in Jerusalem as reported in Matthew 26:6-13, Mark 14:3-9,and John 12:1-8. Some traditions identify this woman as Mary of Magdala or Magdalene, who became a close follower of Jesus:

"Very well, Master," he returned, "say it."

"Once upon a time, there were two men in debt to the same money-lender. One owed him fifty pounds and the other five. And since they were unable to pay, he generously cancelled both of their debts. Now, which one of them do you suppose will love him more?"

"Well," returned Simon, "I suppose it will be the one who has been more generously treated,"

"Exactly," replied Jesus, and then turning to the woman, he said to Simon, "You can see this woman? I came into your house but you provided no water to wash my feet. But she has washed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. There was no warmth in your greeting, but she, from the moment I came in, has not stopped covering my feet with kisses. You gave me no oil for my head, but she has put perfume on my feet. That is why I tell you, Simon, that her sins, many as they are, are forgiven; for she has shown me so much love. But the man who has little to be forgiven has only a little love to give."

Then he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."

And the men at table with him began to say to themselves, "And who is this man, who even forgives sins?"

But Jesus said to the woman, "It is your faith that has saved you. Go in peace."

Luke 8:1-56

SOME OF HIS WOMEN DISCIPLES

Luke 8:1-3 - Not long after this incident (the first time Jesus is anointed with perfume, by a "bad woman of the town" in the house of a Pharisee), Jesus went through every town and village (in Galilee)preaching and telling the people the good news of the kingdom of God. He was accompanied by the twelve and some women who had been cured of evil spirits and illnesses - Mary, known as "the woman from Magdala" (who had once been possessed by seven evil spirits) ....

Mary (Hebrew, Miriam) - Six or seven Mary's appear in the New Testament:

In the Gospels:

1) Mary, the mother of Jesus;

(2) This Mary known as Mary Magdalene or Mary of Magdala;

(3) Mary, sister of Martha and Lazarus who lived at Bethany. It was she who probably anointed the feet of Jesus during his last week in Jerusalem;

(4) and (5) Mary, mother of the apostle James the Less and Joseph; and Mary, wife of Clopas both of whom were present at the crucifixion. They may be the same person;

In the Acts of the Apostles:

(6) Mary, mother of John Mark, the author of Mark's Gospel, who lived in Jerusalem; and

In the Letter to the Romans:

(7) Mary, included in Paul's greetings in his Letter:

..... Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's agent (manager of Antipas' household) ....

Joanna - The Gospel of Jesus obviously reached Herod's royal household at an early stage. Here, in Luke's Gospel, Joanna is married to Herod Antipas' agent. Luke also reports in Acts 13:1 that Manaen, a leader of the church in Syrian Antioch, had been a foster-brother of the same Antipas:

.... Susanna, and many others who used to look after his comfort from their own resources.

MYSTERIES OF THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN: LISTENING AND RESPONDING TO THE GOSPEL OF JESUS - "SOWING THE SEED"
(also Matthew 13:1-9,18-23; Mark 4:1-9,13-20)

Luke 8:4-8 - When a large crowd had collected and people were coming to him from one town after another (in Luke's account, as Jesus continued preaching in Galilee ...), he spoke to them and gave them this parable: "A sower went out to sow his seed, and while he was sowing, some of the seed fell by the roadside and was trodden down and birds gobbled it up. Some fell on the rock, and when it sprouted it withered for lack of moisture. Some fell among thorn-bushes which grew up with the seeds and choked the life out of them. But some seed fell on good soil and grew and produced a crop - a hundred times what had been sown."

And when he had said this, he called out, "Let the man who has ears to hear use them!"

WHY JESUS SPOKE IN PARABLES
(also Matthew 13:34-35; Mark 4:33-34)

Luke 8:9-10 - Then his disciples asked him the meaning of the parable (about sowing the seed). To which Jesus replied, "You have been given the chance to understand the secrets of the kingdom of God, but the others are given parables so that they may go through life with their eyes open and

'seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand' (Isaiah 6:9)".

"SOWING THE SEED" - Concluded

Luke 8:11-15 - "This is what the parable means. The seed is the message of God. The seed sown by the roadside represents those who hear the message, and then the devil comes and takes it away from their hearts so that they cannot believe it and be saved. That sown on the rock represents those who accept the message with

great delight when they hear it, but have no real root. They believe for a little while but when the time of temptation comes, they lose faith. And the seed sown among the thorns represents the people who hear the message and go on their way, and with the worries and riches and pleasures of living, the life is choked out of them, and in the end they produce nothing. But the seed sown on good soil means the men who hear the message and accept it with good and honest heart, and go on steadily producing a good crop.

LIVING AS WITNESSES TO JESUS CHRIST - "LIGHT, AND THE LAMP ON THE STAND"
(also Matthew 5:14-16; Mark 4:21-23)

Luke 8:16-17 - "Nobody lights a lamp and covers it with a basin or puts it under the bed. No, a man puts his lamp on a lamp-stand so that those who come in can see the light. For there is nothing hidden now which will not become perfectly plain and there are no secrets now which will not become as clear as daylight."

THE PRICE OF CRITICISM AND TREATING OTHERS BADLY - "MEASURE FOR MEASURE" (Concluded)

Luke 8:18 - "So take care how you listen - more will be given to the man who has something already, but the man who has nothing will lose even what he thinks he has."

JESUS AND HIS OWN FAMILY - THE INITIAL DIVISIONS BETWEEN THEM
(also Matthew 12:46-50; Mark 3:31-35)

Luke 8:19-21 - Then (in Luke's Gospel, as Jesus continued teaching in parables) his mother and his brothers arrived to see him, but could not get near him because of the crowd. So a message was passed to him, "Your mother and your brothers are standing outside wanting to see you."

To which he replied, "My mother and my brothers? That means those who listen to God's message and obey it."

CALMING THE STORM
(also Matthew 8:23-27; Mark 4:35-41)

Luke 8:22-25 - It happened on one of these days (again after teaching in parables) that he embarked on a boat with his disciples and said to them, "Let us cross over to the other side of the lake."

So they set sail, and when they were under way he dropped off to sleep. Then a squall of wind swept down upon the lake and they were in grave danger of being swamped. Coming forward, they woke him up, saying. "Master, master, we're drowning!"

Then he got up and reprimanded the wind and the stormy waters, and they died down, and everything was still. Then he said to them, "What has happened to your faith?"

But they were frightened and bewildered and kept saying to each other, "Who ever can this be? He gives orders even to the winds and waters and they obey him."

THE MADMAN AND THE GADARENE PIGS
(also Matthew 8:28-34; Mark 5:1-20)

Luke 8:26-39 - They sailed on to the country of the Gerasenes (after calming the storm) which is on the opposite side of the lake to Galilee. And as Jesus disembarked, a man from the town who was possessed by evil spirits met him. He had worn no clothes for a long time and did not live inside a house, but among the tombs. When he saw Jesus, he let out a howl and fell down in front of him, yelling, "What have you got to do with me, you Jesus, Son of the most high God? Please, please, don't torment me."

For Jesus was commanding the evil spirit to come out of the man. Again and again the evil spirit had taken control of him, and though he was bound with chains and fetters and closely watched, he would snap his bonds and go off into the desert with the devil at his heels. Then Jesus asked him, "What is your name?"

"Legion!" he replied. For many evil spirits had gone into him, and were now begging Jesus not to order them off to the bottomless pit. It happened that there was a large herd of pigs feeding on the hill-side, so they implored him to allow them to go into the pigs, and he let them go. And when the evil spirits came out of the man and went into the pigs, the whole herd rushed down the cliff into the lake and

were drowned. When the swineherds saw what had happened, they took to their heels, pouring out the story to the people in the town and countryside. These people came out to see what had happened, and approached Jesus. They found the man, whom the evil spirits had left, sitting down at Jesus' feet, properly clothed and quite sane. That frightened them. Those who had seen it told the others how the man with the evil spirits had been cured. And the whole crowd of people from the district surrounding the Gerasenes' country begged Jesus to go away from them, for they were thoroughly frightened. Then he re-embarked on the boat and turned back. The man who had the evil spirits kept begging to go with Jesus, but he sent him away with the words, "Go back home and tell them all what wonderful things God has done for you."

So the man went away and told the marvellous story of what Jesus had done for him, all over the town.

THE WOMAN WITH THE HAEMORRHAGE and THE RAISING OF JAIRUS' DAUGHTER
(also Matthew 9:18-26; Mark 5:21-43)

Luke 8:40-56 - On Jesus' return (again after healing the madman), the crowd welcomed him back, for they had all been looking for him.

Then up came Jairus (who was president of the synagogue), and fell at Jesus' feet, begging him to come into his house, for his daughter, an only child about twelve years old, was dying.

But as he went, the crowds nearly suffocated him. Among them was a woman, who had a haemorrhage for twelve years and who had derived no benefit from anybody's treatment. She came up behind Jesus and touched the edge of his cloak, with the result that her haemorrhage stopped at once.

"Who was that who touched me?" said Jesus.

And when everybody denied it, Peter remonstrated, "Master, the crowds are all round you and are pressing you on all sides ...."

But Jesus said, "Somebody touched me, for I felt the power went out from me."

When the woman realised that she had not escaped notice she came forward trembling, and fell at his feet and admitted before everybody why she had to touch him, and how she had been instantaneously cured.

"Daughter," said Jesus, "It is your faith that has healed you - go in peace."

While he was still speaking, somebody came from the synagogue president's house to say, "Your daughter is dead - there is no need to trouble the master any further."

But when Jesus heard this, he said to him, "Now don't be afraid, go on believing and she will be all right."

Then when he came to the house, he would not allow anyone to go in with him except Peter, John and James, and the child's parents. All those already there were weeping and wailing over her, but he said, "Stop crying! She is not dead, she is fast asleep."

This drew a scornful laugh from them, for they were quite certain that she had died. But he turned them all out, took the little girl's hand and called out to her, "Wake up, my child!"

And her spirit came back and she got to her feet at once, and Jesus ordered food to be given to her. Her parents were nearly out of their minds with joy, but Jesus told them not to tell anyone what had happened.

Luke 9:1-62

THE TWELVE APOSTLES ARE SENT OUT TO PREACH AND HEAL
(also Matthew 10:5-15; Mark 6:6b-13)

Luke 9:1-6 - Then (after raising Jairus' daughter) he called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all evil spirits and the ability to heal disease. He sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick, with these words, "Take nothing for your journey - neither a stick nor a purse nor food nor money, nor even extra clothes! When you come to stay at a house,

remain there until you go on your way again. And where they will not welcome you, leave that town, and shake the dust off your feet as a protest against them!"

So they set out, and went from village to village preaching the Gospel and healing people everywhere.

DEATH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST
(also Matthew 14:1-12; Mark 6:14-29)

Luke 9:7-9 - "All these things (the preaching and healing by the twelve apostles) came to the ears of Herod the tetrarch and caused him acute anxiety, because some people were saying that John had risen from the dead, some maintaining that the prophet Elijah had appeared, and others that one of the old-time prophets had come back.

"I beheaded John," said Herod. "Who can this be that I hear all these things about?" And he (Herod) tried to find a way of seeing Jesus."

FEEDING THE FIVE THOUSAND
(also Matthew 14:13-21; Mark 6:30-44; John 6:1-15)

- Feeding the 5,000 is the only miracle of nature or healing recorded in all four Gospels:

Luke 9:10-17 - Then the apostles returned (as in Mark's account), and when they had made their report to Jesus of what they had done, he took them with him privately and retired into a town called Bethsaida.

Jesus welcomes the crowds, teaches, heals and feeds them

But the crowds observed this and followed him. And he welcomed them and talked to them about the kingdom of God, and cured those who were in need of healing. As the day drew to its close the twelve came to him and said, "Please dismiss the crowd now so that they can go to the villages and country round about and find some food and shelter, for we're quite in the wilds here."

"You give them something to eat!" returned Jesus.

"But we've nothing here," they replied, "except five loaves and two fish, unless you want us to go and buy food for all this crowd?" (There were approximately five thousand men there).

Then Jesus said to the disciples, "Get them to sit down in groups of about fifty."

This they did, making them all sit down. Then he took the five loaves and the two fish and looked up to Heaven, blessed them, broke them into pieces and passed them to his disciples to serve to the crowds. Everybody ate and was satisfied. Afterwards they collected twelve baskets full of broken pieces which were left over.

"WHO DO PEOPLE SAY I AM?" ASKS JESUS
(also Matthew 16:13-20; Mark 8:27-30)

Luke 9:18-21 - Then (after feeding the five thousand. Note that Luke's Gospel does not include the feeding of the 4,000) came this incident. While Jesus was praying by himself, having only the disciples near him, he asked them this question: "Who are the crowd saying that I am?"

"Some say that you are John the Baptist," they replied. "Others that you are Elijah, and others think that one of the old-time prophets has come to life again."

Then he said, "And who do you say that I am?"

"God's Christ! said Peter.

But Jesus expressly told them not to say a word to anybody, ...

JESUS TEACHES ABOUT HIS DEATH AND RESURRECTION FOR A FIRST TIME
(also Matthew 16:21-23; Mark 8:31-33)

Luke 9:22 - (After Peter's confession that Jesus is the Christ, again he tells them not to say a word to anybody) ..... at the same time warning them of the inevitability of the Son of Man's great suffering, of his repudiation by the elders, chief priests and scribes, and of his death and of being raised to life again on the third day.

CARRYING THE CROSS OF JESUS
(also Matthew 16:24-28; Mark 8:34-9:1)

Luke 9:23-27 - Then he spoke to them all.

"If anyone wants to follow in my footsteps, he must give up all right to himself, carry his cross every day and keep close behind me. For the man who wants to save his life will lose it, but the man who loses his life for my sake will save it. For what is the use of a man gaining the whole world if he loses or forfeits his own soul? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him, when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and the holy angels. I tell you the simple truth - there are men standing here today who will not taste death until they have seen the kingdom of God!"

THE TRANSFIGURATION OF JESUS
(also Matthew 17:1-13; Mark 9:2-13)

- God reveals Jesus' divinity to three of the apostles as he appears in a glorified form with the patriarch Moses and the prophet Elijah:

Luke 9:28-36 - About eight days after these sayings (about his death and resurrection), Jesus took Peter, James and John and went off to the hill-side to pray. And then, while he was praying, the whole appearance of his face changed and his clothes became white and dazzling. And two men were talking with Jesus. They were Moses and Elijah - revealed in heavenly splendour, and their talk was about the way he must take and the end he must fulfil in Jerusalem. But Peter and his companions had been overcome by sleep and it was as they struggled into wakefulness that they saw the glory of Jesus and the two men standing with him. Just as they were parting from him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is wonderful for us to be here! Let us put up three shelters - one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." But he did not know what he was saying. While he was still talking, a cloud overshadowed them and awe swept over them as it enveloped them. A voice came out of the cloud, saying "This is my Son, my chosen! Listen to him!"

And while the voice was speaking, they found there was no one there at all but Jesus. The disciples were reduced to silence, and in those days never breathed a word to anyone to what they had seen.

THE EPILEPTIC BOY
(also Matthew 17:14-21; Mark 9:14-29)

Luke 9:37-43a - Then on the following day (again after the Transfiguration of Jesus ....), as they came down the hill-side, a great crowd met him. Suddenly a man from the crowd shouted out, "Master, please come and look at my son! He's my only child, and without any warning some spirit gets hold of him and he calls out suddenly. Then it convulses him until he foams at the mouth, and only after a fearful struggle does it go away and leave him bruised all over. I begged your disciples to get rid of it, but they couldn't."

"You really are an unbelieving and difficult people," replied Jesus. "How long must I be with you, how long must I put up with you? Bring him here to me."

But even while the boy was on his way, the spirit hurled him to the ground in a dreadful convulsion. Then Jesus reprimanded the evil spirit, healed the lad and handed him back to his father. And everybody present was amazed at this demonstration of the power of God.

JESUS TEACHES ABOUT HIS DEATH AND RESURRECTION FOR A SECOND TIME
(also Matthew 17:22-23; Mark 9:30-32)

Luke 9:43b-45 - And while everybody was full of wonder at all the things they saw him do (such as healing the epileptic boy), Jesus was saying to the disciples, "Store up in your minds what I tell you nowadays, for the Son of Man is going to be handed over to the power of men."

But they made no sense of this saying - something made it impossible for them to understand it, and they were afraid to ask him what he meant.

"WHO IS THE GREATEST?"
(also Matthew 18:1-5; Mark 9:33-37)

Luke 9:46-48 - Then (shortly after healing the boy with epilepsy) an argument arose among them as to who should be the greatest. But Jesus, knowing what they were arguing about, took a little child and made him stand by his side. And then he said to them, "Anyone who accepts a little child in my name is really accepting me, and the man who accepts me is really accepting the one who sent me. It is the humblest among you all who is really the greatest."

THE MAN NOT AGAINST JESUS IS FOR HIM!
(also Mark 9:38-41)

Luke 9:49-50 - Then John broke in (as in Mark), "Master, we saw a man driving out evil spirits in your name, but we stopped him, for he is not one of us who follow you."

But Jesus told him, "You must not stop him. The man who is not against you is on your side."

JESUS AND THE SAMARITANS - HIS REJECTION BY A VILLAGE IN SAMARIA

- Although this story is found in Luke chapter 9, the incident is believed to have taken place after Jesus left Galilee for the last time and around the time he healed the ten lepers (Luke 17:11-19):

Luke 9:51-56 - Now as the days before he should be taken back into Heaven were running out, he resolved to go to Jerusalem, and sent messengers in front of him. They set out and entered a Samaritan village to make preparations for him. But the people there refused to welcome him because he was obviously intending to go to Jerusalem (as a Jew). When the disciples James and John saw this, they said, "Master, do you want us to call down fire from heaven and burn them all up?" (a sign of their character that may help account for their nickname "Boanerges" - sons of thunder.)

But Jesus turned and reproved them ....

(some manuscripts include verses 55b-56a) - "You do not know what manner of spirit you are of, for the Son of Man did not come to

destroy men's lives but to save them,"

..... and they all went on to another village.

HARD DECISIONS FOR THE FOLLOWERS OF JESUS - "LET THE DEAD BURY THE DEAD!"
(also Matthew 8:18-22)

Luke 9:57-62 - As the little company made its way along the road (in Luke's account, after Jesus had been rejected by a Samaritan village), a man said to him, "I'm going to follow you wherever you go."

And Jesus replied, "Foxes have earths, birds have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere that he can call his own."

But he said to another man, "Follow me."

And he replied, "Let me go and bury my father first."

But Jesus told him, "Leave the dead to bury their own dead. You must come away and preach the kingdom of God."

Another man said to him, "I am going to follow you, Lord, but first let me bid farewell to my people at home."

But Jesus told him, "Anyone who puts his hand to the plough and then looks behind him is useless for the kingdom of God."

Luke 10:1-42

MORE DISCIPLES ARE NEEDED - THE SEVENTY (OR 72) ARE SENT OUT
(also Matthew 9:35-38)

Luke 10:1-12 - Later on (following the command to "let the dead bury the dead") the Lord commissioned seventy other disciples and sent them off in twos as advance-parties into every town and district where he intended to go.

- Some of the people whose names appear in the Acts of the Apostles and throughout the accounts of the early Church, are traditionally associated with the unnamed 70

"There is a great harvest," he told them, "but only a few are working in it - which means you must pray to the Lord of the harvest that he will send out more reapers.

"Now go on your way. I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. Don't carry a purse or a pair of shoes, and don't stop to pass the time of day with anyone you meet on the road. When you go into a house, say first of all, 'Peace be to this household!' If there is a lover of peace there, he will accept your words of blessing, and if not, they will come back to you. Stay in the same house and eat and drink whatever they put before you - a workman deserves his wages. But don't move from one house to another.

"Whatever town you go into and the people welcome you, eat the meals they give you and heal the people who are ill there. Tell them, 'The kingdom of God is very near to you now.' But whenever you come into a town and they will not welcome you, you must go into the streets and say, 'We brush off even the dust of your town from our feet as a protest against you. But it is still true that the kingdom of God has arrived! I assure you that it will be better for Sodom in 'that day' than for that town.

WOES ON THE UNBELIEVING CITIES

Luke 10:13-15 - "Alas for you, Chorazin, and alas for you, Bethsaida! For if Tyre and Sidon had seen the demonstrations of God's power that you have seen, they would have repented long ago and sat in sackcloth and ashes. It will be better for Tyre and Sidon in the judgment than for you! As for you, Capernaum, are you on your way up to heaven? I tell you, you will go hurtling down among the dead!"

THE 72 DISCIPLES RETURN)

Luke 10:16-20 - Then (after warning such towns as Chorazin and Bethsaida about God's penalty for rejecting the Gospel) he added to the seventy, "Whoever listens to you is listening to me, and the man who has no use for you has no use for me either. And the man who has no use for me has no use for the one who sent me!"

Jesus tells the returned missioners not to be enthusiastic over mere power

Later the seventy came back full of joy

"Lord," they said, "even evil spirits obey us when we use your name!"

"Yes," returned Jesus, "I was watching and saw Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning! It is true that I have given you the power to tread on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the enemy's power - there is nothing at all that can do you any harm. Yet it is not your power over evil spirits which should give such joy, but the fact that your names are written in Heaven."

JESUS REJOICES FOR THOSE ABLE TO UNDERSTAND HIS MESSAGE
(also Matthew 11:25-27; 13:16-17)

Luke 10:21-24 - At that moment (as the 70 disciples returned) Jesus himself was inspired with joy, and exclaimed, "O Father, Lord of Heaven and earth, I thank you for hiding these things from the clever and the intelligent and for showing them to mere children! Yes, I thank you, Father, that this was your will." Then he went on, "Everything has been put in my hands by my Father; and nobody knows who the Son really is except the Father. Nobody knows who the Father really is except the Son - and the man to whom the Son chooses to reveal him!"

Then he turned to his disciples and said to them quietly, "How fortunate you are to see what you are seeing! I tell you that many prophets and kings have wanted to see what you are seeing but they never saw it, and to hear what you are hearing but they never heard it."

WHO IS OUR NEIGHBOUR? - "THE GOOD SAMARITAN"

Luke 10:25-37 - Then (after the return of the 70 disciples ....) one of the experts in the Law (or scribe) stood up to test him and said, "Master, what must I do to be sure of eternal life?"

"What does the Law say and what has your reading taught you?" said Jesus.

"The Law says,

'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind' (Deuteronomy 6:5), and

'your neighbour as yourself' (Leviticus 19:18)," he replied.

"Quite right," said Jesus. "Do that and you will live."

But the man, wanting to justify himself, continued, "But who is my 'neighbour'?"

And Jesus gave him the following reply: "A man was once on his way down from Jerusalem to Jericho. He fell into the hands of bandits who stripped off his clothes, beat him up, and left him half dead. It so happened that a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. A Levite also came on the scene and when he saw him, he too passed by on the other side. But then a Samaritan traveller came along to the place where the man was lying, and at the sight of him he was touched with pity. He went across to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put him on his own mule, brought him to an inn and did what he could for him. Next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the inn-keeper with the words, 'Look after him, will you? I will pay you back whatever more you spend, when I come through here on my return.' Which of these three seems to you to have been a neighbour to the bandits' victim?"

"The man who gave him practical sympathy," he replied.

"Then you go and give the same," returned Jesus.

- Levites were originally the priestly caste of Israel, but by now assigned to lesser religious duties. In choosing to use the despised Samaritans as an example of a good neighbour, rather than a priest or the Levite, Jesus would not have endeared himself to the scribe. But in doing so he emphasised that love was not just for those who love us.

TWO MORE WOMEN FOLLOWERS, MARTHA AND MARY, AND HOW THEY RECEIVED HIM

Luke 10:38-42 - As they continued their journey, Jesus came to a village (Bethany on the outskirts of Jerusalem) and a woman called Martha welcomed him to her house. She had a sister by the name of Mary (and a brother, the Lazarus who was raised from the dead) who settled down at the Lord's feet and was listening to what he said. But Martha was very worried about her elaborate preparations and she burst in, saying, "Lord, don't you mind that my sister has left me to do everything by myself? Tell her to get up and help me!"

But the Lord answered her, "Martha, my dear, you are worried and bothered about providing so many things. Only a few things are really needed, perhaps only one. Mary has chosen the best part and you must not tear it away from her!"

Luke 11:1-54

A PATTERN FOR PRAYER - "THE LORD'S PRAYER" (also Matthew 6:5-13)

- The Matthew and Luke versions of the Lord's Prayer differ, suggesting a pattern for Christian prayer rather than a rigid form of worship:

Luke 11:1-4 - One day it happened that Jesus was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said, "Lord, teach us how to pray, as John used to teach his disciples."

"When you pray," returned Jesus, "you should say,

'Father, may your name be honoured -

may your kingdom come!

Give us each day the bread we need,

and forgive us our sins, for we forgive anyone who owes anything to us;

and keep us clear of temptation.'"

HOW GOD WILL ANSWER OUR PRAYERS - "THE FRIEND AT MIDNIGHT"

Luke 11:5-8 - Then (sometime after Jesus' first visit to Martha and Mary in Bethany) he added, "If any of you has a friend, and goes to him in the middle of the night and says, 'Lend me three loaves, my dear fellow, for a friend of mine has just arrived after a journey and I have no food to put in front of him'; and then he answers from inside the house, 'Don't bother me with your troubles. The front door is locked and my children and I have gone to bed. I simply cannot get up now and give you anything!' Yet, I tell you, that even if he won't get up and give him what he wants simply because he is his friend, yet if he persists, he will rouse himself and give him everything he needs."

GOD'S GIFTS ARE FREELY AVAILABLE TO EVERYONE - "ASK! SEEK! KNOCK!"
(also Matthew 7:7-8)

Luke 11:9-10 - And so I tell you, ask and it will be given you, search and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you. The one who asks will always receive; the one who is searching will always find, and the door is opened to the man who knocks."

ASKING IN PRAYER; HOW GOD MEETS OUR REAL NEEDS - "THE BREAD AND THE STONE, THE FISH AND THE SNAKE"
(also Matthew 7:9-11)

Luke 11:11-13 - "Some of you are fathers, and if your son asks you for some fish, would you give him a snake instead, or if he asks you for an egg, would you make him a present of a scorpion? So, if you, for all your evil, know how to give good things to your children, how much more likely is it that your Heavenly Father will give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

THE DUMB MAN

Luke 11:14 - Another time (in Luke's account, after teaching the Lord's Prayer and about how God answers prayer), Jesus was expelling an evil spirit which was preventing a man from speaking, and as soon as the evil spirit left him, the dumb man found his speech, to the amazement of the crowds. (Jesus now faces the same accusations as in Matthew's Gospel about being in league with the devil.)

JESUS IS ACCUSED OF USING THE POWER OF THE DEVIL TO HEAL
(Matthew 12:22-32; Mark 3:22-30)

Luke 11:15-23 - Another time (in Luke, after teaching about prayer) , Jesus was expelling an evil spirit which was preventing a man from speaking, and as soon as the evil spirit left him, the dumb man found his speech, to the amazement of the crowds.

But some of them said, "He expels these spirits because he is in league with Beelzebub, the chief of the evil spirits."

Others among them, to test him, tried to get a sign from Heaven out of him. But he knew what they were thinking and told them, "Any kingdom divided against itself is doomed and a disunited household will collapse. And if Satan disagrees with Satan, how does his kingdom continue? - for I know you are saying that I expel evil spirits because I am in league with Beelzebub. But if I do expel devils because I am an ally of Beelzebub, who is your own sons' ally when they do the same thing? They can settle that question for you. But if it is by the finger of God that I am expelling evil spirits, 'then the kingdom of God has swept over you unawares'!

"When a strong man armed to the teeth guards his own house, his property is in peace. But when a stronger man comes and conquers him, he removes all the arms on which he pinned his faith and divides the spoils among his friends.

"Anyone who is not with me is against me, and the man who does not gather with me is really scattering.

THE DANGER OF NOT BEING FILLED WITH THE THINGS OF GOD - "THE RETURN OF THE EVIL SPIRITS" (also Matthew 12:43-45)

Luke 11:24-26 - (In Luke, after being accused of using the devil's power to heal, Jesus continues ....) "When the evil spirit comes out of a man, it wanders through waterless places looking for rest, and when it fails to find any, it says, 'I will go back to my house from which I came.' When it arrives, it finds it cleaned and all in order. Then it goes and collects seven other spirits more evil than itself to keep it company, and they all go in and make themselves at home. The last state of that man is worse than the first."

TRUE HAPPINESS IS HEARING AND OBEYING GOD

Luke 11:27-28 - And while he was still saying this (... Jesus' reply to the accusation of being in league with the devil), a woman in the crowd called out and said, "Oh, what a blessing for a woman to have brought you into the world and nursed you!"

But Jesus replied, "Yes, but a far greater blessing to hear the word of God and obey it."

THE SCRIBES AND PHARISEES DEMAND A SIGN FROM JESUS (also Matthew 12:38-42)

Luke 11:29-32 - Then (after the accusation of being in league with the devil ....) as the people crowded closely around him, he continued, "This is an evil generation! It looks for a sign and it will be given no sign except that of Jonah. Just as Jonah was a sign to the people of Nineveh, so will the Son of Man be a sign to this generation. When the judgment comes, the Queen of the South will rise up with the men of this generation and she will condemn them. For she came from the ends of the earth to listen to the wisdom of Solomon, and there is more than the wisdom of Solomon with you now! The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and will condemn it. For they did repent when Jonah preached to them, and there is something more than Jonah's preaching with you now!"

LIVING AS WITNESSES TO JESUS CHRIST - "LIGHT, AND THE LAMP ON THE STAND"
(also Matthew 5:14-16; Mark 4:21-23)

Luke 11:33 - "No one takes a lamp and puts it in a cupboard or under a bucket, but on a lamp-stand, so that those who come in can see the light."

OUR EYES AS A GUIDE TO OUR INNER BEING - "THE INWARD LIGHT"
(also Matthew 6:22-23)

Luke 11:34-36 - "The lamp of your body is your eye. When your eye is sound, your whole body is full of light, but when your eye is evil, your whole body is full of darkness. So be very careful that your light never becomes darkness. For if your whole body is full of light, with no part of it in shadow, it will all be radiant - it will be like having a bright lamp to give you light."

JESUS CRITICISES THE HYPOCRISY OF THE SCRIBES AND PHARISEES

- Much of this criticism is repeated in Matthew's Gospel after Jesus' final entry into Jerusalem:

Luke 11:37-54 - While he was talking (about the demand for a sign), a Pharisee invited him (Jesus) to dinner. So he went into his house and sat down at table. The Pharisee noticed with some surprise that he did not wash before the meal. But the Lord said to him, "You Pharisees are fond of cleaning the outside of your cups and dishes, but inside yourselves you are full of greed and wickedness! Have you no sense? Don't you realise that the one who made the outside is the maker of the inside as well? If you would only make the inside clean by doing good to others, the outside things become clean as a matter of course! But alas for you Pharisees, for you pay out your tithe of mint and rue (a small Mediterranean shrub) and every little herb, and lose sight of the justice and love of God. Yet these are the things you ought to have been concerned with - it need not mean leaving the lesser duties undone. Yes, alas for you Pharisees, who love the front seats in the synagogues and having men bow down to

you in public! Alas for you, for you are like unmarked graves - men walk over your corruption without knowing it is there."

Jesus denounces the learned for obscuring the truth

Then one of the experts in the Law (a scribe) said to him, "Master, when you say things like this, you are insulting us as well."

And he returned, "Yes, and I do blame you experts in the Law! For you pile up back-breaking burdens for men to bear, but you yourselves will not raise a finger to lift them. Alas for you, for you build memorial tombs for the prophets - the very men whom your fathers murdered. You show clearly enough how you approve your father's actions. They did the actual killing and you put up a memorial to it. That is why the wisdom of God has said, 'I will send them prophets and apostles; some they will kill and some they will persecute!' So that the blood of all the prophets shed from the foundation of the earth, from Abel (killed by his brother Cain - Genesis 4) to Zachariah (or Zechariah, author of the Book of that name) who died between the altar and the sanctuary, shall be charged to this generation!

"Alas for you experts in the Law, for you have taken away the key of knowledge. You have never gone in yourselves and you have hindered everyone else who was at the door!"

And when he left the house, the scribes and the Pharisees began to regard him with bitter animosity and tried to draw him out on a great many subjects, waiting to pounce on some incriminating remark

Luke 12:1-59

THE YEAST OF THE PHARISEES
(also Matthew 16:5-12; Mark 8:13-21)

Luke 12:1 - Meanwhile (in Luke's account, after Jesus has criticised the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees), the crowds had gathered in thousands, so that they were actually treading on each other's toes, and Jesus, speaking primarily to his disciples, said, "Be

on your guard against yeast - I mean the yeast of the Pharisees, which is sheer pretence."

WARNINGS AND ENCOURAGEMENTS AS THE APOSTLES ARE SENT OUT
(also Matthew 10:16-11:1)

Luke 12:2-12 - "For there is nothing covered up which is not going to be exposed, nor anything private which is not going to be made public. Whatever you may say in the dark will be heard in daylight, and whatever you whisper within four walls will be shouted from the house-tops."

Man need only fear God

"I tell you, as friends of mine, that you need not be afraid of those who can kill the body, but afterwards cannot do anything more. I will show you the only one you need to fear - the one who, after he has killed, has the power to throw you into destruction! Yes, I tell you, it is right to stand in awe of him. The market-price of five sparrows is two farthings, isn't it? Yet not one of them is forgotten in God's sight. Why, the very hairs of your heads are all numbered! Don't be afraid, then; you are worth more than a great many sparrows! I tell you that every man who publicly acknowledges me, I, the Son of Man, will acknowledge in the presence of the angels of God. But the man who publicly disowns me will find himself disowned before the angels of God!

"Anyone who speaks against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but there is no forgiveness for the man who speaks evil against the Holy Spirit. And when they bring you before the synagogues and magistrates and authorities, don't worry as to what defence you are going to put up or what word you are going to use. For the Holy Spirit will tell you at the time what is the right thing for you to say."

SEARCHING FOR SECURITY IN MATERIAL POSSESSIONS - "THE RICH AND FOOLISH MAN"

Luke 12:13-21 - Then (as Jesus continues warning and encouraging his disciples) someone out of the crowd said to him, "Master, tell my brother to share his legacy with me."

But Jesus replied, "My dear man, who appointed me a judge or arbitrator in your affairs?"

And then, turning to the disciples, he said to them, "Notice that, and be on your guard against covetousness in any shape or form. For a man's real life in no way depends upon the number of his possessions."

Then he gave them a parable in these words, "Once upon a time a rich man's farmland produced heavy crops. So he said to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have no room to store this harvest of mine?' Then he said, 'I know what I'll do. I'll pull down my barns and build bigger ones where I can store all my grain and my goods and I can say to my soul, Soul, you have plenty of good things stored up there for years to come. Relax! Eat, drink and have a good time!' But God said to him, 'You fool, this very night you will be asked for your soul! Then, who is going to possess all that you have prepared?' That is what happens to the man who hoards things for himself and is not rich where God is concerned."

WORRYING ABOUT MONEY AND POSSESSIONS - "HOW GOD PROVIDES FOR THE BIRDS AND THE FLOWERS" (also Matthew 6:25-33)

Luke 12:22-31 - And then he added to the disciples, "That is why I tell you, don't worry about life, wondering what you are going to eat. And stop bothering about what clothes you will need. Life is much more important than food, and the body more important than clothes. Think of the ravens. They neither sow nor reap, and they have neither store nor barn, but God feeds them. And how much more valuable do you think you are than birds? Can any of you make himself an inch taller however much he worries about it? And if you can't manage a little thing like this, why do you worry about anything else? Think of the wild flowers, and how they neither work nor weave. Yet I tell you that Solomon in all his glory was never arrayed like one of these. If God so clothes the grass, which flowers in the field today and is burnt in the stove tomorrow, is he not much more likely to clothe you, you little-faiths? You must not set your heart on what you eat or drink, nor must you live in a state of anxiety. The

whole heathen world is busy about getting food and drink, and your Father knows well enough that you need such things. No, set your heart on his kingdom, and your food and drink will come as a matter of course."

REAL SECURITY IN LIFE - "NOT FROM MOTH-EATEN AND RUSTING TREASURES ON EARTH" (also Matthew 6:19-21)

Luke 12:32-34 - "Don't be afraid, you tiny flock! Your Father plans to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give the money away. Get yourselves purses that never grow old, inexhaustible treasure in Heaven, where no thief can ever reach it, or moth ruin it. For wherever your treasure is, you may be certain that your heart will be there too!"

BEING PREPARED FOR THE COMING OF JESUS - "THE SERVANTS AND THE RETURNING MASTER".

- This parable is similar to "the faithful servant and the returning householder" included by both Matthew and Mark after Jesus' final entry into Jerusalem (15.39):

Luke 12:35-48 - (After the parable of the "rich and foolish man", Jesus goes on .....) "You must be ready dressed and have your lamps alight, like men who wait to welcome their lord and master on his return from the wedding-feast, so that when he comes and knocks at the door, they may open it for him at once. Happy are the servants whom their lord finds on the alert when he arrives. I assure you that he will take off his outer clothes, make then sit down to dinner, and come and wait on them. And if he should come just after midnight or in the very early morning, and find them still on the alert, their happiness is assured. But be certain of this, that if the householder had known the time when the burglar would come, he would not have let his house be broken into. So you must be on the alert, for the Son of Man is coming at a time when you may not expect him."

Then Peter said to him, "Lord, do you mean this parable for us or for everybody?"

But the Lord continued, "Well, who will be the faithful, sensible steward whom his master will put in charge of his household to give them their supplies at the proper time? Happy is the servant if his master finds him so doing when he returns. I tell you he will promote him to look after all his property. But suppose the servant says to himself, 'My master takes his time about returning', and then begins to beat the men and women servants and to eat and drink and get drunk, that servant's lord and master will return suddenly and unexpectedly, and he will punish him severely and send him to share the penalty of the unfaithful. The slave who knows his master's plan but does not get ready or act upon it will be severely punished, but the servant who did not know the plan, though he has done wrong, will be let off lightly. Much will be expected from the one who has been given much, and the more a man is trusted, the more people will expect of him."

WARNINGS AND ENCOURAGEMENTS AS THE APOSTLES ARE SENT OUT - Continued
(also Matthew 10:16-11:1)

Luke 12:49-53 - "It is fire that I have come to bring upon the earth - how I could wish it were already ablaze! There is a baptism that I must undergo and how strained I am until it is over!

Jesus declares that his coming is bound to bring division

"Do you think I have come to bring peace on the earth? No, I tell you, not peace, but division! For from now on, there will be five people divided against each other in one house, three against two, and two against three. It is going to be father against son, and son against father, and mother against daughter, and daughter against mother; mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law, and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law!"

THE SCRIBES AND PHARISEES DEMAND MORE SIGNS FROM JESUS
(also Matthew 16:1-4; Mark 8:11-12)

Luke 12:54-56 - Then (in Luke after warning and encouraging his disciples about various matters) he said to the crowds, "When you see a cloud rising in the west, you say at once that it is going to rain, and so it does. And when you feel the south wind blowing, you say that it is going to be hot, and so it is. You frauds! You know how to interpret the look of the earth and the sky. Why can't you interpret the meaning of the times in which you live?"

SETTLING DISAGREEMENTS WISELY
(also Matthew 5:25-26)

Luke 12:57-59 - "And why can't you decide for yourselves what is right? For instance, when you are going before the magistrate with your opponent, do your best to come to terms with him while you have the chance, or he may rush you off to the judge, and the judge hand you over to the police-officer, and the police-officer throw you into prison. I tell you you will never get out again until you have paid your last farthing."

Luke 13:1-35

IF WE CONTINUE TO REJECT GOD - "THE UNFRUITFUL FIG-TREE"

Luke 13:1-9 - (Following the parable of the "servants and the returning master", Jesus later continues ....) It was just at this moment that some people came up to tell him the story of the Galileans whose blood (the Roman procurator, Pontius) Pilate had mixed with that of their own sacrifices (... Galileans killed by the Romans, possibly in the Temple during Passover). Jesus made this reply to them: "Are you thinking that these Galileans were worse sinners than any other men of Galilee because this happened to them? I assure you that is not so. You will all die just as miserable a death unless your hearts are changed! You remember those eighteen people who were killed at Siloam (in the Lower City of Jerusalem, near the Pool of Siloam) when the tower collapsed upon them? Are you imagining that they were worse offenders than any of

the other people who lived in Jerusalem? I assure you they were not. You will all die as tragically unless your whole outlook is changed!"

And hints at God's patience with the Jewish nation

Then he gave them this parable: "Once upon a time a man had a fig-tree growing in his garden, and when he came to look for the figs, he found none at all. So he said to his gardener, 'Look, I have come expecting fruit on this fig-tree for three years running and never found any. Better cut it down. Why should it use up valuable space?' And the gardener replied, 'Master, don't touch it this year till I have had a chance to dig round it and give it a bit of manure. Then, if it bears after that, it will be all right. But if it doesn't, then you can cut it down.'"

THE CRIPPLED WOMAN

Luke 13:10-17 - It happened (sometime after Jesus told the parable of the unfruitful fig-tree) that he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath day. In the congregation was a woman who for eighteen years had been ill from some psychological cause; she was bent double and was quite unable to straighten herself up. When Jesus noticed her, he called her and said, "You are set free from your illness!"

And he put his hands upon her, and at once she stood upright and praised God. But the president of the synagogue, in his annoyance at Jesus' healing on the Sabbath, announced to the congregation, "There are six days in which men may work. Come on one of them and be healed, and not on the Sabbath day!"

But the Lord answered him, saying, "You hypocrites, every single one of you unties his ox or his ass from the stall on the Sabbath day and leads him away to water! This woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom you all know Satan has kept bound for eighteen years - surely she should be released from such bonds on the Sabbath day!"

These words reduced his opponents to shame, but the crowd was thrilled at all the glorious things he did.

MYSTERIES OF THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN: "THE TINY MUSTARD SEED THAT GROWS INTO A GREAT TREE" (also Matthew 13:31-32; Mark 4:30-32)

Luke 13:18-19 - Then he went on (at a later point in Luke's Gospel, after Jesus had healed the crippled woman), "What is the kingdom of God like? What illustration can I use to make it plain to you? It is like a grain of mustard-seed which a man took and dropped in his own garden. It grew and became a tree and the birds came and nested in its branches.

MYSTERIES OF THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN: "THE YEAST MIXED WITH FLOUR" (also Matthew 13:33)

Luke 13:20-21 - Then again he said (as in Matthew), "What can I say the kingdom of God is like? It is like the yeast which a woman took and covered up in three measures of flour until the whole lot had risen."

ARE WE REALLY DOING GOD'S WILL? OR WILL JESUS SAY "I NEVER KNEW YOU!" (also Matthew 7:21-23)

Luke 13:22-30 - So he (Jesus) went on his way through towns and villages, teaching as he went and making his way towards Jerusalem. Someone remarked, "Lord, are only a few men to be saved?"

And Jesus told them, "You must do your utmost to get in through the narrow door, for many, I assure you, will try to do so and will not succeed, once the master of the house has got up and shut the door. Then you may find yourselves standing outside and knocking at the door crying, 'Lord, please open the door for us.' He will reply to you, 'I don't know who you are or where you come from.' 'But ...' you will protest, 'we have had meals with you, and you taught in our streets!' Yet he will say to you, 'I tell you I do not know where you have come from. Be off, you scoundrels!' At that time there will be tears and bitter regret - to see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets inside the kingdom of God, and you yourselves excluded,

outside! Yes, and people will come from the east and the west, and from the north and the south, and take their seats in the kingdom of God. There are some at the back now who will be in the front then, and there are some in front now who will then be far behind."

JESUS AND THE ANTAGONISM OF HEROD ANTIPAS

Luke 13:31-35 - Just then (as he taught about the broad and narrow ways) some Pharisees arrived to tell him, "You must get right away from here, for Herod (Antipas, tetrarch of Galilee and Perea) intends to kill you."

"Go and tell that fox," returned Jesus, "today and tomorrow I am expelling evil spirits and continuing my work of healing, and on the third day my work will be finished. But I must journey on today, tomorrow, and the next day, for it would never do for a prophet to meet his death outside Jerusalem!

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you murder the prophets and stone the messengers that are sent to you! How often have I longed to gather your children round me like a bird gathering her brood together under her wings, but you would never have it. Now, all that is left is yourselves, and your house. For I tell you that you will never see me again till the day when you cry,

'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!' (Psalm 118:26)"

Luke 14:1-35

THE MAN WITH DROPSY

Luke 14:1-6 - One Sabbath day (as Jesus continued to criticise the scribes and Pharisees for their hypocrisy) he went into the house of one of the leading Pharisees for a meal, and they were all watching him closely. Right in front of him was a man afflicted with dropsy (an accumulation of water in the body). So Jesus spoke to the scribes and Pharisees and said, "Well, is it right to heal on the Sabbath day or not?"

But there was no reply. So Jesus took the man and healed him and let him go. Then he said to them, "If an ass or a cow belonging to

one of you fell into a well, wouldn't you rescue him without the slightest hesitation even though it were the Sabbath?"

And this again left them quite unable to reply.

LEARNING HUMILITY THE HARD WAY - "TAKING THE BEST SEAT AT THE WEDDING FEAST". Also "REAL CHARITY"

Luke 14:7-14 - Then (after healing a man with dropsy in the house of a leading Pharisee) he gave a little word of advice to the guests when he noticed how they were choosing the best seats.

"When you are invited to a wedding reception, don't sit down in the best seat. It might happen that a more distinguished man than you has also been invited. Then your host might say, 'I am afraid you must give up your seat for this man.' And then, with considerable embarrassment, you will have to sit in the humblest place. No, when you are invited, go and take your seat in an inconspicuous place, so that when your host comes in he may say to you, 'Come on, my dear fellow, we have a much better seat than this for you.' That is the way to be important in the eyes of all your fellow-guests! For everyone who makes himself important will become insignificant, while the man who makes himself insignificant will find himself important."

Then, addressing his host, Jesus said, "When you give a luncheon or a dinner party, don't invite your friends or your brothers or relations or wealthy neighbours, for the chances are they will invite you back, and you will be fully repaid. No, when you give a party, invite the poor, the lame, the crippled and the blind. That way lies real happiness for you. they have no means of repaying you, but you will be repaid when good men are rewarded - at the resurrection."

CONTINUING TO REJECT GOD - "INVITATIONS TO THE GREAT BANQUET FOR THE KING'S SON"

- Similar to Matthew's parable on the invitation to the banquet for the king's son recorded after Jesus' final entry into Jerusalem (15.36):

Luke 14:15-24 - Then, one of the guests, hearing these remarks of Jesus (about taking the best seat at the feast) said, "What happiness for a man to eat a meal in the kingdom of God!"

Men who are "too busy" for the kingdom of God

But Jesus said to him, "Once upon a time, a man planned a big dinner party and invited a great many people. At dinner-time, he sent his servant out to tell those who were invited, 'Please come, everything is ready now.' But they all, as one man, began to make their excuses. The first one said to him, 'I have bought some land. I must go and look at it. Please excuse me.' Another one said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen and am on my way to try them out. Please convey my apologies.' Another one said, 'I have just got married and I am sure you will understand I cannot come.' So the servant returned and reported all this to his master. The master of the house was extremely annoyed and said to his servant, 'Hurry out now into the streets and alleys of the town, and bring here the poor and crippled and blind and lame.' Then the servant said, 'I have done what you told me, sir, and there are still empty places.' Then the master replied, 'Now go out to the roads and hedgerows and make them come inside, so that my house may be full. For I tell you that not one of the men I invited shall have a taste of my dinner.'"

COUNTING THE COST OF FOLLOWING JESUS - "THE UNFINISHED TOWER" and "THE KING GOING TO WAR"

Luke 14:25-33 - Now as Jesus proceeded on his journey (after the parable of the "invitations to the great banquet"), great crowds accompanied him, and he turned and spoke to them, "If anyone comes to me without 'hating' his father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, and even his own life, he cannot be a disciple of mine. The man who will not take up his cross and follow in my footsteps cannot be my disciple.

- Luke uses "hating" to contrast"love" for Jesus with human love in the strongest possible terms:

"If any of you wanted to build a tower, wouldn't he first sit down and work out the cost of it, to see if he can afford to finish it? Otherwise, when he has laid the foundation and found himself unable to complete the building, everyone who sees it will begin to jeer at him,

saying, 'This is the man who started to build a tower but couldn't finish it!'

"Or, suppose there is a king who is going to war with another king, doesn't he sit down first and consider whether he can engage the twenty thousand of the other king with his own ten thousand? And if he decides he can't, then, while the other king is still a long way off, he sends messengers to him to ask for conditions of peace. So it is with you; only the man who says goodbye to all his possessions can be my disciple.

LIVING AS WITNESSES TO JESUS CHRIST - "SALT, AND THE SALT OF THE EARTH"
(also Matthew 5:13; Mark 9:50)

Luke 14:34-35 - "Salt is a very good thing, but if salt loses its flavour, what can you use to restore it? It is no good for the ground and no good as manure. People just throw it away. Every man who has ears should use them!"

Luke 15:1-32

GOD'S GREAT LOVE FOR THE LOST: "THE LOST SHEEP"
(also Matthew 18:10-14)

Luke 15:1-7 - Now (in Luke's account after Jesus had told the parables about "the unfinished tower" and the "king going to war") all the tax-collectors and "outsiders" (or "sinners") were crowding around to hear what he had to say. The Pharisees and the scribes complained of this, remarking, "This man accepts sinners and even eats his meals with them."

So Jesus spoke to them, using this parable: "Wouldn't any man among you who owned a hundred sheep, and lost one of them, leave the ninety-nine to themselves in the open, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? And when he has found it, he will put it on his shoulders with great joy, and as soon as he gets home, he will call his friends and neighbours together. 'Come and celebrate with me,' he will say, 'for I have found that sheep of mine which was lost.' I tell you that it is the same in Heaven - there is more joy over one

sinner whose heart is changed than over ninety-nine righteous people who have no need for repentance.

GOD'S GREAT LOVE FOR THE LOST: "THE LOST SILVER COIN"

Luke 15:8-10 - (After the parable of "the lost sheep ....) "Or if there is a woman who has ten silver coins, if she should lose one, won't she take a lamp and sweep and search the house from top to bottom until she finds it? And when she has found it, she calls her friends and neighbours together. 'Come and celebrate with me', she says, 'for I have found that coin I lost.' I tell you, it is the same in Heaven - there is rejoicing among the angels of God over one sinner whose heart is changed."

GOD'S GREAT LOVE FOR THE LOST: "THE PRODIGAL SON, THE ELDER BROTHER AND THEIR FATHER"

Prodigal - A squanderer, lavish waster:

Luke 15:11-32 - Then he continued (after the parable of the "lost silver coin"), "Once there was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the property that will come to me.' So he divided up his property between the two of them. Before very long, the younger son collected all his belongings and went off to a foreign land, where he squandered his wealth in the wildest extravagance. And when he had run through all his money, a terrible famine arose in that country, and he began to feel the pinch. Then he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country who sent him out into the fields to feed the pigs. He got to the point of longing to stuff himself with the food the pigs were eating and not a soul gave him anything. Then he came to his senses and cried aloud, 'Why, dozens of my father's hired men have got more food than they can eat and here I am dying of hunger! I will get up and go back to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have done wrong in the sight of Heaven and in your eyes. I don't deserve to be called your son any more. Please take me on as one of your hired men.'"

So he got up and went to his father. But while he was still some distance off, his father saw him and his heart went out to him, and he

ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. But his son said, 'Father, I have done wrong in the sight of Heaven and in your eyes. I don't deserve to be called your son any more ....' 'Hurry!' called out his father to the servants, 'fetch the best clothes and put them on him! Put a ring on his finger and shoes on his feet, and get that calf we've fattened and kill it, and we will have a feast and a celebration! For this is my son - I thought he was dead, and he's alive again. I thought I had lost him, and he's found!' And they began to get the festivities going.

"But his elder son was out in the fields, and as he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants across to him and enquired what was the meaning of it all. 'Your brother has arrived, and your father has killed the calf we fattened because he has got him home again safe and sound,' was the reply. But he was furious and refused to go inside the house. So his father came outside and called him. Then he burst out, 'Look, how many years have I slaved for you and never disobeyed a single order of yours, and yet you have never given me so much as a young goat, so that I could give my friends a dinner? But when that son of yours arrives, who has spent all your money on prostitutes, for him you kill the calf we've fattened!' But the father replied, 'My dear son, you have been with me all the time and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and show our joy. For this is your brother; I thought he as dead - and he's alive. I thought he was lost - and he is found!'"

Luke 16:1-31

BEING WISE IN THE WAYS OF THE WORLD - "THE SHREWD BUT DISHONEST MANAGER"

Luke 16:1-12 - Then (after the parable of the prodigal son) there is this story he told his disciples: "Once there was a rich man whose agent was reported to him to be mismanaging his property. So he summoned him and said, 'What's this I hear about you? Give me an account of your stewardship - you're not fit to manage my household any longer.' At this the agent said to himself, 'What am I going to do now that my employer is taking away the stewardship from me? I am

not strong enough to dig and I can't sink to begging. Ah, I know what I'll do so that when I lose my position people will welcome me into their homes!' So he sent for each one of his master's debtors. 'How much do you owe my master?' he said to the first. 'A hundred barrels of oil,' he replied. 'Here,' replied the agent, 'take your bill, sit down, hurry up and write in fifty.' Then he said to another, 'And what's the size of your debt?' 'A thousand bushels of wheat,' he replied. 'Take your bill,' said the agent, 'and write in eight hundred.' Now the master praised this rascally steward because he had been so careful for his own future. For the children of this world are considerably more shrewd in dealing with their contemporaries than the children of light. Now my (Jesus') advice to you is to use 'money', tainted as it is, to make yourselves friends, so that when it comes to an end, they may welcome you into eternal habitations.

"The man who is faithful in the little things will be faithful in the big things, and the man who cheats in the little things will cheat in the big things too. So that if you are not fit to be trusted to deal with the wicked wealth of this world, who will trust you with the true riches? And if you are not trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own?"

- Together with verse 13 following, a difficult and seemingly immoral parable to understand with dishonesty on all sides, yet it provides a number of valuable lessons:

1. Christians must be wise in their dealings with the world, "as wise as serpents and yet as harmless as doves" (Jesus in Matthew 10:16);

2. They should use their money and possessions in the service of God;

3. If Christians cannot be trusted with small things, they cannot be trusted with the great things of God; and

4. They cannot serve both God and money.

WE CANNOT SERVE GOD AND MONEY AT THE SAME TIME
(also Matthew 6:24)

Luke 16:13 - "No servant can serve two masters. He is bound to hate one and love the other, or give his loyalty to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and the power of money at the same time."

THE PHARISEES AND PROSPERITY

Luke 16:14-15 - Now the Pharisees, who were very fond of money, heard all this (... the parable of the shrewd but dishonest manager) with a sneer. But he said to them, "You are the people who advertise your goodness before men, but God knows your hearts. Remember, there are things men consider perfectly splendid which are detestable in the sight of God!"

JESUS HAS COME NOT TO ABOLISH THE LAW AND THE PROPHETS, BUT TO COMPLETE THEM (also Matthew 5:17-20)

Luke 16:16-17 - "The Law and the Prophets were in force until John's day. From then on the good news of the kingdom of God has been proclaimed and men are forcing their way into it.

"Yet it would be easier for heaven and earth to disappear than for a single point of the Law to become a dead letter."

DIVORCE AND ADULTERY (also Matthew 5:31-32)

Luke 16:18 - "Any man who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery. And so does any man who marries the woman who was divorced from her husband."

THE TIME FOR SHARING OUR RICHES IS NOW - "THE RICH MAN IN HELL AND THE POOR LAZARUS IN HEAVEN"

Luke 16:19-31 - (Jesus talks to the Pharisees and others about money, the Law, divorce, and continues .....) "There was once a rich man (traditionally named Dives) who used to dress in purple and fine linen and lead a life of daily luxury. And there was a poor man called Lazarus who was put down at his gate. ....

Lazarus - This is the only time a character in a parable is named. Interestingly, it is the same name as the friend Jesus raised from the dead (John 11:1-44):

.... He (Lazarus) was covered with sores. He used to long to be fed with the scraps from the rich man's table. Yes, and the dogs used to come and lick his sores. Well, it happened that the poor man died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. And from among the dead he looked up and saw Abraham a long way away, and Lazarus in his arms. 'Father Abraham!' he cried out, 'please pity me. Send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in agony in these flames.' But Abraham replied, 'Remember, my son, that you used to have the good things in your lifetime, while Lazarus suffered the bad. Now he is being comforted here, while you are in agony. And besides this, a great chasm has been set between you and us, so that those who want to go to you from this side cannot do so, and people cannot come to us from your side.' At this he said, 'Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house for I have five brothers. He could warn them about all this and prevent their coming to this place of torture.' But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets: they can listen to them.' 'Ah no, father Abraham,' he said, 'if only someone were to go to them from the dead, they would change completely.' But Abraham told him, 'If they will not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they would not be convinced even if somebody were to rise from the dead (as Jesus did!).'"

Luke 17:1-37

LEADING OTHERS INTO SIN - "THE MILLSTONE AROUND THE NECK"
(also Matthew 18:6-7; Mark 9:42)

Luke 17:1-3a - .... Jesus said to his disciples, "It is inevitable that there should be pitfalls, but alas for the man who is responsible for them! It would be better for that man to have a mill-stone hung round his neck and be thrown into the sea, than that he should trip up one of these little ones. So be careful how you live.

FORGIVENESS HAS NO LIMITS
(also Matthew 18:21-35 in part)

Luke 17:3b-4 - "If your brother offends you, take him to task about it, and if he is sorry, forgive him. Yes, if he wrongs you seven times in one day and turns to you and says, 'I am sorry' seven times, you must forgive him."

FAITH AS BIG AS A MUSTARD SEED

Luke 17:5-6 - And the apostles said to the Lord, "Give us more faith."

And he replied, "If your faith were as big as a grain of mustard seed, you could say to this fig-tree, 'Pull yourself up by the roots and plant yourself in the sea', and it would do what you said!"

UNCOMPLAINING SERVICE - "A SERVANT'S DUTY"

Luke 17:7-10 - (Jesus talks about leading others into sin and having faith as big as a mustard seed. Then ....) "If any of you has a servant ploughing or looking after the sheep, are you likely to say to him when he comes in from the fields, 'Come straight in and sit down to your meal'? Aren't you more likely to say, 'Get my supper ready: change your coat, and wait until I eat and drink: and then, when I've finished, you can have your meal'? Do you feel particularly grateful to your servant for doing what you tell him? I don't think so. It is the same with yourselves - when you have done everything that you are told to do, you can say, 'We are not much good as servants, for we have only done what we ought to do.'"

THE TEN LEPERS

Luke 17:11-19 - In the course of his journey to Jerusalem (the last from Galilee), Jesus crossed the boundary between Samaria and Galilee, and as he was approaching a village, ten lepers met him. They kept their distance but shouted out, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!"

When Jesus saw them, he said, "Go and show yourselves to the priests."

And it happened that as they went on their way they were cured. One of their number, when he saw that he was cured, turned round and praised God at the top of his voice, and then fell on his face before Jesus and thanked him. This man was a Samaritan. And at this Jesus remarked, "Weren't there ten men healed? Where are the other nine? Is nobody going to turn and praise God for what he has done, except this stranger?"

And he said to the man, "Stand up now, and go on your way. It is your faith that has made you well."

Samaritan - Of Samaria; a native of Samaria; survivors of the original northern kingdom of Israel who intermarried with other peoples; followers of the Samaritan religion that only accepted the Samaritan version of the Pentateuch Bible. Their hostility with the Jews was mainly for historical, and not religious reasons. Small numbers of Samaritans still live today in modern Israel.

JESUS DESCRIBES THE END-TIMES AND HIS RETURN (also Matthew 24:1-51; Mark 13:1-37)

Luke 17:20-37 - Luke's first account of the end-times and the second coming of Jesus is reported some time before the Last Week in Jerusalem:

Later (after Jesus had healed the ten lepers on his way through Samaria towards Jerusalem), he was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was coming, and he gave them this reply: "The kingdom of God never comes by watching for it. Men cannot say, 'Look, here it is', or 'there it is', for the kingdom of God is inside you."

Jesus tell his disciples about the future

Then he said to the disciples, "The time will come when you will long to see again a single day of the Son of Man, but you will not see it. People will say to you, 'Look, there he is', or 'Look, here he is.' Stay where you are and don't go off looking for him! For the day of the Son of Man will be like lightning flashing from one end of the sky to the other. But before that happens, he must go through much suffering and be utterly rejected by this generation. In the time of the

coming of the Son of Man, life will be as it was in the days of Noah. People ate and drank, married and were given in marriage, right up to the day when Noah entered the ark - and then came the flood and destroyed them all. It will be just the same as it was in the days of Lot (the nephew of Abraham). People ate and drank, bought and sold, planted and built, but on the day that Lot left Sodom, it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. That is how it will be on the day when the Son of Man is revealed. When that day comes, the man who is on the roof of his house, with his goods inside it, must not come down to get them. And the man out in the fields must not turn back for anything. Remember what happened to Lot's wife (who looked back at Sodom during its destruction, and was turned into a pillar of salt, Genesis 19:26). Whoever tries to preserve his life will lose it, and the man who is prepared to lose his life will preserve it. I tell you, that night there will be two men in one bed, one man will be taken and the other will be left. Two women will be turning the grinding-mill together; one will be taken and the other left."

"But where, Lord?" they asked him.

"Wherever there is a dead body, there the vultures will flock," he replied.

Luke 18:1-43

KEEP ON PRAYING - "THE PERSISTENT WIDOW AND THE UNJUST JUDGE"

Luke 18:1-8 - Then (after Jesus' has taught about the end-times) he gave them an illustration to show that they must always pray and never lose heart.

"Once upon a time," he said, "there was a magistrate in a town who had neither fear of God nor respect for his fellow-men. There was a widow in the town who kept coming to him, saying, 'Please protect me from the man who is trying to ruin me.' And for a long time he refused. But later he said to himself, 'Although I don't fear God and have no respect for men, yet this woman is such a nuisance that I

shall give judgment in her favour, or else her continual visits will be the death of me!'"

Then the Lord said, "Notice how this dishonest magistrate behaved. Do you suppose God, patient as he is, will not see justice done for his chosen, who appeal to him day and night? I assure you he will not delay in seeing justice done. Yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find men on earth who believe in him?"

PRIDE AND HUMILITY - "THE PHARISEE AND THE TAX COLLECTOR"

Luke 18:9-14 - Then (after the story of the "persistent widow") he gave this illustration to certain people who were confident of their own goodness and looked down on others: "Two men went up to the Temple to pray, one was a Pharisee, the other was a tax-collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed like this with himself, 'O God, I do thank you that I am not like the rest of mankind, greedy, dishonest, impure, or even like that tax-collector over there. I fast twice every week; I give away a tenth-part of all my income.' But the tax-collector stood in a distant corner, scarcely daring to look up to Heaven, and with a gesture of despair, said, 'God, have mercy on a sinner like me.' I assure you that he was the man who went home justified in God's sight, rather than the other one. For everyone who sets himself up as somebody will become a nobody, and the man who makes himself nobody will become somebody."

Tenth-part (or tithe) - "Tithe", Old English for a tenth. Originally one tenth of the produce of land or labour given to God (Leviticus 27:30) to support the Temple and its priesthood (Numbers 18:21). Applied to Christians, it should mean returning one tenth of their time, possessions, money, to honour and further God's work on earth -

ACCEPTING THE KINGDOM OF GOD LIKE A CHILD (also Matthew 19:13-15; Mark 10:13-16)

Luke 18:15-17 - Then (in Luke's account after the parables about "the persistent widow and the unjust judge" and "the Pharisee and the tax-collector") people began to bring babies to him so that he could put his hands on them. But when the disciples noticed it, they

frowned on them. But Jesus called them to him, and said, "You must let little children come to me, and you must never prevent their coming. The kingdom of God belongs to little children like these. I tell you, the man who will not accept the kingdom of God like a little child will never get into it at all."

POSSESSIONS AS A POSSIBLE BARRIER TO FOLLOWING JESUS - "THE RICH YOUNG MAN"
(also Matthew 19:16-30; Mark 10:17-31)

Luke 18:18-30 - Then one of the Jewish rulers put this question to him, "Master, I know that you are good; tell me, please, what must I do to be sure of eternal life?"

"I wonder why you call me good?" returned Jesus. "No one is good - only the one God. You know the commandments -

'Do not commit adultery,' 'Do not murder,' 'Do not steal,' 'Do not bear false witness,' 'Honour your father and your mother' (Exodus 20:12-16; Deuteronomy 5:16-20)"

"All these," he replied, "I have carefully kept since I was quite young."

And when Jesus heard that, he said to him, "There is still one thing you have missed. Sell everything you possess and give the money away to the poor, and you will have riches in Heaven. Then come and follow me."

But when he heard this, he was greatly distressed for he was very rich.

And when Jesus saw how his face fell, he remarked, "How difficult it is for those who have great possessions to enter the kingdom of God! A camel could squeeze through the eye of a needle more easily than a rich man could get into the kingdom of God."

Those who heard Jesus say this, exclaimed, "Then who can possibly be saved?"

Jesus replied, "What men find impossible is perfectly possible with God."

"Well," rejoined Peter, "we have left all that we ever had and followed you."

And Jesus told them, "Believe me, nobody has left his home or wife, or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God, without receiving very much more in this present life - and eternal life in the world to come."

JESUS TEACHES ABOUT HIS DEATH AND RESURRECTION FOR A THIRD TIME
(also Matthew 20:17-19; Mark 10:32-34)

Luke 18:31-34 - Then Jesus took the twelve on one side and spoke to them, "Listen to me. We are now going up to Jerusalem and everything that has been written by the prophets about the Son of Man will come true. For he will be handed over to the heathen, and he is going to be jeered at and insulted and spat upon, and then they will flog and kill him. But he will rise again on the third day."

But they did not understand any of this, His words were quite obscure to them and they had no idea of what he meant.

THE BLIND MAN NEAR JERICHO
(also Matthew 20:29-34; Mark 10:46-52)

Luke 18:35-43 - Then, as he was approaching Jericho, it happened that there was a blind man sitting by the roadside, begging. He heard the crowd passing and enquired what it was all about. And they told him, "Jesus the man from Nazareth is going past you." So he shouted out, "Jesus, Son of David, have pity on me!"

Those who were in front tried to hush his cries. But that made him call out all the more, "Son of David, have pity on me!"

So Jesus stood quite still and ordered the man to be brought to him. And when he was quite close, he said to him, "What do you want me to do for you?"

"Lord, make me see again," he cried.

"You can see again! Your faith has cured you," returned Jesus. And his sight was restored at once, and he followed Jesus, praising God.

All the people who saw it thanked God too.

Luke 19:1-48

THE CALLING OF ZACCHAEUS THE TAX-COLLECTOR

Luke 19:1-10 - Then he went into Jericho (on the final stage of the last journey to Jerusalem) and was making his way through it. And here we find a wealthy man called Zacchaeus, a chief collector of taxes, wanting to see what sort of person Jesus was. But the crowd prevented him from doing so, for he was very short. So he ran ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to get a view of Jesus as he was heading that way. When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and saw the man and said, "Zacchaeus, hurry up and come down. I must be your guest today."

So Zacchaeus hurriedly climbed down and gladly welcomed him. But the bystanders muttered their disapproval, saying, "Now he has gone to stay with a real sinner."

But Zacchaeus himself stopped and said to the Lord, "Look, sir, I will give half my property to the poor (compared to all the property the rich young ruler needed to give away to follow Jesus). And if I have swindled anybody out of anything I will pay him back four times as much,"

Jesus said to him, "Salvation has come to this house today! Zacchaeus is a descendant of Abraham, and it was the lost the Son of Man came to seek - and to save."

USING OUR GIFTS AND ABILITIES WHILE WAITING FOR THE RETURN OF JESUS - "THE TEN POUNDS OR MINAS"

- This parable is similar to Matthew's "talents of money" (15.41):

Luke 19:11-27 - Then (having called Zacchaeus the tax collector to follow him ....) as the crowd still listened attentively, Jesus went on to give them this parable, For the fact that he was nearing Jerusalem made them imagine that the kingdom of God was on the point of appearing.

"Once upon a time a man of good family went abroad to accept a kingdom and then return. He summoned ten of his servants and gave them each ten pounds, with the words, 'Use this money to trade with until I come back.' But the citizens detested him and they sent a delegation after him, to say, 'We will not have this man to be our king.' Then later, when he had received his kingdom, he returned and gave orders for the servants to whom he had given the money to be called to him, so that he could find out what profit they had made. The first came into his presence, and said, 'Sire, your ten pounds have made a hundred pounds more.' 'Splendid, my good fellow,' he said, 'since you have proved trustworthy over this small amount, I am going to put you in charge of ten towns.' The second came in and said, 'Sire, your ten pounds have made fifty pounds.' and he said to him, 'Good, you're appointed governor of five towns.' When the last came, he said, 'Sire, here are your ten pounds, which I have been keeping wrapped up in a handkerchief. I have been scared - I know you're a hard man, getting something for nothing and reaping where you never sowed.' To which he replied, 'You scoundrel, your own words condemn you! You knew perfectly well, did you, that I am a hard man who gets something for nothing and reaps where he never sowed? Then why didn't you put my money into the bank, and then when I returned I could have had it back with interest?' Then he said to those who were standing by, 'Take away his ten pounds and give it to the fellow who has a hundred.'

"'But, sire, he has a hundred pounds already,' they said to him. 'Yes,' he replied, 'and I tell you that the man who has something will get more given to him. But as for the man who has nothing, even his "nothing" will be taken away. And as for these enemies of mine who objected to my being their king, bring them here and execute them in my presence.'"

TOWARDS THE END Spring c AD30

THE FINAL ENTRY OF JESUS INTO JERUSALEM
(also Matthew 21:1-11; Mark 11:1-11; John 12:12-19)

Luke 19:28-44 - After these words (the parable of the ten minas or pounds), Jesus walked on ahead of them on his way to Jerusalem.

Then as he was approaching Bethphage and Bethany, near the hill called the Mount of Olives, he sent off two of his disciples, telling them, "Go into the village just ahead of you, and there you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever yet ridden. Untie it and bring it here. And if anybody asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' just say, 'the Lord needs it.'"

So the messengers went off and found things just as he had told them. In fact, as they were untying the colt, the owners did say, "Why are you untying it?" and they replied, "The Lord needs it." So they brought it to Jesus and, throwing their cloaks upon it, mounted Jesus on its back. Then as he rode along, people spread out their coats on the roadway. And as he approached the city, where the road slopes down from the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of his disciples shouted praises to God for all the marvellous things that they had seen him do.

"'Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!'" (Psalm 118:26)

they cried. "There is peace in Heaven and glory on high!"

There were some Pharisees in the crowd who said to Jesus, "Master, restrain your disciples!"

To which he replied, "I tell you that if they kept quiet, the very stones in the road would burst out cheering!"

The sight of the city moves him to tears

And as he came still nearer to the city, he caught sight of it and wept over it, saying, "Ah, if you only knew, even at this eleventh hour, on what your peace depends - but you cannot see it. The time is coming when your enemies will encircle you with ramparts, surrounding you and hemming you in on every side. And they will hurl you and all your children to the ground - yes, they will not leave you one stone standing upon another - all because you did not know when God Himself was visiting you!"

JESUS DRIVES THE BUYERS AND SELLERS FROM THE TEMPLE
(also Matthew 21:12-17; Mark 11:15-19)

- This is the second recorded incident of this nature. The first came in John 2:12-25 at the start of Jesus' three year ministry:

Luke 19:45-48 - Then (after Jesus had wept over the city of Jerusalem) he went into the Temple, and proceeded to throw out the traders there.

"It is written," he told them, "

'My house is a house of prayer' (Isaiah 56:7),

but you have turned it into a

'den of thieves!' (Jeremiah 7:11)"

Jesus teaches daily in the Temple

Then day after day he was teaching inside the Temple. The chief priests, the scribes and the national leaders were all the time trying to get rid of him, but they could not find any way to do it since all the people hung upon his words.

Luke 20:1-47

THE AUTHORITY OF JESUS IS QUESTIONED
(also Matthew 21:23-27; Mark 11:27-33)

Luke 20:1-8 - Then one day (after arriving in Jerusalem) as he was teaching the people in the Temple, and preaching the Gospel to them, the chief priests, the scribes and elders confronted him in a body and asked him this direct question, "Tell us by whose authority you act as you do - who gave you such authority?"

"I have a question for you, too," replied Jesus. "John's baptism, now - tell me, did it come from Heaven or was it purely human?"

At this they began arguing with each other, saying, "If we say, 'from Heaven,' he will say to us, 'Then why didn't you believe in him?' but if we say it was purely human, this mob will stone us to death, for they

are convinced that John was a prophet." So they replied that they did not know where it came from.

"Then," returned Jesus, "neither will I tell you by what authority I do what I am doing."

THOSE WHO WON'T ACCEPT GOD: "THE WICKED TENANTS OF THE VINEYARD". Also "THE REJECTED STONE" (also Matthew 21:33-46; Mark 12:1-12)

Luke 20:9-19 - Then (while Jesus was in the Temple and the chief priests, scribes and elders questioned him about his authority) he turned to the people and told them this parable: "There was once a man who planted a vineyard, let it out farm-workers, and went abroad for some time. Then, when the season arrived, he sent a servant to the farm-workers so that they could give him the proceeds of the vineyard. But the farm-workers beat him up and sent him back empty-handed. So he sent another servant, and they beat him up as well, manhandling him disgracefully, and sent him back empty-handed. Then he sent a third servant, but after wounding him severely they threw him out. Then the owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do now? I will send them my son who is so dear to me. Perhaps they will respect him.' But when the farm-workers saw him, they talked the matter over with each other and said, 'This man is the heir - come on, let's kill him, and we shall get everything that he would have had!' And they threw him outside the vineyard and killed him. What do you suppose the owner will do to them? He will come and destroy the men who were working his property, and hand it over to others."

When they heard this, they said, "God forbid!"

But he looked them straight in the eyes and said, "Then what is the meaning of this scripture -

'The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone?' (Psalm 118:22)

The man who falls on that stone will be broken, and the man on whom it falls will be crushed to powder."

The authorities resort to trickery

The scribes and chief priests longed to get their hands on him at that moment, but they were afraid of the people. They knew well enough that his parable referred to them.

THE PHARISEES AND HERODIANS QUESTION HIM - PAYING TAXES
(also Matthew 22:15-22; Mark 12:13-17)

Luke 20:20-26 - They (the scribes and chief priests) watched him, however, and sent some spies into the crowd, pretending that they were honest men, to fasten on something that he might say which could be used to hand him over to the authority and power of the governor (the Roman Pontius Pilate).

These men asked him, "Master, we know that what you say and teach is right, and that you teach the way of God truly without fear or favour. Now, is it right for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?"

But Jesus saw through their cunning and said to them, "Show me one of the coins. Whose face is this, and whose name is in the inscription?"

"Caesar's," they said.

"Then give to Caesar," he replied, "what belongs to Caesar, and to God what belongs to God."

So his reply gave them no sort of handle that they could use against him publicly. And in fact they were so taken aback by his answer that they had nothing more to say.

THE SADDUCEES QUESTION HIM - RISING FROM DEATH
(also Matthew 22:23-33; Mark 12:18-27)

Luke 20:27-40 - Then (again after the question on taxes) up came some of the Sadducees (who deny that there is any resurrection) and they asked him, "Master, Moses told us in the scripture, 'If a man's brother should die without any children, he should marry the widow and raise up a family for his brother.' Now, there were once seven brothers. The first got married and died childless, and the

second and the third married the woman, and in fact all the seven married her and died without leaving any children. Lastly, the woman herself died. Now in the 'resurrection' whose wife is she of these seven men, for she belonged to all of them?"

"People in this world," Jesus replied, "marry and are given in marriage. But those who are considered worthy of reaching that world, which means rising from the dead, neither marry nor are they given in marriage. They cannot die any more but live like the angels; for being children of the resurrection, they are the sons of God. But that the dead are raised, even Moses showed to be true in the story of the bush, when he calls the Lord

'the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob' (Exodus 3:6,15).

For God is not God of the dead, but of the living. For all men are alive to him."

To this some of the scribes replied, "Master, that was a good answer."

And indeed nobody had the courage to ask him any more questions.

JESUS IN RETURN, ASKS A QUESTION - ABOUT THE EXPECTED MESSIAH
(also Matthew 22:41-46; Mark 12:35-37)

Luke 20:41-44 - But Jesus (having answered the Sadducees' question about resurrection) went on to say, "How can they say that Christ is David's son? For David himself said in the book of psalms -

'The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool.' (Psalm 110:1)

David is plainly calling him 'Lord'. How then can he be his son?"

JESUS CRITICISES THE TEACHERS OF THE LAW (OR SCRIBES) AND THE PHARISEES
(also Matthew 23:1-39; Mark 12:38-40)

Luke 20:45-47 - Then while everybody was listening (to the debate), Jesus remarked to his disciples, "Be on your guard against the

scribes, who enjoy walking round in long robes and love having men bow to them in public, getting front seats in the synagogue, and the best places at dinner parties - while all the time they are battening on widow's property and covering it up with long prayers. These men are only heading for deeper damnation."

Luke 21:1-38

JESUS COMPARES THE RICH MAN'S GIVING WITH THE WIDOW'S OFFERING!
(also Mark 12:41-44)

Luke 21:1-4 - Then (again after warning his disciples about the scribe's hypocrisy) he looked up and saw the rich people dropping their gifts into the treasury, and he noticed a poor widow drop in two coppers, and he commented, "I assure you that this poor widow put in more than all of them, for they have all put in what they can easily spare, but she in her poverty has given away her whole living."

JESUS DESCRIBES THE END-TIMES AND HIS RETURN
(also Matthew 24:1-51; Mark 13:1-37)

Luke 21:5-38 - Then (after the debate with the Pharisees and Sadducees ....) when some of them (the disciples) were talking about the Temple and pointing out the beauty of its lovely stonework and the various ornaments that people had given, he said, "Yes, you can gaze on all this today, but the time is coming when not a single stone will be left upon another, without being thrown down."

So they asked him, "Master, when will this happen, and what sign will there be that these things are going to take place?"

"Be careful that you are not deceived," he replied. "There will be many coming in my name, saying 'I am he' and 'The time is very near now.' Never follow men like that. And when you hear about wars and disturbances, don't be alarmed. These things must indeed happen first, but the end will not come immediately.

And prophesies world-wide suffering

Then he continued, "Nation will rise up against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be great earthquakes and famines and plagues in this place or that. There will be dreadful sights, and great signs from heaven. But before all this happens, men will arrest you and persecute you, handing you over to synagogue or prison, or bringing you before kings and governors, for my name's sake. This will be your chance to witness for me. So make up your minds not to think out your defence beforehand. I will give you such eloquence and wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to resist or contradict it. But you will be betrayed, even by parents and brothers and kinsfolk and friends. and there will be some of you who will be killed and you will be hated everywhere for my name's sake. Yet, not a hair of your head will perish. Hold on, and you will win your souls!

"But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armed forces, then you will know that the time of her devastation has arrived. Then is the time for those who are in Judea to fly to the hills. And those who are in the city itself must get out of it, and those who are already in the country must not try to get into the city. For these are the days of vengeance, when all that the scriptures have said will come true. Alas for those who are pregnant and those who have tiny babies in those days! For there will be bitter misery in the land and great anger against this people. They will die by the sword. They will be taken off as prisoners into all nations. Jerusalem will be trampled under foot by the heathen until the heathen's day is over. There will be signs in the sun and moon and stars, and on the earth there will be dismay among the nations and bewilderment at the roar of the surging sea. Men's courage will fail completely as they realise what is threatening the world, for the very powers of heaven will be shaken. Then men will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with great power and splendour! But when these things begin to happen, look up, hold your heads high, for you will soon be free."

Vigilance is essential

Then he gave them a parable.

"Look at a fig-tree, or indeed any tree, when it begins to burst its buds, and you realise without anybody telling you that summer is

nearly here. So, when you see these things happening, you can be equally sure that the kingdom of God has nearly come. Believe me, this generation will not disappear until all this has taken place. Earth and heaven will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

"Be on your guard - see to it that your minds are never clouded by dissipation or drunkenness or the worries of this life, or else that day may catch you like the springing of a trap - for it will come upon every inhabitant of the whole earth.

"You must be vigilant at all times, praying that you may be strong enough to come safely through all that is going to happen, and stand in the presence of the Son of Man."

And every day he went on teaching in the Temple, and every evening he went off and spent the night on the hill which is called the Mount of Olives. And the people used to come early in the morning to listen to him in the Temple.

Luke 22:1-71

THE PLOT TO KILL JESUS
(also Matthew 26:3-5; Mark 14:1-2; John 11:45-57)

Luke 22:1-2 - Now (after speaking about the end-times, teaching the people in the Temple each day, and ....) as the feast of unleavened bread, called the Passover, was approaching, fear of the people made the chief priests and scribes try desperately to find a way of getting rid of Jesus

JUDAS ISCARIOT DECIDES TO BETRAY HIM
(also Matthew 26:14-16; Mark 14:10-11)

Luke 22:3-6 - Then (following Jesus' teaching about the end-times, and as the chief priests and scribes plan to get rid of him) a diabolical plan came into the mind of Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve. He went and discussed with the chief priests and officers a method of getting Jesus into their hands. They were delighted and arranged to pay him for it. He agreed, and began to look for a suitable opportunity for betrayal when there was no crowd present.

THE LAST SUPPER
(also Matthew 26:17-29; Mark 14:12-25; John 13:1-30; 1 Corinthians 11:23-25)

Luke 22:7-30 - Then (as in Matthew and Mark) the day of unleavened bread arrived, on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed ....

Passover lamb - At the climax of the power-struggles between Moses and the Egyptian Pharaoh leading to the Exodus (Exodus 7-12), a Passover lamb without defect was sacrificed. It's blood was used to mark the houses "passed over", or spared the death of their first-born - both human or animals -

.... and Jesus sent off Peter and John with the words, "Go and make all the preparations for us to eat the Passover."

"Where would you like us to do this?" they asked.

And he replied, "Listen, just as you're going into the city a man carrying a jug of water will meet you. Follow him to the house he is making for. Then say to the owner of the house, 'The Master has this message for you - which is the room where my disciples and I may eat the Passover?' And he will take you upstairs and show you a large room furnished for our needs. Make all the preparations there."

So they went off and found everything exactly as he had told them it would be, and they made the Passover preparations.

Then, when the time came, he took his seat at table with the apostles, and spoke to them, "With all my heart I have longed to eat this Passover with you before the time comes for me to suffer. Believe me, I shall not eat the Passover again until all that it means is fulfilled in the kingdom of God."

Then taking a cup from them he thanked God, and said, "Take this and share it amongst yourselves, for I tell you I shall drink no more wine until the kingdom of God comes."

The mysterious words which were remembered later

Then he took a loaf and after thanking God he broke it and gave it to them, with these words, "This is my body which is given for you: do this in remembrance of me."

So too, he gave them a cup after supper with the words, "This cup is the new agreement made in my own blood which is shed for you. Yet the hand of the man who is betraying me lies with mine at this moment on the table. The Son of Man goes on his appointed way: yet alas for the man by whom he is betrayed!"

Jesus again teaches humility

And at this they began to debate among themselves as to which of them would do this thing.

And then a dispute arose among them as to who should be considered the most important.

But Jesus said to them, "Among the heathen it is their kings who lord it over them, and their rulers are given the title of 'benefactors.' But it must not be so with you! Your greatest man must become like a junior and your leader must be a servant. Who is the greater, the man who sits down to dinner or the man who serves him? Obviously, the man who sits down to dinner - yet I am the one who is the servant among you. But you are the men who have stood by me in all that I have gone through, and as surely as my Father has given me my kingdom, so I give you the right to eat and drink at my table in that kingdom. Yes, you will sit on thrones and rule the twelve tribes of Israel!

THE LAST NIGHT CONTINUED AND THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE

(also Matthew 26:30-46; Mark 14:26-42; John 13:31-38; 18:1-2)

Luke 22:31-46 - (As Jesus concludes the Last Supper and teaches about humility, he continues ....) "Oh Simon, Simon, do you know that Satan has asked to have you all to sift like wheat? - but I have prayed for you that you may not lose your faith. Yes, when you have turned back to me, you must strengthen these brothers of yours."

Peter said to him, "Lord, I am ready to go to prison or even to die with you!"

"I tell you, Peter," returned Jesus, "before the cock crows today you will deny three times that you know me!"

Jesus tells his disciples that the crisis has arrived

Then he continued to tell all, "That time when I sent you out without any purse or wallet or shoes - did you find you needed anything?"

"No, not a thing," they replied.

"But now," Jesus continued, "if you have a purse or wallet, take it with you, and if you have no sword, sell your coat and buy one! For I tell you that this scripture must be fulfilled in me -

'And he was numbered with the transgressors' (Isaiah 53:12).

So comes the end of what they wrote about me."

Then the disciples said, "Lord, look, here are two swords."

And Jesus returned, "That is enough."

- The reference to swords is at odds with Jesus' usual teaching. He may have been referring to the disciples need to be as strong and determined in spiritual battle as the sword-armed soldier is in his earthly fight. "That is enough" should probably read, "that is enough of such talk" -

Then he went out of the city and up on to the Mount of Olives, as he had often done before, with the disciples following him. And when he reached his usual place, he said to them, "Pray that you may not have to face temptation!"

Then he went off by himself, about a stone's throw away, and falling on his knees, prayed in these words - "Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me - but it is not my will, but yours, that must be done."

And an angel from Heaven appeared, strengthening him. He was in agony and prayed even more intensely so that his sweat was like great drops of blood falling to the ground. Then he got to his feet

from his prayer and walking back to his disciples, he found them sleeping through sheer grief.

"Why are you sleeping?" he said to them. "You must get up and go on praying that you may not have to face temptation." (A crowd of people now arrive led by Judas Iscariot.)

JESUS IS BETRAYED AND ARRESTED
(also Matthew 26:47-56; Mark 14:43-52; John 18:3-12)

Luke 22:47-54a - While he was still speaking (to his disciples about temptation as he prayed) a crowd of people arrived, led by the man called Judas, one of the twelve. He stepped up to Jesus to kiss him.

"Judas, would you betray the son of Man with a kiss?" said Jesus to him.

And the disciples, seeing what was going to happen, cried, "Lord, shall we use our swords?"

And one of them did slash at the High Priest's servant, cutting off his right ear. But Jesus retorted, "That will do!"

And he touched his ear and healed him. Then he spoke to the chief priests, Temple officers and elders who were there to arrest him, "So you have come out with your swords and staves as if I were a bandit. Day after day I was with you in the Temple and you never laid a finger on me - but this is your hour and the power of darkness is yours!"

Then they arrested him .....

After his arrest Jesus appears before three separate authorities:

(1) Annas still a "chief priest", and the Sanhedrin of which Caiaphas is the High Priest;

(2) Pontius Pilate, Roman procurator of Judea and Samaria; and

(3) Herod Antipas, Jewish tetrarch of Galilee and Perea visiting Jerusalem at that time.

Pontius Pilate actually sentences Jesus to death by crucifixion

JESUS IS TRIED BEFORE THE JEWISH AUTHORITIES; PETER BETRAYS HIM
(also Matthew 26:57-27:2; Mark 14:53-15:1; John 18:13-28)

Luke 22:54b-23:1 - (After arresting Jesus, the armed crowd and the Temple officers ....) marched him off to the High Priest's house. Peter followed at a distance, and sat down among some people who had lighted a fire in the middle of the courtyard and were sitting round it. A maid-servant saw him sitting there in the firelight, peered into his face, and said "This man was with him too."

But he denied it and said, "I don't know him, girl!"

A few minutes later someone else noticed Peter, and said, "You're one of these men too."

But Peter said, "Man, I am not!".

Then about an hour later someone else insisted, "I am convinced this fellow was with him. Why, he is a Galilean!"

"Man," returned Peter, "I don't know what you're talking about."

And immediately, while he was still speaking, the cock crew. The Lord turned his head and looked straight at Peter, and into his mind flashed the words that the Lord had said to him ... "You will disown me three times before the cock crows today." And he went outside and wept bitterly.

Then the men who held Jesus made a great game of knocking him about. And they blindfolded him and asked him, "Now prophet, guess who hit you that time!" And that was only the beginning of the way they insulted him.

In the early morning Jesus is formally interrogated

Then when daylight came, the assembly of the elders of the people, which included both chief priests and scribes, met and marched him off to their own council (the Sanhedrin). There they asked him, "If you really are Christ, tell us!"

"If I tell you, you will never believe me, and if I ask you a question, you will not answer me. But from now on the Son of Man will take his seat at the right hand of almighty God."

Then they all said, "So you are the Son of God then?"

"You are right; I am," Jesus told them.

Then they said, "Why do we need to call any more witnesses, for we ourselves have heard this thing from his own lips?"

Luke 23:1-56

Jesus is taken before Pilate and Herod

Then they rose up in a body and took him off to Pilate .....

JESUS BEFORE THE ROMAN PONTIUS PILATE; THE SENTENCE
(also Matthew 27:11-26; Mark 15:2-15; John 18:29-19:16a)

Luke 23:2-25 - (Members of the Sanhedrin have taken Jesus before Pilate and .....) began their accusation in these words, "Here is this man whom we found corrupting our people, and telling them that it is wrong to pay taxes to Caesar, claiming that he himself is Christ, a king."

But Pilate addressed his question to Jesus, "Are you the king of the Jews?"

"Yes, I am," he replied.

Then Pilate spoke to the chief priests and the crowd, "I find nothing criminal about this man."

But they pressed their charge, saying, "He's a trouble-maker among the people. He teaches through the whole of Judea, all the way from Galilee to this place."

- Only Luke’s Gospel reports that Jesus also appears before Herod Antipas, tetrarch of Galilee and Perea:

When Pilate heard this, he enquired whether the man were a Galilean, and when he discovered that he came under Herod's jurisdiction (as tetrarch of Galilee), he passed him on to Herod who happened to be in Jerusalem at that time. When Herod saw Jesus, he was delighted, for he had been wanting to see him for a long time. He had heard a lot about Jesus and was hoping to see him perform a miracle. He questioned him very thoroughly, but Jesus gave him absolutely no reply, though the chief priests and scribes stood there making the most violent accusations. So Herod joined his own soldiers in scoffing and jeering at Jesus. Finally, they dressed him up in a gorgeous cloak, and sent him back to Pilate. On that day Herod and Pilate became firm friends, though previously they had been at daggers drawn.

Pilate declares Jesus' innocence

Then Pilate summoned the chief priests, the officials and the people and addressed them in these words. "You have brought this man to me as a mischief-maker among the people, and I want you to realise that, after examining him in your presence, I have found nothing criminal about him, in spite of all your accusations. And neither has Herod, for he has sent him back to us. Obviously, then, he has done nothing to deserve the death penalty. I propose, therefore, to teach him a sharp lesson and let him go."

But they all yelled as one man, "Take this man away! We want Barabbas set free!" (Barabbas was a man who had been put in prison for causing a riot in the city and for murder.) But Pilate wanted to set Jesus free and he called out to them again, but they shouted back at him, "Crucify, crucify him!"

Then he spoke to them, for a third time, "What is his crime, then? I have found nothing in him that deserves execution; I am going to teach him a lesson and let him go."

But they shouted him down, yelling their demand that he should be crucified.

Their shouting won the day, and Pilate pronounced the official decision that their request should be granted. He released the man

for whom they asked, the man who had been imprisoned for rioting and murder, and surrendered Jesus to their demands.

HIS CRUCIFIXION AND DEATH
(also Matthew 27:32-50; Mark 15:21-37; John 19:16b-30)

Luke 23:26-46 - And as they were marching him (Jesus) away, they caught hold of Simon, a native of Cyrene in Africa, who was on his way home from the fields, and put the cross on his back for him to carry behind Jesus.

On the way to the cross

A huge crowd of people followed him, including women who wrung their hands and wept for him. But Jesus turned to them and said, "Women of Jerusalem, do not shed your tears for me, but for yourselves and for your children! For the days are coming when men will say, 'Lucky are the women who are childless - the bodies which have never borne, and the breasts which have never given nourishment.' Then men will begin

'to say to the mountains, Fall on us! and to the hills, Cover us!' (Hosea 10:8)

For if this is what men do when the wood is green, what will they do when it is seasoned?"

Jesus is crucified with two criminals

Two criminals were also led out with him for execution, and when they came to the place called The Skull, they crucified him with the criminals, one on either side of him. But Jesus himself was saying, "Father, forgive them; they do not know what they are doing."

Then they shared out his clothes by casting lots.

The people stood and stared while their rulers continued to scoff, saying, "He saved other people, let's see him save himself, if he is really God's Christ - his chosen!"

The soldiers also mocked him by coming up and presenting sour wine to him, saying, "If you are the king of the Jews, why not save

yourself?" For there was a placard over his head which read, THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.

One of the criminals hanging there covered him with abuse, and said, "Aren't you Christ? Why don't you save yourself - and us?"

But the other one checked him with the words, "Aren't you afraid of God even when you're getting the same punishment as he is? And it's fair enough for us, for we've only got what we deserve, but this man never did anything wrong in his life."

Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

And Jesus answered, "I tell you truly, this day you will be with me in paradise."

The darkness, and the death of Jesus

It was now about midday, but darkness came over the whole countryside until three in the afternoon, for there was an eclipse of the sun. The veil in the Temple sanctuary was split in two. Then Jesus gave a great cry and said, "Father,

'into your hands I commend my spirit.' (Psalm 31:5)"

And with these words, he died.

SOME OF THE PEOPLE PRESENT
(also Matthew 27:54-56; Mark 15:39-41; John 19:25-26a)

- The identity of all the women has not been completely solved:

Luke 23:47-49 - When the centurion saw what had happened, he exclaimed reverently, "That was indeed a good man!"

And the whole crowd who had collected for the spectacle, when they saw what had happened, went home in deep distress. And those who had known him, as well as the women who had followed him from Galilee, remained standing at a distance and saw all this happen.

HIS BURIAL
(Matthew 27:57-66; Mark 15:42-47; John 19:31-42)

Luke 23:50-56 - Now there was a man called Joseph, a member of the Jewish council. He was a good and just man, and had neither agreed with their plan nor voted for their decision. He came from the Jewish city of Arimathaea and was awaiting the kingdom of God. He went to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. He took it down and wrapped it in linen and placed it in a rock-hewn tomb which had not been used before.

It was now the day of the preparation and the Sabbath was beginning to dawn, so the women who had accompanied Jesus from Galilee followed Joseph, noted the tomb and the position of the body, and then went home to prepare spices and perfumes. On the Sabbath they rested, in obedience to the commandment.

The life and ministry of Jesus on earth is over - tortured to death on a Roman cross and consigned to the grave. Everything he did, no matter how wonderful or wise - his miracles, his parables, the Sermon on the Mount - mark him as a superb teacher, a miracle-worker, a man of unsurpassed personality, but still a man. And sometimes,almost a madman from his seemingly more outrageous statements and claims.

In evidence of failure, his followers are desolate, mostly scattered and without hope. The few that remain prepare to give him a proper burial. There seems nothing left to suggest the birth, 2,000 years ago of a life and world-changing religion that claims to be unique, to come directly from the creator God of the universe, and which is offered freely to all the people of Earth and perhaps beyond.

THE NEW BEGINNING Spring cAD30

Luke 24:1-53

THE EMPTY TOMB
(also Matthew 28:1-8,11-15; Mark 16:1-8; John 20:1-13)

Luke 24:1-12 - But at the first signs of dawn on the first day of the week (Sunday), they (the women who accompanied Jesus from

Galilee and who after his resurrection, had rested throughout the Saturday Sabbath in obedience to the Fourth Commandment) went to the tomb, taking with them the aromatic spices they had prepared. They discovered that the stone had been rolled away from the tomb, but on going inside, the body of the Lord Jesus was not to be found. While they were still puzzling over this, two men suddenly stood at their elbow, dressed in dazzling light. The women were terribly frightened, and turned their eyes away and looked at the ground. But the two men spoke to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here: he has risen! Remember what he said to you, while he was still in Galilee - that the Son of Man must be betrayed into the hands of sinful men, and must be crucified, and must rise again on the third day."

Then they did remember what he had said, and they turned their backs on the tomb and went and told all this to the eleven and the others who were with them.

It was Mary of Magdala, Joanna (one of Jesus' earliest women followers and wife of Chuza, Herod Antipas' steward, Luke 8:3), the mother of James (the "other" Mary), and their companions who made this report to the apostles. But it struck them as sheer imagination, and they did not believe the women. Only (the apostle) Peter got up and ran to the tomb. He stooped down and saw the linen clothes lying there all by themselves, and he went home wondering at what had happened.

THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS AND HIS APPEARANCES TO HIS DISCIPLES
(also Matthew 28:9-10,16-17; Mark 16:9-14; John 20:14-21:14; Acts 1:1-5; 1 Corinthians 15:3-8)

Luke 24:13-44 - Then on the same day we find two of them (disciples) going off to Emmaus, a village (location uncertain) about seven miles from Jerusalem. As they went they were deep in conversation about everything that had happened. While they were absorbed in their serious talk and discussion, Jesus himself approached and walked along with them, but something

prevented them from recognising him. Then he spoke to them, "What is all this discussion that you are having on your walk?"

They stopped, their faces drawn with misery, and the one called Cleopas (possibly Clopas, the husband of Mary who was present at the crucifixion) replied, "You must be the only stranger in Jerusalem who hasn't heard all the things that have happened there recently!"

"What things?" asked Jesus.

"Oh, all about Jesus, from Nazareth. There was a man - a prophet strong in what he did and what he said, in God's eyes as well as the people's. Haven't you heard how our chief priests and rulers handed him over for execution, and had him crucified? But we were hoping he was the one who was to come and set Israel free ...

"Yes, and as if that were not enough, it's getting on for three days since all this happened; and some of our womenfolk have disturbed us profoundly. For they went to the tomb at dawn, and then when they couldn't find his body they said that they had a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of our people went straight off to the tomb and found things just as the women had described them - but they didn't see him!"

Then he spoke to them, "Aren't you failing to understand, and slow to believe in all that the prophets have said? Was it not inevitable that Christ should suffer like that and so find his glory?"

Then, beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he explained to them everything in the scriptures that referred to himself. They were by now approaching the village to which they were going. He gave the impression that he meant to go on further, but they stopped him with the words, "Do stay with us. It is nearly evening and soon the day will be over."

So he went indoors to stay with them. Then it happened! While he was sitting at table with them he took the loaf, gave thanks, broke it and passed it to them. Their eyes opened wide and they knew him! But he vanished from their sight. Then they said to each other, "Weren't our hearts glowing while he was with us on the road, and when he made the scriptures so plain to us?"

And they got to their feet without delay and turned back to Jerusalem. There they found the eleven and their friends all together, full of the news - "The Lord is really risen - he has appeared to Simon (the apostle Peter) now!"

Then they told the story of their walk, and how they recognised him when he broke the loaf.

Jesus suddenly appears to the disciples

And while they were still talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them and said, "Peace be to you all!"

But they shrank back in terror for they thought they were seeing a ghost.

"Why are you so worried?" said Jesus, "and why do doubts arise in your minds? Look at my hands and feet - it is really I myself! Feel me and see; ghosts have no flesh or bones as you can see that I have."

But while they still could not believe it through sheer joy and were quite bewildered, Jesus said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?"

They gave him a piece of broiled fish and part of a honeycomb which he took and ate before their eyes. Then he said, "Here and now are fulfilled the words that I told you when I was with you: that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and in the prophets and psalms must come true."

HIS COMMISSION TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO THE WORLD
(also Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-18; John 21:15-23; Acts 1:6-8)

Luke 24:45-50 - Then (after Jesus had eaten with the disciples, and showed them how his death and resurrection had fulfilled prophecy) he opened their minds so that they could understand the scriptures, and added, "That is how it was written, and that is why it was inevitable that Christ should suffer, and rise from the dead on the third day. So must the change of heart which leads to the forgiveness of sins be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

"You are eye-witnesses of these things. Now I hand over to you the command of my Father. Stay in the city (of Jerusalem), then, until you are clothed with power from on high."

Then he led them outside as far as Bethany, where he blessed them with uplifted hands.

JESUS ASCENDS TO HEAVEN
(also Mark 16:19-20; Acts 1:9-11)

Luke 24:51-53 - While he was in the act of blessing them he was parted from them and was carried up to Heaven. They worshipped him, and turned back to Jerusalem with great joy, and spent their days in the Temple, praising and blessing God (while awaiting baptism in the Holy Spirit).

In a short time, the disciples, totally demoralised by the death of Jesus are transformed. They are soon taking the Gospel of Jesus Christ fearlessly to much of the known world and often in the face of every form of opposition, persecution, and soon, brutality, torture and death.

The Acts of the Apostles and the Letters of the New Testament reveal part of this early story that continues to the present day.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JOHN

With people, places, definitions ...

Writer: The apostle John, son of Zebedee;

Date: c AD90-100. Note that the ancient Ryland's papyrus with its short extract from John's Gospel is dated to the first half of the 2nd century;

Where written: Ephesus in the west of Asia Minor, before or after John's banishment to the island of Patmos which lay off the coast in the Aegean Sea;

Readers: The whole Christian Church - Jew, Greek and Roman;

Why written: To convince his readers that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

According to Some Modern Scholarship: Still traditionally Ephesus, c AD90-110. The oral traditions and theology of the apostle John were compiled during his lifetime, and the Gospel finally published by a close companion. This might have been John the Elder, possibly after John's death, with the Elder "interpreting" John, much as John Mark "interpreted" the apostle Peter.

THE BEGINNINGS - FROM THE BIRTH OF JESUS TO THE START OF HIS MINISTRY c 6BC-AD27

John 1:1-51

PROLOGUE
(also Mark 1:1, Luke 1:1-4)

John 1:1-5 - At the beginning God expressed himself. That personal expression, that word, was with God, and was God, and he existed with God from the beginning. All creation took place through him,

and none took place without him. In him appeared life and this life was the light of mankind. The light still shines in the darkness and the darkness has never put it out.

APPEARANCE OF JOHN THE BAPTIST
(also Matthew 3:1-12; Mark 1:2-8; Luke 3:1-20)

John 1:6-28 - A man called John was sent by God as a witness to the light, so that any man who heard his testimony might believe in the light. This man (John the Baptist) was not himself the light: he was sent simply as a personal witness to that light (of Christ).

That was the true light which shines upon every man as he comes into the world. He (Jesus Christ) came into the world - the world he had created - and the world failed to recognise him. He came into his own creation, and his own people would not accept him. Yet wherever men did accept him he gave them the power to become sons of God. These were the men who truly believed in him, and their birth depended not on the course of nature nor on any impulse or plan of man, but on God.

So the word of God became a human being (in Jesus) and lived among us. We saw his splendour (the splendour as of a father's only son), full of grace and truth. And it was about him that John stood up and testified, exclaiming: "Here is the one I was speaking about when I said that although he would come after me he would always be in front of me; for he existed before I was born!" Indeed, every one of us has shared in his riches - there is a grace in our lives because of his grace. For while the Law was given by Moses, love and truth came through Jesus Christ. It is true that no one has ever seen God at any time. Yet the divine and only Son, who lives in the closest intimacy with the Father, has made him known.

John's witness

This then is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was. ....

Levites - A Hebrew word for descendants of Levi. A member of the tribe of Levi, one of the twelve tribes of Israel, especially those who were assistants to the priests of the Jewish Temple -

.... He (John the Baptist) admitted with complete candour, "I am not Christ."

So they asked him, "Who are you then? Are you Elijah?" (The great prophet of the divided kingdom of Israel c 850BC.)

"No, I am not," he replied.

"Are you the Prophet?"

"No," he replied.

"Well, then," they asked again, "who are you? We want to give an answer to the people who sent us. What would you call yourself?"

"I am

'The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Make straight the way of the Lord' (Isaiah 40:3)

as Isaiah the prophet said."

Now some of the Pharisees had been sent to John, and they questioned him, "What is the reason, then, for your baptising people if you are not Christ and not Elijah and not the Prophet?"

To which John returned, "I do baptise - with water. But somewhere among you stands a man you do not know. He comes after me, it is true, but I am not fit to undo his shoes!" (All this happened in the Bethany on the far side of the Jordan where the baptisms of John took place.)

Bethany on the far side of the Jordan - Not to be confused with the Bethany near Jerusalem in Judea, home of Lazarus who was raised from the dead. Bethany-across-the-Jordan in the province of Perea is sometimes called Bethabara in ancient manuscripts.

BAPTISM OF JESUS
(also Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-23a)

John 1:29-34 - On the following day (after John the Baptist had told the Pharisees that one greater than him was among them), John saw Jesus coming towards him and said, "Look, there is the lamb of God who will take away the sins of the world! ....

Lamb of God - One of the titles of Jesus, found twice in John's Gospel, but as the "Lamb" only through much of the Book of Revelations. The lamb was a sacrificial animal commonly used in the Jerusalem Temple, and in the annual celebration of Passover -

.... This (Jesus) is the man I meant when I said, 'A man comes after me who is always in front of me, for he existed before I was born!' It is true I have not known him, yet it was to make him known to the people of Israel that I came and baptised people with water."

Then John gave this testimony, "I have seen the Spirit come down like a dove from Heaven and rest upon him. Indeed, it is true that I did not recognise him by myself, but he who sent me to baptise with water told me this: 'The one on whom you will see the Spirit coming down and resting is the man who baptises with the Holy Spirit!' Now I have seen this happen and I declare publicly before you all that he is the Son of God.!"

HIS TRAVELS AND ACTS c AD27-30

HOW JESUS STARTS HIS MINISTRY
(also Matthew 4:12-17; Mark 1:14-15; Luke 4:14-15)

John 1:35-36 - On the following day (after John the Baptist had seen the Holy Spirit descend on Jesus) John was again standing with two of his disciples. He looked straight at Jesus as he walked along, and said, "There is the lamb of God!"

FIRST CALLING OF ANDREW AND ONE OTHER DISCIPLE (JOHN?), SIMON PETER, PHILIP AND NATHANAEL

Apostles - Greek for "sent away", "a messenger". The twelve disciples chosen by Jesus and sent out to heal and to preach the Gospel - the brothers Simon Peter and Andrew, James and John the sons of Zebedee, Philip, Bartholomew (or Nathanael), Matthew (or Levi), Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus (or Judas, son of James), Simon the Patriot, and Judas Iscariot (who betrayed him, and was later replaced by Matthias). The title is also applied to Paul of Tarsus, and to some other disciples at times:

John 1:37-51 - (John the Baptist is standing with two of his disciples. Seeing Jesus, he says "There is the lamb of God!" ....) The two disciples ....

Disciple - From the Latin "to learn". Those who followed Jesus of Nazareth, and eventually believed in him as the Christ. Especially one of the twelve apostles -

.... heard what he said and followed Jesus. Then Jesus turned round and when he saw them (Andrew and possibly John, son of Zebedee) following him, spoke to them. "What do you want?" he said.

"Master, where are you staying?" they replied.

"Come and see," returned Jesus.

So they went and saw where he was staying and remained with him the rest of that day. (It was then about four o'clock in the afternoon.) One of the two men who had heard what John said and had followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He went straight off and found his own brother, Simon, and told him, "We have found the Messiah!" (meaning, of course, Christ). And he brought him to Jesus.

Jesus looked steadily at him and said, "You are Simon, the son of John. From now on your name is Cephas" - (that is, Peter, meaning "a rock").

The following day Jesus decided to go into Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me!" Philip was a man from Bethsaida (near the Sea of Galilee), the town that Andrew and Peter came from. Now Philip found Nathanael (also known as Bartholomew, from the town of Cana) and told him, "We have discovered the man whom Moses wrote about in the Law and about whom the Prophets wrote too. He is Jesus, the son of Joseph and comes from Nazareth."

"Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" retorted Nathanael.

"You come and see," replied Philip.

Jesus saw Nathanael coming towards him and remarked, "Now here is a true man of Israel; there is no deceit in him!"

"How can you know me?" returned Nathanael.

"When you were underneath that fig-tree," replied Jesus, "before Philip called you, I saw you."

At which Nathanael exclaimed, "Master, you are the Son of God, you are the king of Israel!"

"Do you believe in me," replied Jesus, "because I said I had seen you underneath that fig-tree? You are going to see something greater than that! Believe me," he added, "I tell you all that you will see Heaven wide open and God's angels ascending and descending around the Son of Man!"

Son of Man - This title is found only a few times in the Old Testament, except in the case of the apocalyptic book of Ezekiel. In the New Testament, it is frequently used in the Gospels by Jesus to describe himself, and just once or twice each by the writers of Acts, Hebrews, and Revelations -

John 2:1-25

WATER INTO WINE

John 2:1-11 - Two days later (after Nathanael, or Bartholomew, had been called by Jesus to be one of his disciples) there was a wedding in the Galilean village of Cana.

Jesus' mother (Mary) was there and he and his disciples were invited to the festivities. Then it happened that the supply of wine gave out, and Jesus' mother told him, "They have no more wine."

"Is that your concern, or mine?" replied Jesus. "My time has not come yet."

So his mother said to the servants, "Mind you do whatever he tells you."

In the room six very large stone water-jars stood on the floor (actually for the Jewish ceremonial cleansing), each holding about

twenty gallons. Jesus gave instructions for these jars to be filled with water, and the servants filled them to the brim. Then he said to them, "Now draw some water out and take it to the master of ceremonies", which they did. When this man tasted the water, which had now become wine, without knowing where it came from (though naturally the servants who had drawn the water knew), he called out to the bridegroom and said to him, "Everybody I know puts his good wine on first and then when men have had plenty to drink, he brings out the poor stuff. But you have kept back your good wine till now!" Jesus gave this, the first of his signs, at Cana in Galilee (the second is healing the official's dying son later in John 4:43). He demonstrated his power and his disciples believed in him.

JESUS DRIVES THE BUYERS AND SELLERS FROM THE TEMPLE FOR THE FIRST TIME

- Commentators generally consider this a separate incident from the one reported by Matthew, Mark and Luke. In John's Gospel, it marks the start of Jesus' ministry, while in the three Synoptic Gospels it comes during Jesus' last week before his death and resurrection:

John 2:12-25 - After this incident (changing the water into wine at Cana in Galilee), Jesus, accompanied by his mother, his brothers and his disciples, went down to Capernaum (also in Galilee) and stayed there a few days. The Jewish Passover was approaching and Jesus made the journey up to Jerusalem (in Judea). In the Temple he discovered cattle and sheep dealers and pigeon-sellers, as well as money-changers sitting at their tables. So he made a rough whip out of rope and drove the whole lot of them, sheep and cattle as well, out of the Temple. He sent the coins of the money-changers flying and turned their tables upside down. Then he said to the pigeon-dealers, "Take those things out of here. Don't you dare turn my Father's house into a market!" His disciples remembered the scripture -

'Zeal for your house has eaten me up' (Psalm 69:9)

As a result of this, the Jews said to him, "What sign can you give us to justify what you are doing?"

"Destroy this temple," Jesus retorted, "and I will rebuild it in three days!"

To which the Jews replied, "This Temple took forty-six years to build, and you are going to rebuild it in three days?"

He was, in fact, speaking about the temple of his own body, and when he was raised from the dead the disciples remembered what he had said to them and that made them believe both the scripture and what Jesus had said.

While he was in Jerusalem at Passover-time, during the festivities many believed in him as they saw the signs that he gave. But Jesus, on his side, did not trust himself to them - for he knew them all. He did not need anyone to tell him what people were like: he understood human nature.

John 3:1-36

JESUS MEETS NICODEMUS THE PHARISEE - "YOU MUST BE BORN AGAIN"

John 3:1-21 - One night (after Jesus had driven the buyers and sellers from the Temple in Jerusalem) Nicodemus, a leading Jew and a Pharisee, came to see Jesus.

"Master," he began, "we realise that you are a teacher who has come from God. Obviously no one could show the signs that you show unless God were with him."

"Believe me," returned Jesus, "a man cannot even see the kingdom of God without being born again."

"And how can a man who's getting old possibly be born?" replied Nicodemus. "How can he go back into his mother's womb and be born a second time?"

"I assure you," said Jesus, "that unless a man is born from water and from spirit he cannot enter the kingdom of God. Flesh gives birth to flesh and spirit gives birth to spirit: you must not be surprised that I told you that all of you must be born again. The wind blows where it likes, you can hear the sound of it but you have no idea where it

comes from and where it goes. Nor can you tell how a man is born by the wind of the Spirit."

"How on earth can things like this happen?" replied Nicodemus.

"So you are a teacher of Israel," said Jesus, "and you do not recognise such things? I assure you that we are talking about something we really know and we are witnessing to something we have actually observed, yet men like you will not accept our evidence. Yet if I have spoken to you about things which happen on this earth and you will not believe me, what chance is there that you will believe me if I tell you about what happens in Heaven? No one has ever been up to Heaven except the Son of Man who came down from Heaven. The Son of Man (Jesus) must be lifted above the heads of men (in crucifixion) - as Moses lifted up that serpent in the desert (Numbers 21:4-9) - so that any man who believes in him may have eternal life. For God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that every one who believes in him shall not be lost, but should have eternal life. You must understand that God has not sent his Son into the world to pass sentence upon it, but to save it - through him. Any man who believes in him is not judged at all. It is the one who will not believe who stands already condemned, because he will not believe in the character of God's only Son. This is the judgment - that light has entered the world and men have preferred darkness to light because their deeds are evil. Anybody who does wrong hates the light and keeps away from it, for fear his deeds may be exposed. But anybody who is living by the truth will come to the light to make it plain that all he has done has been done through God."

JOHN THE BAPTIST TESTIFIES THAT JESUS IS THE CHRIST

John 3:22-36 - After this (meeting with Nicodemus) Jesus went into the country of Judea with his disciples and stayed there with them while the work of baptism was being carried on. John (the Baptist), too, was in Aenon near Salim, baptising people because there was plenty of water in that district and they were still coming to him for baptism. (John, of course, had not yet been put in prison - by Herod Antipas.)

This led to a question arising between John's disciples and one of the Jews about the whole matter of being cleansed. They approached John and said to him, "Master, look, the man (Jesus) who was with you on the other side of the Jordan, the one you testified to, is now baptising and everybody is coming to him!"

"A man can receive nothing at all," replied John, "unless it is given him from Heaven. You yourselves can witness that I said, 'I am not Christ but I have been sent as his forerunner.' It is the bridegroom who possesses the bride, yet the bridegroom's friend who merely stands and listens to him can be overjoyed to hear the bridegroom's voice. That is why my happiness is now complete. He must grow greater and greater and I less and less.

"The one who comes from above is naturally above everybody. The one who arises from the earth belongs to the earth and speaks from the earth. The one who comes from Heaven is above all others and he bears witness to what he has seen and heard - yet no one is accepting his testimony. Yet if a man does accept it, he is acknowledging the fact that God is true. For the one whom God sent speaks the authentic words of God - and there can be no measuring of the Spirit given to him! The Father loves the Son and has put everything into his hand. The man who believes in the Son has eternal life. The man who refuses to believe in the Son will not see life; he lives under the anger of God."

John 4:1-54

JESUS THE LIVING WATER - HIS MEETING WITH THE SAMARITAN WOMAN AT THE WELL

John 4:1-42 - (After John the Baptist's testimony that Jesus is the Christ .....) Now when the Lord (Jesus) found that the Pharisees had heard that "Jesus is making and baptising more disciples than John" - although, in fact, it was not Jesus who did the baptising but his disciples - he left Judea and went off again to Galilee, which meant passing through Samaria. There he came to a little town called

Sychar, which is near the historic plot of land that Jacob gave to his son, Joseph, and "Jacob's Spring" was there. ....

Jacob - Or Israel, grandson of the patriarch Abraham and ancestor of the 12 tribes of Israel. His son Joseph - of the "coat of many colours" - was sold into captivity in Egypt and became only second in importance to the Pharaoh during the seven year famine -

.... Jesus, tired with his journey, sat down beside it, just as he was. The time was about midday. Presently, a Samaritan woman arrived to draw some water.

"Please give me a drink," Jesus said to her, for his disciples had gone away to the town to buy food. The Samaritan woman said to him, "How can you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.)

"If you knew what God can give," Jesus replied, "and if you knew who it is that said to you, 'Give me a drink', I think you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water!"

"Sir," said the woman, "you have nothing to draw water with and this well is deep - where can you get your living water? Are you a greater man than our ancestor, Jacob, who gave us this well, and drank here himself with his family, and his cattle?"

Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again. But whoever drinks the water I will give him will never be thirsty again. For my gift will become a spring in the man himself, welling up into eternal life."

The woman said, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may stop being thirsty - and not have to come here to draw water any more!"

"Go and call your husband and then come back here," said Jesus to her.

"I haven't got a husband!" the woman answered.

"You are quite right in saying, 'I haven't got a husband'," replied Jesus, "for you have had five husbands and the man you have now

is not your husband at all. Yes, you spoke the simple truth when you said that."

"Sir," said the woman again, "I can see that you are a prophet! Now our ancestors worshipped on this hill-side, but you Jews say that Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship -"

"Believe me," returned Jesus, "the time is coming when worshipping the Father will not be a matter of 'on this hill-side' or 'in Jerusalem'. Nowadays you are worshipping with your eyes shut. We Jews are worshipping with our eyes open, for the salvation of mankind is to come from our race. Yet the time is coming, yes, and has already come, when true worshippers will worship in spirit and in reality. Indeed, the Father looks for men who will worship him like that. God is spirit, and those who worship him can only worship in spirit and in reality."

"Of course I know that Messiah is coming," returned the woman, "you know, the one who is called Christ. When he comes he will make everything plain to us."

"I am Christ speaking to you now," said Jesus.

At this point his disciples arrived, and were surprised to find him talking to a woman (Jesus was rejecting two strongly-held prejudices - men had little dealing with women, and Jews had no dealing with Samaritans), but none of them asked, "What do you want?" or "What are you talking to her about?" So the woman left her water-pot behind and went into the town and began to say to the people, "Come out and see the man who told me everything I've ever done! Can this be 'Christ'?" So they left the town and started to come to Jesus.

Meanwhile the disciples were begging him, "Master, do eat something."

To which Jesus replied, "I have food to eat that you know nothing about."

This, of course, made the disciples ask each other, "Do you think anyone has brought him any food?"

Jesus said to them, "My food is doing the will of him who sent me and finishing the work he has given me. Don't you say, 'Four months more and then comes the harvest'? But I tell you to open your eyes and look to the field - they are gleaming white, all ready for the harvest! The reaper is already being rewarded and getting in a harvest for eternal life, so that both sower and reaper may be glad together. For in this harvest the old saying comes true, 'One man sows and another reaps.' I have sent you to reap a harvest for which you never laboured; other men have worked hard and you have reaped the results of their labours."

Many of the Samaritans who came out of that town believed in him through the woman's testimony - "He told me everything I've ever done." And when they arrived they begged him to stay with them. He did stay there two days and far more believed in him because of what he himself said. As they told the woman, "We don't believe any longer now because of what you said. We have heard him with our own ears. We know now that this must be the man who will save the world!"

- Although the Samaritans and the Jews were centuries-old enemies, this is the third occasion the Gospels have shown them in a favourable light. First the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) and then the gratitude of the healed Samaritan leper (Luke 17:11-19).

THE OFFICIALS' DYING SON

John 4:43-54 - After the two days were over (following his meeting with the Samaritan woman at the well), Jesus left and went away to Galilee. (For Jesus himself testified that a prophet enjoys no honour in his own country.) And on his arrival the people received him with open arms. For they had seen all that he had done in Jerusalem during the festival, since they had themselves been present. So Jesus came again to Cana in Galilee, the place where he had made the water into wine. At Capernaum there was an official whose son was very ill. When he heard that Jesus had left Judea and had arrived in Galilee, he went off to see him and begged him to come down and heal his son, who was by this time at the point of death.

Jesus said to him, "I suppose you will never believe unless you see signs and wonders!"

"Sir," returned the official, "please come down before my boy dies!"

"You can go home," returned Jesus, "your son is alive and well."

And the man believed what Jesus had said to him and went on his way.

On the journey back his servants met him with the report, "Your son is alive and well." So he asked them at what time he had begun to recover, and they replied: "The fever left him yesterday at one o'clock in the afternoon". Then the father knew that this must have happened at the very moment when Jesus had said to him, "Your son is alive and well." And he and his whole household believed in Jesus. This, then, was the second sign that Jesus gave on his return from Judea to Galilee. (The first was changing the water into wine, also at Cana, earlier in John 2:1-11) .

John 5:1-47

THE INVALID AT THE POOL OF BETHESDA

John 5:1-15 - Some time later (after Jesus had met the woman at the well in Samaria, and then, in Cana in Galilee, saved the official's dying son) came one of the Jewish feast-days and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. There is in Jerusalem near the sheep-gate a pool surrounded by five arches, which has the Hebrew name of Bethzatha (the Pool of Bethesda). Under these arches a great many sick people were in the habit of lying; some of them were blind, some lame, and some had withered limbs. (They used to wait there for the "moving of the water", for at certain times an angel used to come down into the pool and disturb the water, and then the first person who stepped into the water after the disturbance would be healed of whatever he was suffering from - this explanation in brackets is only in some ancient manuscripts.) One particular man had been there ill for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there on his back - knowing that he had been like that for a long time, he said to him, "Do you want to get well again?"

"Sir," replied the sick man, "I just haven't got anybody to put me into the pool when the water is all stirred up. While I'm trying to get there somebody else gets down into it first."

"Get up," said Jesus, "pick up your bed and walk!"

At once the man recovered, picked up his bed and walked.

This happened on a Sabbath day, which made the Jews keep on telling the man who had been healed, "It's the Sabbath, you know; it's not right for you to carry your bed."

"The man who made me well," he replied, "was the one who told me, 'Pick up your bed and walk.'"

Then they asked him, "And who is the man who told you to do that?"

But the one who had been healed had no idea who it was, for Jesus had slipped away in the dense crowd. Later Jesus found him in the Temple and said to him, "Look: you are a fit man now. Do not sin again or something worse might happen to you!"

Then the man went off and informed the Jews that the one who had made him well was Jesus.

THE FIRST SERIOUS OPPOSITION TO THE CLAIMS OF JESUS TO BE THE SON OF GOD

John 5:16-47 - It was because Jesus did such things (as heal the invalid at the Pool of Bethesda) on the Sabbath day that the Jews persecuted him. But Jesus' answer to them was this, "My Father is still at work and therefore I work as well."

This remark made the Jews all the more determined to kill him, because not only did he break the Sabbath but he referred to God as his own Father, so putting himself on equal terms with God.

Jesus makes his tremendous claim

Jesus said to them, "I assure you that the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. What the Son does is always modelled on what the Father does, for the Father loves the Son and shows him everything that he does himself, Yes, and he will show him even greater things than these to fill you with

wonder. For just as the Father raises the dead and makes them live, so does the Son give life to any man he chooses. The Father is no man's judge: he has put judgment entirely into the Son's hands, so that all men may honour the Son equally with the Father. The man who does not honour the Son does not honour the Father who sent him. I solemnly assure you that the man who hears what I have to say and believes in the one who has sent me has eternal life. He does not have to face judgment; he has already passed from death into life. Yes, I assure you that a time is coming, in fact has already come, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and when they have heard it they will live! For just as the Father has life in himself, so by the Father's gift, the Son also has life in himself. And he has given him authority to judge because he is Son of Man. No, do not be surprised - the time is coming when all those who are dead and buried will hear his voice and out they will come - those who have done right will rise again to life, but those who have done wrong will rise to face judgment!

"By myself I can do nothing. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is true because I do not live to please myself but to do the will of the Father who sent me. You may say that I am bearing witness about myself, that therefore what I say about myself has no value, but I would remind you that there is one who witnesses about me and I know that his witness about me is absolutely true. You sent to John (the Baptist), and he testified to the truth. Not that it is man's testimony that I accept - I only tell you this to help you to be saved. John certainly was a lamp that burned and shone, and for a time you were willing to enjoy the light that he gave. But I have a higher testimony than John's. The work that the Father gave me to complete, yes, these very actions which I do are my witness that the Father has sent me. This is how the Father who has sent me has given his own personal testimony to me.

"Now you have never at any time heard what he says or seen what he is like. Nor do you really believe his word in your hearts, for you refuse to believe the man who he has sent. You pore over the scriptures for you imagine that you will find eternal life in them. And all the time they give their testimony to me! But you are not willing to

come to me to have real life! Men's approval or disapproval means nothing to me, but I can tell that you have none of the love of God in your hearts. I have come in the name of my Father and you will not accept me. Yet if another man comes simply in his own name, you will accept him. How on earth can you believe while you are for ever looking for each other's approval and not for the glory that comes from the one God? There is no need for you to think that I have come to accuse you before the Father. You already have an accuser - Moses, in whom you put all your confidence! For if you really believed Moses, you would be bound to believe me; for is was about me that he wrote. But if you do not believe what he wrote, how can you believe what I say"?

John 6:1-71

FEEDING THE FIVE THOUSAND
(also Matthew 14:13-21; Mark 6:30-44; Luke 9:10-17)

John 6:1-15 - After this ...

- According to John's account, when Jesus was back in Galilee month's after Jesus had visited Jerusalem, healed the invalid at the Pool of Bethesda - not Bethsaida near the Sea of Galilee - and clashed with the authorities over his claim to be the Son of God:

... Jesus crossed the Lake of Galilee (or Lake Tiberias), and a great crowd followed him because they had seen signs which he gave in his dealings with the sick. But Jesus went up the hillside and sat down there with his disciples. The Passover, the Jewish festival, was near. ....

- The Passover referred to here in verse 6:4 may be the Festival reported earlier in John's Gospel in verse 5: There is some evidence the original order of John was chapters 4, 6, 5, 7, which would account for this inconsistency -

.... So Jesus, raising his eyes and seeing a great crowd on the way towards him, said to Philip, "Where can we buy food for these people to eat?" (He said this to test Philip, for he himself knew what he was going to do.)

"Ten pounds' worth of bread would not be enough for them," Philip replied, "even if they had only a little each."

Then Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, another disciple, put in, "There is a boy here who has five small barley loaves and a couple of fish, but what's the good of that for such a crowd?"

Then Jesus said, "Get the people to sit down."

There was plenty of grass there, and the men, some five thousand of them, sat down. Then Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks for them and distributed them to the people sitting on the grass, and he distributed the fish in the same way, giving them as much as they wanted. When they had eaten enough, Jesus said to his disciples, "Collect the pieces that are left over so that nothing is wasted."

So they did as he suggested and filled twelve baskets with the broken pieces of the five barley loaves, which were left over after the people had eaten! When the men saw this sign of Jesus' power, they kept saying, "This certainly is the Prophet who was to come into the world!"

Then Jesus, realising that they were going to carry him off and make him their king, retired once more to the hill-side quite alone.

WALKING ON WATER
(also Matthew 14:22-33; Mark 6:45-52)

John 6:16-21 - In the evening (after feeding the five thousand), his disciples went down to the lake, embarked on the boat and made their way across the lake to Capernaum (just around the coast from Bethsaida). Darkness had already fallen and Jesus had not returned to them. A strong wind sprang up and the water grew very rough. When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the water, and coming towards the boat, and they were terrified. But he spoke to them, "Don't be afraid: it is I myself."

So they gladly took him aboard, and at once the boat reached the shore they were making for.

JESUS THE BREAD OF LIFE AND THE HARD REALITY OF HIS TEACHING?

Jesus teaches about the true bread

John 6:22-71 - The following day (after Jesus had fed the five thousand and walked on the water), the crowd, who had remained on the other side of the lake (the Sea of Galilee), noticed that only the one boat had been there, and that Jesus had not embarked on it with the disciples, but that they had in fact gone off by themselves. Some other small boats from Tiberias had landed quite near the place where they had eaten the food and the Lord had given thanks. When the crowd realised that neither Jesus nor the disciples were there any longer, they themselves got into the boats and went off to Capernaum to look for Jesus. When they had found him on the other side of the lake, they said to him, "Master, when did you come here?"

"Believe me," replied Jesus, "you are looking for me now not because you saw my signs but because you ate that food and had all you wanted. You should not work for the food which does not last but for the food which lasts on into eternal life. This is the food the Son of Man will give you, and he is the one who bears the stamp of God the Father."

This made them ask him, "What must we do to carry out the work of God?"

"The work of God for you," replied Jesus, "is to believe in the one (Jesus) whom he has sent to you."

Then they asked him, "Then what sign can you give us that will make us believe in you? What work are you doing? Our forefathers (during the Exodus from Egypt) ate manna in the desert just as the scripture says, 'He gave them bread out of Heaven to eat.'"

To which Jesus replied, "Yes, but what matters is not that Moses gave you bread from Heaven, but that my Father is giving you the true bread from Heaven. For the bread of God which comes down from Heaven gives life to the world."

This made them say to him, "Lord, please give us this bread, always!"

Then Jesus said to them, "I myself am the bread of life. The man who comes to me will never be hungry and the man who believes in me will never again be thirsty. Yet I have told you that you have seen me and do not believe. Everything that my Father gives me will come to me and I will never refuse anyone who comes to me. For I have come down from Heaven, not to do what I want, but to do the will of him who sent me. The will of him who sent me is that I should not lose anything of what he has given me, but should raise it up when the last day comes. And this is the will of the one who sent me, that everyone who sees the Son and trusts in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up when the last day comes."

At this, the Jews began grumbling at him because he said, "I am the bread which came down from Heaven", remarking "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose parents we know? How can he say that 'I have come down (as the true manna) from Heaven'?"

So Jesus answered them, "Do not grumble among yourselves. Nobody comes to me unless he is drawn to me by the Father who sent me, and I will raise him up when the last day comes. In the prophets it is written -

'And they shall all be taught by God,' (Isaiah 54:13)

and this means that everybody who has heard the Father's voice and learned from him will come to me. Not that anyone has ever seen the Father except the one who comes from God - he has seen the Father. I assure you that the man who trusts in him has eternal life already. I myself am the bread of life. Your forefathers ate manna in the desert, and they died. This is bread that comes down from Heaven, so that a man may eat it and not die. I myself am the living bread which came down from Heaven, and if anyone eats this bread he will live for ever. The bread which I will give is my body and I shall give it for the life of the world."

This led to a fierce argument among the Jews, some of them saying, "How can this man give us his body to eat?"

So Jesus said to them, "Unless you do eat the body of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you are not really living at all. The man who

eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life and I will raise him up when the last day comes. For my body is real food and my blood is real drink. The man who eats my body and drinks my blood shares my life and I share his. Just as the living Father sent me and I am alive because of the Father, so the man who lives on me will live because of me. This is the bread which came down from Heaven! It is not like the manna which your forefathers used to eat, and died. The man who eats this bread will live for ever."

Jesus said all these things while teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum. Many of his disciples heard him say these things, and commented, "This is hard teaching indeed; who could accept that?"

Then Jesus, knowing intuitively that his disciples were complaining about what he had just said, went on, "Is this too much for you? Then what would happen if you were to see the Son of Man going up to the place where he was before? It is the Spirit which gives life. The flesh will not help you. The things which I have told you are spiritual and are life. But some of you will not believe me."

For Jesus knew from the beginning which of his followers did not trust him and who was the man who would betray him. Then he added, "This is why I said to you, 'No one can come to me unless my Father puts it into his heart to come.'"

As a consequence of this, many of his disciples withdrew and no longer followed him. So Jesus said to the twelve, "And are you too wanting to go away?"

"Lord," answered Simon Peter, "who else should we go to? Your words have the ring of eternal life! And we believe and are convinced that you are the holy one of God."

Jesus replied, "Did I not choose you twelve - and one of you has the devil in his heart?"

He was speaking of Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, one of the twelve, who was planning to betray him.

John 7:1-53

THE OPPOSITION TO JESUS CONTINUES; THE AUTHORITIES TRY TO ARREST HIM

- The first paragraph throws further light on Jesus' earlier relationship with his family, in this case his brothers:

John 7:1-53 - After this (feeding the 5,000, walking on water, and teaching about himself as the bread of life), Jesus moved about in Galilee but decided not to do so in Judea since the Jews were planning to take his life. A Jewish festival, "The feast of the tabernacles" (the Autumn harvest thanksgiving festival), was approaching and his brothers said to him, "You ought to leave here and go to Judea so that your disciples can see what you are doing, for nobody works in secret if he wants to be known publicly. If you are going to do things like this, let the world see what you are doing." For not even his brothers had any faith in him. Jesus replied by saying, "It is not yet the right time for me, but any time is right for you. You see, it is impossible for you to arouse the world's hatred, but I provoke hatred because I show the world how evil its deeds really are. No, you go up to the festival; I shall not go up now, for it is not yet time for me to go." And after these remarks he remained where he was in Galilee.

Later, after his brothers had gone up to the festival, he went up himself, not openly but as though he did not want to be seen. Consequently, the Jews kept looking for him at the festival and asking "Where is that man?" And there was an undercurrent of discussion about him among the crowds. Some would say, "He is a good man", others maintained that he was not, but that he was "misleading the people". Nobody, however, spoke openly about him for fear of the Jews (... the Jewish religious authorities).

But at the very height of the festival, Jesus went up to the Temple (in Jerusalem) and began teaching. The Jews were amazed and remarked, "How does this man know all this - he has never been taught?"

Jesus replied to them, "My teaching is not really mine but comes from the one who sent me. If anyone wants to do God's will, he will know whether my teaching is from God or whether I merely speak on

my own authority. A man who speaks on his own authority has an eye for his own reputation. But the man who is considering the glory of God who sent him is a true man. There can be no dishonesty about him.

"Did not Moses give you the Law? Yet not a single one of you obeys the Law. Why are you trying to kill me?"

The crowd answered, "You must be mad! Who is trying to kill you?"

Jesus answered them, "I have done one thing and you are all amazed at it. Moses gave you circumcision (not that it came from Moses originally but from your forefathers), and you will circumcise a man even on the Sabbath. If a man receives the cutting of circumcision on the Sabbath to avoid breaking the Law of Moses, why should you be angry with me because I have made a man's body perfectly whole on the Sabbath? You must not judge by the appearance of things but by the reality!"

Some of the people of Jerusalem, hearing him talk like this, were saying, "Isn't this the man whom they are trying to kill? It's amazing - he talks quite openly and they haven't a word to say to him. Surely our rulers haven't decided that this really is Christ! But then, we know this man and where he comes from (Nazareth) - when Christ comes, no one will know where he comes from."

Jesus makes more unique claims

Then Jesus, in the middle of his teaching, called out in the Temple, "So you know me and know where I have come from? But I have not come of my own accord; I am sent by one (God) who is true and you do not know him! I do know him, because I come from him and he has sent me here."

Then they attempted to arrest him, but actually no one laid a finger on him because the right moment had not yet come. Many of the crowd believed in him and kept on saying, "When Christ comes, is he going to show greater signs than this man?"

The Pharisees heard the crowd whispering these things about him, and they and the chief priests (of the Temple) sent officers to arrest

him. Then Jesus said, "I shall be with you only a little while longer and then I am going to him who sent me. You will look for me then but you will never find me. You cannot come where I shall be."

This made the Jews say to each other, "Where is he going to hide himself so that we cannot find him? Surely he's not going to our refugees (Jews of the Dispersion or Diaspora) among the Greeks to teach Greeks? What does he mean when he says, 'You will look for me and you will never find me' and 'You cannot come where I shall be'?"

Then, on the last day, the climax of the festival, Jesus stood up and cried out, "If any man is thirsty, he can come to me and drink! The man who believes in me, as the scripture says, will have rivers of living water flowing from his inmost heart." (Here he was speaking about the Spirit which those who believe in him would receive. The Holy Spirit had not yet been given because Jesus had not yet been glorified.) When they heard these words, some of the people were saying, "This really is the Prophet." Others said, "This is Christ!" But some said, "And does Christ come from Galilee? Don't the scriptures say that Christ will be descended from David, and will come from Bethlehem, the village where David lived?"

So the people were in two minds about him - some of them wanted to arrest him, but so far no one laid hands on him.

Then the officers returned to the Pharisees and chief priests, who said to them, "Why haven't you brought him?"

"No man ever spoke like that!" they replied.

"Has he pulled the wool over your eyes, too?" retorted the Pharisees. "Have any of the authorities or any of the Pharisees believed in him? But this crowd, who know nothing about the Law, is damned anyway!"

One of their number, Nicodemus (the one who had previously been to see Jesus), remarked to them, "But surely our Law does not condemn the accused without hearing what he has to say, and finding out what he has done?"

"Are you a Galilean, too?" they answered him. "Look where you will - you won't find any prophet comes out of Galilee!"

So they broke up their meeting and went home, ...

John 8:1-59

John 8:1 - ..... while Jesus went off to the Mount of Olives (or Olivet just to the east of Jerusalem).

THE WOMAN CAUGHT IN ADULTERY - "HE WHO IS WITHOUT SIN"

- This beautiful story, although considered genuine, is either not included in the earliest and most reliable manuscripts or placed at the end of John or in Luke's Gospel:

John 8:2-11 - Early next morning he returned to the Temple (after the authorities failed to arrest him) and the entire crowd came to him. So he sat down and began to teach them. But the scribes and Pharisees brought in to him a woman who had been caught in adultery. They made her stand in front, and then said to him, "Now, master, this woman has been caught in adultery, in the very act. According to the Law, Moses commanded us to stone such women to death (Leviticus 20:10 and Deuteronomy 22:24). Now, what do you say about her?"

They said this to test him, so that they might have some good grounds for an accusation. But Jesus stooped down and began to write with his finger in the dust on the ground. But as they persisted in their questioning, he straightened himself up and said to them, "Let the one among you who has never sinned throw the first stone at her." Then he stooped down again and continued writing with his finger on the ground. And when they heard what he said, they were convicted by their own consciences and went out, one by one, beginning with the eldest until they had all gone.

Jesus was left alone, with the woman still standing where they had put her. So he stood up and said to her, "Where are they all - did no one condemn you?"

And she said, "No one, sir."

"Neither do I condemn you," said Jesus to her. "Go home and do not sin again."

THE OPPOSITION TO JESUS INCREASES - "BEFORE ABRAHAM WAS, I AM!"

John 8:12-59 - Later (after dealing with the woman caught in adultery), Jesus spoke to the people again and said, "I am the light of the world. The man who follows me will never walk in the dark but will live his life in the light."

This made the Pharisees say to him, "You are testifying to yourself - your evidence is not valid."

Jesus answered, "Even if I am testifying to myself, my evidence is valid, for I know where I have come from and I know where I am going. But as for you, you have no idea where I come from or where I am going. You are judging by human standards, but I am not judging anyone. Yet if I should judge, my decision would be just, for I am not alone - the Father who sent me is with me. In your Law (also Jesus' Law!), it is stated that the witness of two persons is valid. I am one testifying to myself and the second witness to me is the Father who sent me."

"And where is this father of yours?" they replied.

"You do not know my Father," returned Jesus, "any more than you know me: if you had known me, you would have known him."

Jesus made these statements while he was teaching in the Temple treasury.

Yet no one arrested him, for his time had not yet come.

Later, Jesus spoke to them again and said, "I am going away and you will try to find me, but you will die in your sins. You cannot come where I am going."

This made the Jews say, "Is he going to kill himself, then? Is that why he says, "You cannot come where I am going'?"

"The difference between us," Jesus said to them, "is that you come from below and I am from above. You belong to this world but I do not. That is why I told you will die in your sins. For unless you believe that I am who I am, you will die in your sins."

Then they said, "Who are you?"

"I am what I have told you I was from the beginning," replied Jesus. "There is much in you that I could speak about and condemn. But he who sent me is true and I am only speaking to this world what I myself have heard from him."

They did not realise that he was talking to them about the Father. So Jesus resumed, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man (in crucifixion), then you will realise that I am who I say I am, and that I do nothing on my own authority but speak simply as my Father has taught me. The one who sent me is with me now: the Father has never left me alone for I always do what pleases him." And even while he said these words, many people believed in him.

Jesus speaks of personal freedom

So Jesus said to the Jews who believed in him, "If you are faithful to what I have said, you are truly my disciples. And you will know the truth and the truth will set you free!"

"But we are descendants of Abraham," they replied, "and we have never in our lives been any man's slaves. How can you say to us, 'You will be set free'?"

Jesus returned, "Believe me when I tell you that every man who commits sin is a slave. For a slave is no permanent part of a household, but a son is. If the Son, then, sets you free, you are really free! I know that you are descended from Abraham, but some of you are looking for a way to kill me because you can't bear my words. I am telling you what I have seen in the presence of my Father, and you are doing what you have seen in the presence of your father."

"Our father is Abraham!" they retorted.

"If you were the children of Abraham, you would do the sort of things Abraham did. But in fact, at this moment, you are looking for a way

to kill me, simply because I am a man who has told you the truth that I have heard from God. Abraham would never have done that. No, you are doing your father's work (... the devil's)."

"We are not illegitimate!" they retorted. "We have one Father - God."

"If God were really your Father," replied Jesus, "you would have loved me. For I came from God, and I am here. I did not come of my own accord - he sent me, and I am here. Why do you not understand my words? It is because you cannot hear what I am really saying. Your father is the devil, and what you are wanting to do is what your father longs to do. He (Satan) always was a murderer, and has never dealt with the truth, since the truth will have nothing to do with him. Whenever he tells a lie, he speaks in character, for he is a liar and the father of lies. And it is because I speak the truth that you will not believe me. Which of you can prove me guilty of sin? If I am speaking the truth, why is it that you do not believe me? The man who is born of God can hear these words of God and the reason why you cannot hear the words of God is simply this, that you are not the sons of God."

"How right we are," retorted the Jews, "in calling you a Samaritan (reflecting the antagonism between Jews and Samaritans), and mad at that!"

"No," replied Jesus, "I am not mad. I am honouring my Father and you are trying to dishonour me. But I am not concerned with my own glory: there is one whose concern it is, and he is the true judge. Believe me when I tell you that if anybody accepts my words, he will never see death at all."

"Now we know that you're mad," replied the Jews. "Why, Abraham died and the prophets, too, and yet you say, 'If a man accepts my words, he will never experience death!' Are you greater than our father, Abraham? He died, and so did the prophets - who are you making yourself out to be?"

"If I were trying to glorify myself," returned Jesus, "such glory would be worthless. But it is my Father who glorifies me, the very one whom you say is your God - though you have never known him. But I

know him, and if I said I did not know him, I should be as much a liar as you are! But I do know him and I am faithful to what he says. As for your father, Abraham, his great joy was that he would see my coming. Now he has seen it and he is overjoyed."

"Look," said the Jews to him, "you are not fifty yet, and has Abraham seen you?"

"I tell you in solemn truth," returned Jesus, "before there was an Abraham, I AM!" ("I am who I am" becomes in Hebrew "Yahweh", "he is", that is God! - Exodus 3:14)

At this (total blasphemy according to the Jews who did not believe in Jesus as the Messiah), they picked up stones to hurl at him, but Jesus disappeared and made his way out of the Temple.

John 9:1-41

THE MAN BORN BLIND WHO GOES BEFORE THE PHARISEES

John 9:1-41 - Later, as Jesus walked along (in Jerusalem, after he had forgiven the woman caught in adultery) he saw a man who had been blind from birth.

"Master, whose sin caused this man's blindness," asked the disciples, "his own or his parents'?"

"He was not born blind because of his own sin or that of his parents," returned Jesus, "but to show the power of God at work in him. We must carry on the work of him who sent me while the daylight lasts. Night is coming, when no one can work. I am the world's light as long as I am in it."

Having said this, he spat on the ground and made a sort of clay with the saliva. This he applied to the man's eyes and said, "Go and wash in the pool of Siloam (in the Lower City of Jerusalem)." (Siloam means "one who has been sent".) So the man went off and washed and came home with his sight restored.

His neighbours and the people who had often seen him before as a beggar remarked, "Isn't this the man who used to sit and beg?"

"Yes, that's the one," said some.

Others said, "No, but he's very like him."

But he himself said, "I'm the man all right!"

"Then how was your blindness cured?" they asked.

"The man called Jesus made some clay and smeared it on my eyes," he replied, "and then he said, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' So off I went and washed - and that's how I got my sight!"

"Where is he now?" they asked.

"I don't know," he returned.

So they brought the man who had once been blind before the Pharisees. (It should be noted that Jesus made the clay and restored his sight on a Sabbath day.) The Pharisees asked the question all over again as to how he had become able to see.

"He put clay on my eyes; I washed it off; now I can see - that's all," he replied.

Some of the Pharisees commented, "This man cannot be from God since he does not observe the Sabbath."

"But how can a sinner give such wonderful signs as these?" others demurred. And they were in two minds about him. Finally, they asked the blind man again, "And what do you say about him? You're the one whose sight was restored."

"I believe he is a prophet," he replied.

The Jews did not really believe that the man had been blind and then had become able to see, until they had summoned his parents and asked them, "Is this your son who you say was born blind? How does it happen that he can now see?"

"We know that this is our son, and we know that he was born blind," returned his parents, "but how he can see now, or who made him able to see, we have no idea. Why don't you ask him? He is a grown-up man; he can speak for himself."

His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews who had already agreed that anybody who admitted that Christ had done this thing should be excommunicated (excluded from the synagogue). It was this fear which made his parents say, "Ask him, he is a grown-up man."

So, once again they summoned the man who had been born blind and said to him, "You should

'give God the glory' (Joshua 7:19)

for what has happened to you. We know that this man is a sinner."

"Whether he is a sinner or not, I couldn't tell, but one thing I am sure of," the man replied, "I used to be blind, now I can see!"

"But what did he do to you - how did he make you see?" they continued.

"I've told you before," he replied. "Weren't you listening? Why do you want to hear it all over again? Are you wanting to be his disciples too?"

At this, they turned on him furiously.

"You're the one who is his disciple! We are disciples of Moses. We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this man, we don't even know where he came from."

"Now here's the extraordinary thing," he retorted, "you don't know where he came from and yet he gave me the gift of sight.

Everybody knows that God does not listen to sinners. It is the man who has a proper respect for God and does what God wants him to do - he's the one God listens to. Why, since the world began, nobody's ever heard of a man who was born blind being given his sight. If this man did not come from God, he couldn't do such a thing!"

"You misbegotten wretch!" they flung back at him. "Are you trying to teach us?" And they threw him out.

- In this clash between a poor and once-blind man and the overwhelming intellectual and judicial power of the religious

authorities, it is difficult not to feel the apostle John's sense of humour and irony -

Jesus heard that they had expelled him and when he had found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"

"And who is he, sir?" the man replied. "Tell me, so that I can believe in him."

"You have seen him," replied Jesus. "It is the one who is talking to you now."

"Lord, I do believe," he said, and worshipped him.

Then Jesus said, “My coming into this world is itself a judgment - those who cannot see have their eyes opened and those who think they can see become blind."

Some of the Pharisees near him overheard this and said, "So we're blind, too, are we?"

"If you were blind," returned Jesus, "nobody could blame you, but, as you insist 'We can see', your guilt remains."

John 10:1-42

JESUS, THE DOOR FOR THE SHEEP, AND THE GOOD SHEPHERD

John 10:1-18 - (The man born blind and healed by Jesus has been interrogated by the Pharisees .....) Then Jesus (speaking about such people as the Pharisees) said, "Believe me when I tell you that anyone who does not enter the sheepfold though the door, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a rogue. It is the shepherd of the flock who goes in by the door. It is to him the door-keeper opens the door and it is his voice that the sheep recognise. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out of the fold, and when he has driven all his own flock outside, he goes in front of them himself, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. They will never follow a stranger - indeed, they will run away from him, for they do not recognise strange voices."

Jesus gave them this illustration but they did not grasp the point of what he was saying to them. So Jesus said to them once more, "I do assure you that I myself am the door for the sheep. All who have gone before me are like thieves and rogues, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the door. If a man goes in through me, he will be safe and sound; he can come in and out and find his food. The thief comes with the sole intention of stealing and killing and destroying, but I came to bring them life, and far more life than before. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd will give his life for the sake of his sheep. But the hired man, who is not the shepherd, and does not own the sheep, will see the wolf coming, desert the sheep and run away. And the wolf will attack the flock and send them flying. The hired man runs away because he is only a hired man and has no interest in the sheep. I am the good shepherd, and I know those that are mine and my sheep know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I am giving my life for the sake of the sheep.

"And I have other sheep who do not belong to this fold. I must lead these also, and they will hear my voice. So there will be one flock and one shepherd. This is the reason why the Father loves me - that I lay down my life, and I lay it down to take it up again! No one is taking it from me, but I lay it down of my own free will. I have the power to lay it down and I have the power to take it up again. This is an order that I have received from my Father."

THE OPPOSITION CONTINUES; AGAIN THE AUTHORITIES TRY TO ARREST HIM

John 10:19-42 - Once again (after Jesus had taught about the Good Shepherd), the Jews were in two minds about him because of these words, many of them remarking, "The devil's in him and he's insane. Why do you listen to him?"

But others were saying, "This is not the sort of thing a devil-possessed man would say! Can a devil make a blind man see?"

Then came the dedication festival at Jerusalem (in late December c AD29. It was held to commemorate the rededication of the Second Temple in c 164BC, following its desecration by the Syrians. Also called "Hanukkah" or Festival of Lights ....). It was winter-time and

Jesus was walking about inside the Temple in Solomon's cloisters. So the Jews closed in on him and said, "How much longer are you going to keep us in suspense? If you really are Christ, tell us so straight out!"

"I have told you," replied Jesus, "and you do not believe it. What I have done in my Father's name is sufficient to prove my claim, but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. My sheep recognise my voice and I know who they are. They follow me and I give them eternal life. They will never die and no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all. And no one can tear anything out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are One."

Again (at this blasphemy) the Jews reached for stones to stone him to death, but Jesus answered them, "I have shown you many good things from the Father - for which of these do you intend to stone me?"

"We're not going to stone you for any good things," replied the Jews, "but for blasphemy: because you, who are only a man, are making yourself out to be God."

"Is it not written in your own (our) Law," replied Jesus,

"'I have said you are gods'? (Psalm 82:6)

And if he called these men 'gods' to whom the word of God came (and the scripture cannot be broken), can you say to the one whom the Father has consecrated and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming' because I said, 'I am the Son of God'? If I fail to do what my Father does, then do not believe me. But if I do, even though you have no faith in me personally, then believe in the things that I do. Then you may come to know and realise that the Father is in me and I am in the Father."

And again they tried to arrest him, but he moved out of their reach.

Then Jesus went off again across the Jordan to the place where John had first baptised and there he stayed. A great many people

came to him, and said, "John never gave us any sign but all that he said about this man was true.."

And in that place many believed in him.

John 11:1-57

LAZARUS RAISED FROM THE DEAD

John 11:1-44 - Now there was a man by the name of Lazarus (not the poor man who went to heaven in Luke's parable, Luke 16:19-31) who became seriously ill. He lived in Bethany (outside Jerusalem on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives), the village where Mary and her sister Martha lived. (Lazarus was the brother of the Mary who poured perfume upon the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair.) So the sisters sent word to Jesus: "Lord, your friend is ill."

When Jesus (across the River Jordan in Perea) received the message, he said, "This illness is not meant to end in death; it is going to bring glory to God - for it will show the glory of the Son of God."

Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So when he heard of Lazarus' illness he stayed where he was two days longer. Only then did he say to the disciples, "Let us go back into Jude"

"Master!" returned the disciples, "only a few days ago, the Jews were trying to stone you to death - are you going there again?"

"There are twelve hours of daylight every day, are there not?" replied Jesus. "If a man walks in the daytime, he does not stumble, for he has the daylight to see by. But if he walks at night he stumbles, because he cannot see where he is going."

Jesus spoke these words; then after a pause he said to them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going to wake him up."

At this, his disciples said, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right."

Actually Jesus had spoken about his death, but they thought that he was speaking about falling into natural sleep. This made Jesus tell

them quite plainly, "Lazarus has died, and I am glad that I was not there - for your sakes, that you may learn to believe. And now, let us go to him."

Thomas (known as the twin - "doubting" Thomas) then said to his fellow-disciples, "Come on, then, let us all go and die with him!"

When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the grave four days. Now Bethany is quite near Jerusalem, rather less than two miles away, and a good many of the Jews had come out to see Martha and Mary to offer them sympathy over their brother's death. When Martha heard that Jesus was on his way, she went out and met him, while Mary stayed in the house.

"If only you had been here, Lord," said Martha, "my brother would never have died. And I know that, even now, God will give you whatever you ask from him."

"Your brother will rise again," Jesus replied to her.

"I know," said Martha, "that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."

"I myself am the resurrection and the life," Jesus told her. "The man who believes in me will live even though he dies, and anyone who is alive and believes in me will never die at all. Can you believe that?"

"Yes, Lord," replied Martha. "I do believe that you are Christ, the Son of God, the one who was to come into the world." Saying this she went away and called Mary her sister, whispering, "The master's here and is asking for you." When Mary heard this she sprang to her feet and went to him. Now Jesus had not yet arrived at the village itself, but was still where Martha had met him. So when the Jews who had been condoling with Mary in the house saw her get up quickly and go out, they followed her, imagining that she was going to the grave to weep there.

When Mary met Jesus, she looked at him, and then fell down at his feet. "If only you had been here, Lord," she said, "my brother would never have died."

When Jesus saw Mary weep and noticed the tears of the Jews who came with her, he was deeply moved and visibly distressed.

"Where have you put him?" he asked.

"Lord, come and see," they replied, and at this Jesus himself wept.

"Look how much he loved him!" remarked the Jews, though some of them asked, "Could he not have kept this man from dying if he could open that blind man's eyes?" (The man born blind who went before the Pharisees, John 9:1-41)

Jesus was again deeply moved at these words, and went on to the grave. It was a cave, and a stone lay in front of it.

"Take away the stone," said Jesus.

"But Lord," said Martha, the dead man's sister, "he has been dead four days. By this time he will be decaying ...."

"Did I not tell you," replied Jesus, "that if you believed, you would see the wonder of what God can do?"

Then they took the stone away and Jesus raised his eyes and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I know that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of these people standing here so that they may believe that you have sent me."

And when he had said this, he called out in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!"

And the dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with grave-clothes and his face muffled with a handkerchief.

"Now unbind him," Jesus told them, "and let him go home."

THE PLOT TO KILL JESUS
(also Matthew 26:3-5; Mark 14:1-2; Luke 22:1-2)

John 11:45-57 - In John's Gospel, the plot to kill Jesus is recorded before he makes his triumphal entry into Jerusalem:

After this (raising Lazarus from the dead) many of the Jews who had accompanied Mary (the sister of Lazarus) and observed what Jesus did, believed in him. But some of them went off to the Pharisees and

told them what Jesus had done. Consequently, the Pharisees and chief priests summoned the council and said, "What can we do? This man obviously shows many remarkable signs. If we let him go on doing this sort of thing we shall have everybody believing in him. Then we shall have the Romans coming and that will be the end of our holy place and our very existence as a nation."

But one of them, Caiaphas, who was High Priest that year, addressed the meeting: "You plainly don't understand what is involved here. You do not realise that it would be a good thing for us if one man should die for the sake of the people - instead of the whole nation being destroyed." (He did not make this remark on his own initiative but, since he was High Priest that year, he was in fact inspired to say that Jesus was going to die for the nation's sake - and in fact not for that nation only, but to bring together into one family all the children of God scattered throughout the world.) From that day then, they planned to kill him. As a consequence Jesus made no further public appearance among the Jews but went away to the countryside on the edge of the desert, and stayed with his disciples in a town called Ephraim. The Jewish Passover was approaching and many people went up from the country to Jerusalem before the actual Passover, to go through a ceremonial cleansing. They were looking for Jesus there and kept saying to one another as they stood in the Temple, "What do you think? Surely he won't come to the festival?"

TOWARDS THE END (Spring c AD30)

John 12:1-50

THE ANOINTING OF JESUS AT BETHANY
(also Matthew 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9)

John 12:1-8 - Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, the village of Lazarus whom he had raised from the dead (in John's account, the anointing takes place before Jesus makes his triumphal entry into Jerusalem). They gave a supper for him there, and Martha (sister of Mary and Lazarus) waited on the

party while Lazarus took his place at table with Jesus. Then Mary took a whole pound of very expensive perfume and anointed Jesus' feet and then wiped them with her hair. The entire house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot (the man who was going to betray Jesus), burst out, "Why on earth wasn't this perfume sold? It's worth thirty pounds, which could have been given to the poor!"

He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was dishonest, and when he was in charge of the purse used to help himself to the contents.

But Jesus replied to this outburst, "Let her alone, let her keep this for the day of my burial. You have the poor with you always - you will not always have me!"

THE PLOT TO KILL LAZARUS AS WELL

John 12:9-11 - The large crowd of Jews discovered that he (Jesus) was there (in Bethany where he was anointed with perfume) and came to the scene - not only because of Jesus but to catch sight of Lazarus, the man whom he had raised from the dead. Then the chief priests planned to kill Lazarus as well, because he was the reason for many of the Jews' going away and putting their faith in Jesus.

THE FINAL ENTRY OF JESUS INTO JERUSALEM
(also Matthew 21:1-11; Mark 11:1-11; Luke 19:28-44)

John 12:12-19 - The next day (after Jesus had been anointed at Bethany in John's account), the great crowd who had come to the festival (the Passover) heard that Jesus was coming into Jerusalem, and went to meet him with palm branches in their hands, shouting, "God save him!

'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord' (Psalm 118:26),

God bless the king of Israel!"

For Jesus had found a young ass and was seated upon it, just as the scripture foretold -

'Fear not, daughter of Zion: behold, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt' (Zechariah 9:9).

(The disciples did not realise the significance of what was happening at the time, but when Jesus was glorified, then they recollected that these things had been written about him and that they had carried them out for him.)

The people who had been with him, when he had summoned Lazarus from the grave and raised him from the dead, were continually talking about him. This accounts for the crowd who went out to meet him, for they had heard that he had given this sign. Seeing all this, the Pharisees remarked to one another, "You see? - There's nothing one can do! The whole world is running after him."

AS MANY JEWS REJECT JESUS, SO OTHERS REACH OUT TO HIM

John 12:20-50 - (In John's account, Jesus has just made his triumphal entry into Jerusalem ....) Among those who had come up to worship at the (Passover) festival were some Greeks. They approached Philip (the apostle - whose home town was Bethsaida in Galilee) with the request, "Sir, we want to see Jesus."

Philip went and told Andrew, and Andrew went with Philip and told Jesus.

Jesus told them, "The time has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. I tell you truly that unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains a single grain of wheat; but if it does, it brings a good harvest. The man who loves his own life will destroy it, and the man who hates his life in this world will preserve it for eternal life. If a man wants to enter my service, he must follow my way; and where I am, my servant will also be. And my Father will honour every man who enters my service.

"Now comes my hour of heart-break, and what can I say, 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very purpose that I came to this hour. 'Father, honour your own name!'"

At this there came a voice from Heaven, "I have honoured it and I will honour it again!"

When the crowd of bystanders heard this, they said it thundered, but some of them said, "An angel spoke to him."

Then Jesus said, "That voice came for your sake, not for mine. Now is the time for the judgment of this world to begin, and now will the spirit that rules this world (the devil or Satan) be driven out. As for me, if I am lifted up from the earth (in crucifixion), I will draw all men to myself." (He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.)

Then the crowd said, "We have heard from the Law that Christ lives for ever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be 'lifted up'? Who is this Son of Man?"

At this, Jesus said to them, "You have the light with you only a little while longer. Go on while the light is good, before the darkness come down upon you. For the man who walks in the dark has no idea where he is going. You must believe in the light while you have the light, that you may become the sons of light."

Jesus said all these things, and then went away, out of their sight. But though he had given so many signs, yet they did not believe in him, so that the prophecy of Isaiah was fulfilled, when he said,

'Lord, who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?' (Isaiah 53:1)

Thus, they could not believe, and he hardened their heart:

'He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they should see with their eyes and understand with their heart, lest they should turn, so that I should heal them' (Isaiah 6:10).

Isaiah said these things because he saw the glory of Christ, and spoke about him. Nevertheless, many even of the (Jewish religious) authorities did believe in him. But they would not admit it for fear of the Pharisees, in case they should be excommunicated. They were more concerned to have the approval of men than to have the approval of God.

But later, Jesus cried aloud, "Every man who believes in me, is believing in the one (God) who sent me; and every man who sees me is seeing the one who sent me. I have come into the world as light, so that no one who believes in me need remain in the dark. Yet, if anyone hears my sayings and does not keep them, I do not judge him - for I did not come to judge the world but to save it. Every man who rejects me and will not accept my sayings has a judge - at the last day, the very words that I have spoken will be his judge. For I have not spoken on my own authority: the Father who sent me has commanded me what to say and what to speak. And I know that what he commands means eternal life. All that I say I speak only in accordance with what the Father has told me."

John 13:1-38

THE LAST SUPPER
(also Matthew 26:17-29; Mark 14:12-25; Luke 22:7-30; 1 Corinthians 11:23-25)

John 13:1-30 - Before the festival of the Passover began, Jesus realised that the time had come for him to leave this world and return to the Father. He had loved those who were his own in this world and he loved them to the end. By supper-time, the devil had already put the thought of betraying Jesus in the mind of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son. Jesus, with the full knowledge that the Father had put everything into his hands and that he had come from God and was going to God, rose from the supper-table, took off his outer clothes, picked up a towel and fastened it round his waist. Then he poured water into the basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to dry them with the towel around his waist.

So he came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"

"You do not realise now what I am doing," replied Jesus, "but later on you will understand."

Then Peter said to him, "You must never wash my feet!"

"Unless you let me wash you, Peter," replied Jesus, "you cannot share my lot."

"Then," returned Simon Peter, "please - not just my feet but my hands and my face as well!"

"The man who has bathed," returned Jesus, "only needs to wash his feet to be clean all over. And you are clean - though not all of you."

(For Jesus knew his betrayer and that is why he said, "though not all of you".)

When Jesus had washed their feet and put on his clothes, he sat down and spoke to them, "Do you realise what I have just done to you? You call me 'teacher' and 'Lord' and you are quite right, for I am your teacher and your Lord. But if I, your teacher and Lord, have washed your feet, you must be ready to wash one another's feet. I have given you this as an example so that you may do as I have done. Believe me, the servant is not greater than his master and the messenger is not greater than the man who sent him. Once you have realised these things, you will find your happiness in doing them.

Jesus foretells his betrayal

"I am not speaking about all of you - I know the men I have chosen. But let this scripture be fulfilled -

'He who eats bread with me has lifted up his heel against me' (Psalm 41:9).

From now onwards, I shall tell you about things before they happen, so that when they do happen, you may believe that I am the one I claim to be. I tell you truly that anyone who accepts my messenger will be accepting me, and anyone who accepts me will be accepting the one who sent me."

After Jesus had said this, he was clearly in anguish of soul, and he added solemnly, "I tell you plainly, one of you is going to betray me."

At this the disciples stared at each other, completely mystified as to whom he could mean. And it happened that one of them who Jesus

loved (traditionally the apostle John), was sitting very close to him. So Simon Peter nodded to this man and said, "Tell us who he means."

He simply leaned forward on Jesus' shoulder, and asked, "Lord, who is it?"

And Jesus answered, "It is the one I am going to give this piece of bread to, after I have dipped it in the dish."

Then he took a piece of bread, dipped it in the dish and gave it to Simon's son, Judas Iscariot. After he had taken the piece of bread, Satan entered his heart. Then Jesus said to him, "Be quick about your business!"

No one else at table knew what he meant in telling him this. Indeed, some of them thought that, since Judas had charge of the purse, Jesus was telling him to buy what they needed for the festival, or that he should give something to the poor. So Judas took the piece of bread and went out quickly - into the night.

THE LAST NIGHT CONTINUED AND THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE
(also Matthew 26:30-46; Mark 14:26-42; Luke 22:31-46)

John 13:31-38 - When he (Judas Iscariot who had been present during the Last Supper) had gone, Jesus spoke, "Now comes the glory of the Son of Man, and the glory of God in him! If God is glorified through him then God will glorify the Son of Man - and that without delay. Oh, my children, I am with you such a short time! You will look for me and I have to tell you as I told the (other) Jews, 'Where I am going, you cannot follow.' Now I am giving you a new command - love one another. Just as I have loved you, so you must love one another. This is how all men will know that you are my disciples, because you have such love for one another."

Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, where are you going?"

"I am going," replied Jesus, "where you cannot follow now, though you will follow me later."

"Lord, why can't I follow you now? said Peter. "I would lay down my life for you!"

"Would you lay down your life for me?" replied Jesus. "Believe me, you will disown me three times before the cock crows!"

John 14:1-31

JESUS THE WAY TO GOD THE FATHER AND THE COMING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT - "I AM THE WAY, AND THE TRUTH AND THE LIFE"

John 14:1-31 - "You must not let yourselves be distressed - you must hold on to your faith in God and to your faith in me. There are many rooms in my Father's House. If there were not, should I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? It is true that I am going away to prepare a place for you, but it is just as true that I am coming again to welcome you into my own home, so that you may be where I am. You know where I am going and you know the road I am going to take."

"Lord," Thomas (the "doubting" apostle) remonstrated, "we do not know where you're going, and how can we know what road you're going to take?"

"I myself am the road," replied Jesus, "and the truth and the life. No one approaches the Father except through me. If you had known who I am, you would have known my Father. From now on, you do know him and you have seen him."

Jesus explains his relationship with the Father

Then Philip said to him, "Show us the Father, Lord, and we shall be satisfied."

"Have I been such a long time with you," returned Jesus, "without your really knowing me, Philip? The man who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The very words I say to you are not my own. It is the Father who lives in me who carries out his work through me. Do you believe me when I say

that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? But if you cannot, then believe me because of what you see me do. I assure you that the man who believes in me will do the same things that I have done, yes, and he will do even greater things than these, for I am going away to the Father. Whatever you ask the Father in my name, I will do - that the Son may bring glory to the Father. And if you ask me anything in my name, I will grant it.

Jesus promises the Spirit

"If you really love me, you will keep the commandments I have given you and I shall ask the Father to give you someone else to stand by you, to be with you always. I mean the Spirit of truth (the Holy Spirit, or the Comforter or Counsellor or Helper .....), whom the world cannot accept, for it can neither see nor recognise that Spirit. But you recognise him, for he is with you now and will be in your hearts. I am not going to leave you alone in the world - I am coming to you. In a very little while, the world will see me no more but you will see me, because I am really alive and you will be alive too. When that day come, you will realise that I am in my Father, that you are in me, and I am in you.

"Every man who knows my commandments and obeys them is the man who really loves me, and every man who really loves me will himself be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and make myself known to him."

Then Judas (not Iscariot - but Judas, also called Thaddaeus, son of James), said, "Lord, how is it that you are going to make yourself known to us but not to the world?"

And to this Jesus replied, "When a man loves me, he follows my teaching. Then my Father will love him, and we will come to that man and make our home within him. The man who does not really love me will not follow my teaching. Indeed, what you are hearing from me now is not really my saying, but comes from the Father who sent me.

"I have said all this while I am still with you. But the one who is coming to stand by you, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in

my name, will be your teacher and will bring to your minds all that I have said to you.

"I leave behind with you - peace; I give you my own peace and my gift is nothing like the peace of this world. You must not be distressed and you must not be daunted. You have heard me say, 'I am going away and I am coming back to you.' If you really loved me, you would be glad because I am going to my Father, for my Father is greater than I. And I have told you of it now, before it happens, so that when it does happen, your faith in me will not be shaken. I shall not be able to talk much longer to you for the spirit that rules this world (Satan or the devil) is coming very close. He has no hold over me, but I go on my way to show the world that I love the Father and do what he sent me to do ... Get up now! Let us leave this place (presumably the Upper Room or the table where the Last Supper is being held).

John 15:1-27

UNION WITH JESUS - "THE VINE AND THE BRANCHES", AND THE HATRED OF THE WORLD

John 15:1-27 - (During the Last Supper, Jesus continues .....) "I am the real vine, my Father is the vine-dresser. He removes any of my branches which are not bearing fruit and he prunes every branch that does bear fruit to increase its yield. Now, you have already been pruned by my words. You must go on growing in me and I will grow in you. For just as the branch cannot bear any fruit unless it shares the life of the vine, so you can produce nothing unless you go on growing in me. I am the vine itself, you are the branches. It is the man who shares my life and whose life I share who proves fruitful. For the plain fact is that apart from me you can do nothing at all. The man who does not share my life is like a branch that is broken off and withers away. He becomes just like the dry sticks that men pick up and use for the firewood. But if you live your life in me, and my words live in your hearts, you can ask for whatever you like and it will come true for you. This is how my Father will be glorified - in your becoming fruitful and being my disciples.

"I have loved you just as the Father has loved me. You must go on living in my love. If you keep my commandments you will live in my love just as I have kept my Father's commandments and live in his love. I have told you this so that you can share my joy, and that your happiness may be complete. This is my commandment: that you love each other as I have loved you. There is no greater love than this - that a man should lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I tell you to do. I shall not call you servants any longer, for a servant does not share his master's confidence. No, I call you friends, now, because I have told you everything that I have heard from the Father.

"It is not that you have chosen me; but it is I who have chosen you. I have appointed you to go and bear fruit that will be lasting; so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he will give it to you.

Jesus speaks of the world's hatred

"This I command you, love one another! If the world hates you, you know that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, the world would love its own. But because you do not belong to the world and I have chosen you out of it, the world will hate you. Do you remember what I said to you, 'The servant is not greater than his master'? If they have persecuted me, they will persecute you as well, but if they have followed my teaching, they will also follow yours. They will do all these things to you as my disciples because they do not know the one who sent me. If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have been guilty of sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. The man who hates me, hates my Father as well. If I had not done among them things that no other man has ever done, they would not have been guilty of sin, but as it is they have seen and they have hated both me and my Father. Yet this only fulfils what is written in their Law -

'They hated me without a cause' (Psalm 69:4).

But when the helper comes, that is, the Spirit of truth (the Holy Spirit), who comes from the Father and whom I myself will send to you from the Father, he will speak plainly about me. And you

yourselves will also speak plainly about me for you have been with me from the first.

John 16:1-33

THE HATRED OF THE WORLD - Concluded

Jesus speaks of the future without his bodily presence

John 16:1-4 - "I am telling you this now so that your faith in me may not be shaken. They will excommunicate you from their synagogues. Yes, the time is coming when a man who kills you will think he is thereby serving God! They will act like this because they have never had any true knowledge of the Father or of me, but I have told you all this so that when the time comes for it to happen you may remember that I told you about it. I have not spoken like this to you before, because I have been with you ....."

JESUS TALKS ABOUT THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE FUTURE

John 16:5-33 - (Jesus continues ....) "but now the time has come for me to go away to the one who sent me. None of you asks me, 'Where are you going?' That is because you are so distressed at what I have told you. Yet I am telling you the simple truth when I assure you that it is a good thing for you that I should go away. For if I did not go away, the divine helper (the Comforter, the Holy Spirit) would not come to you. But if I go, then I will send him to you. When he comes, he will convince the world of the meaning of sin, of true goodness and of judgment. He will expose their sin because they do not believe in me; he will reveal true goodness for I am going away to the Father and you will see me no longer; and he will show them the meaning of judgment, for the spirit which rules this world (Satan, the prince of the earth) will have been judged.

"I have much more to tell you but you cannot bear it now. Yet when that one I have spoken to you about comes - the (Holy) Spirit of truth - he will guide you into everything that is true. For he will not be speaking of his own accord but exactly as he hears, and he will inform you about what is to come. He will bring glory to me for he will

draw on my truth and reveal it to you. Whatever the Father possesses is also mine; that is why I tell you that he will draw on my truth and will show it to you.

The disciples are puzzled: Jesus explains

"In a little while you will not see me any longer, and again, in a little while you will see me."

At this some of his disciples remarked to each other, "What is this that he tells us now, 'A little while and you will not see me, and again, in a little while you will see me' and 'for I am going away to the Father'? What is the 'little while' that he talks about?" they were saying. "We simply do not know what he means!"

Jesus knew that they wanted to ask him what he meant, so he said to them, "Are you trying to find out from each other what I meant when I said, 'In a little while you will not see me, and again, in a little while you will see me'? I tell you truly that you are going to be both sad and sorry while the world is glad. Yes, you will be deeply distressed, but your pain will turn into joy. When a woman gives birth to a child, she certainly knows pain when her time comes. Yet as soon as she has given birth to the child, she no longer remembers her agony for joy that a man has been born into the world. Now you are going through pain, but I shall see you again and your hearts will thrill with joy - the joy that no one can take away from you - and on that day you will not ask me any questions.

"I assure you that whatever you ask the Father he will give you in my name. Up to now you have asked nothing in my name; ask now, and you will receive, that your joy may be overflowing.

Jesus speaks further of the future

"I have been speaking to you in parables - but the time is coming to give up parables and tell you plainly about the Father. When that time comes, you will make your requests to him in my own name, for I need make no promise to plead to the Father for you, for the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God. Yes, I did come from the Father and I came

into the world. Now I leave the world behind and return to the Father."

"Now you are speaking plainly," cried the disciples, "and are not using parables. Now we know that everything is known to you - no more questions are needed. This makes us sure that you did come from God."

"So you believe in me now?" replied Jesus. "The time is coming, indeed, it has already come, when you will be scattered, every one of you going home and leaving me alone. Yet I am not really alone for the Father is with me. I have told you all this so that you may find your peace in me. You will find trouble in the world - but, never lose heart, I have conquered the world!"

John 17:1-26

JESUS PRAYS FOR HIMSELF, HIS DISCIPLES AND ALL FUTURE BELIEVERS

John 17:1-26 - (The Last Supper comes to a close ....) When Jesus had said these words, he raised his eyes to Heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son now so that he may bring glory to you, for you have given him authority over all men to give eternal life for all that you have given to him. And this is eternal life, to know you, the only true God, and him whom you have sent - Jesus Christ.

"I have brought you honour upon earth, I have completed the task which you gave me to do. Now, Father, honour me in your own presence with the glory that I knew with you before the world was made. I have shown your self to the men whom you gave me from the world. They were your men and you gave them to me, and they have accepted your word. Now they realise that all that you have given me comes from you - and that every message that you gave me I have given them. They have accepted it all and have come to know in their hearts that I did come from you - they are convinced that you sent me.

"I am praying to you for them: I am not praying for the world but for the men whom you gave me, for they are yours - everything that is mine is yours and yours mine - and they have done me honour. Now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world and I am returning to you. Holy Father, keep the men you gave me by your power that they may be one, as we are one. As long as I was with them I kept them by the power that you gave me; I guarded them, and not one of them was destroyed, except the son of destruction (Judas Iscariot) - that the scripture might come true.

"And now I come to you and I say these things in the world that these men may find my joy completed in themselves. I have given them your word, and the world has hated them, for they are no more sons of the world than I am. I am not praying that you will take them out of the world but that you will keep them from the evil one. They are no more the sons of the world than I am - make them holy by the truth; for your word is the truth. I have sent them to the world just as you sent me to the world and I consecrate myself for their sakes that they may be made holy by the truth.

"I am not praying only for these men (the disciples present at the Last Supper) but for all those who will believe in me (in the coming millennia) through their message, that they may all be one. Just as you, Father, live in me and I live in you, I am asking that they may live in us, that the world may believe that you did send me. I have given them the honour that you gave me, that they may be one, as we are one - I in them and you in me, that they may grow complete into one, so that the world may realise that you sent me and have loved them as you loved me. Father, I want those whom you have given me to be with me where I am; I want them to see that glory which you have made mine - for you loved me before the world began. Father of goodness and truth, the world has not known you, but I have known you and these men now know that you have sent me. I have made your self known to them and I will continue to do so that the love which you have had for me may be in their hearts - and that I may be there also.

In John's Gospel, Jesus now leaves the Last Supper to cross the Kidron Valley to reach the Garden of Gethsemane on the lower

slopes of the Mount of Olives. Here he is arrested by the Jewish authorities.

John 18:1-40

THE LAST NIGHT - Concluded

John 18:1-2 - When Jesus had spoken these words (chapters 14-17), he went out with his disciples across the Cedron (or Kidron) valley to a place where there was a garden, and they went into it together. Judas who betrayed him knew the place, for Jesus often met his disciples there. (Judas Iscariot shortly arrives.)

JESUS IS BETRAYED AND ARRESTED
(also Matthew 26:47-56; Mark 14:43-52; Luke 22:47-54a)

John 18:3-12 - So Judas (knowing the place where Jesus had gone) fetched the guard and the officers which the chief priests and Pharisees had provided for him, and came to the place with torches and lanterns and weapons. Jesus, fully realising all that was going to happen to him, went forward and said to them, "Who are you looking for?"

"Jesus of Nazareth," they answered.

"I am the man," said Jesus. (Judas who was betraying him was standing there with the others.)

When he said to them, "I am the man", they retreated and fell to the ground. So Jesus asked them again, "Who are you looking for?"

And again they said, "Jesus of Nazareth."

"I have told you that I am the man," replied Jesus. "If I am the man you are looking for, let these others (his disciples) go." (Thus fulfilling his previous words, "I have not lost one of those whom you gave me.")

At this, Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it and slashed at the High Priest's servant, cutting off his right ear. (The servant's name was Malchus.) But Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword back into its sheath. Am I not to drink the cup the Father has given me?"

Then the guard, with their captain and the Jewish officers, took hold of Jesus and tied his hands together .....

After his arrest Jesus appears before three separate authorities:

(1) Annas still a "chief priest", and the Sanhedrin of which Caiaphas is the High Priest;

(2) Pontius Pilate, Roman procurator of Judea and Samaria; and

(3) Herod Antipas, Jewish tetrarch of Galilee and Perea visiting Jerusalem at that time.

Pontius Pilate actually sentences Jesus to death by crucifixion

JESUS IS TRIED BEFORE THE JEWISH AUTHORITIES; PETER BETRAYS HIM
(also Matthew 26:57-27:2; Mark 14:53-15:1; Luke 22:54b-23:1)

John 18:13-28 - .... (the guard) led him (Jesus) off to Annas first, for he was the father-in-law to Caiaphas, who was High Priest that year. Caiaphas was the man who advised the Jews, "that it would be a good thing that one man should die for the sake of the people." Behind Jesus followed Simon Peter, and one other disciple who was known personally to the High Priest (most likely the apostle John, author of this Gospel). He went in with Jesus into the High Priest's courtyard, but Peter was left standing at the door outside. So this other disciple, who was acquainted with the High Priest, went out and spoke to the doorkeeper, and brought Peter inside. The young woman at the door remarked to Peter, "Are you one of this man's disciples, too?"

"No, I am not," retorted Peter.

In the courtyard, the servants and officers stood around a charcoal fire which they had made, for it was cold. They were warming themselves, and Peter stood there with them, keeping himself warm.

Meanwhile the High Priest interrogated Jesus about his disciples and about his own teaching.

"I have always spoken quite openly to the world," replied Jesus. "I have always taught in the synagogue or in the Temple where all the Jews meet together, and I have said nothing in secret. Why do you question me? Why not question those who have heard me about what I said to them? Obviously they are the ones who know what I actually said."

As he said this, one of those present, an officer, slapped Jesus with his open hand, remarking, "Is that the way for you to answer the High Priest?"

"If I have said anything wrong," Jesus said to him, "you must give evidence about it, but if what I said was true, why do you strike me?

Then Annas sent him, with his hands still tied, to the High Priest Caiaphas.

Peter's denial

In the meantime Simon Peter was still standing, keeping himself warm. Some of them said to him, "Surely you too are one of his disciples, aren't you?"

And he denied it and said, "No, I am not."

Then one of the High Priest's servants, a relation of the man (Malchus) whose ear Peter had cut off, remarked, "Didn't I see you in the garden with him?"

And again Peter denied it. And immediately the cock crew.

Jesus is taken before the Roman authority

Then they led Jesus from Caiaphas' presence into the (Roman) palace (of Pontius Pilate). It was now early morning and the Jews themselves did not go into the palace, for fear that they would be contaminated and would not be able to eat the Passover.

JESUS BEFORE THE ROMAN PONTIUS PILATE
(Matthew 27:11-26; Mark 15:2-15; Luke 23:2-25; John 18:29-19:16a)

- In Luke's account Jesus is also taken before Herod Antipas, Jewish tetrarch of Galilee and Perea:

John 18:29-40 - (Jesus has been taken to the Roman palace and the Jewish authorities wait outside for religious reasons because of the approaching Passover .....) So Pilate walked out to them and said, "What is the charge that you are bringing against this man?"

"If he were not an evil-doer, we should not have handed him over to you," they replied.

To which Pilate retorted, "Then take him yourselves and judge him according to your law."

"We are not allowed to put a man to death," replied the Jews (thus fulfilling Christ's prophecy of the method of his own death).

So Pilate went back into the Palace and called Jesus to him. "Are you the king of the Jews?" he asked.

"Are you asking this of your own accord," replied Jesus, "or have other people spoken to you about me?"

"Do you think I am a Jew?" replied Pilate. "It's your people and your chief priests who handed you over to me. What have you done, anyway?"

"My kingdom is not founded in this world - if it were, my servants would have fought to prevent my being handed over to the Jews. But in fact my kingdom is not founded on all this!"

"So you are a king, are you?" returned Pilate.

"Indeed I am a king," Jesus replied; "the reason for my birth and the reason for my coming into the world is to witness to the truth. Every man who loves truth recognises my voice."

To which Pilate retorted, "What is 'truth'?" and went straight out again to the Jews and said: "I find nothing criminal about him at all. But I have an arrangement with you to set one prisoner free at Passover time. Do you wish me then to set free for you the 'king of the Jews'?"

At this, they shouted out again, "No, not this man, but Barabbas!"

Barabbas was a bandit.

John 19:1-42

JESUS BEFORE THE ROMAN PONTIUS PILATE; THE SENTENCE

Pilate's vain efforts to save Jesus

John 19:1-16a - Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged, and the soldiers twisted thorn-twigs into a crown and put it on his head, threw a purple robe around him and kept coming into his presence, saying, "Hail, king of the Jews!" And then they slapped him with their open hands.

Then Pilate went outside again and said to them, "Look, I bring him out before you here, to show that I find nothing criminal about him at all."

And at this Jesus came outside too, wearing the thorn crown and the purple robe.

"Look," said Pilate, "here's the man!"

The sight of him made the chief priests and Jewish officials shout at the top of their voices, "Crucify! Crucify!"

"You take him and crucify him," retorted Pilate. "He's no criminal as far as I can see!"

The Jews answered him, "We have a Law, and according to that Law, he must die, for he made himself out to be Son of God!"

When Pilate heard them say this, he became much more uneasy, and returned to the palace again and spoke to Jesus, "Where do you come from?"

But Jesus gave him no reply. So Pilate said to him, "Won't you speak to me? Don't you realise that I have the power to set you free, and I have the power to have you crucified?"

"You have no power at all against me," replied Jesus, "except what was given to you from above. And for that reason the one who handed me over to you is even more guilty than you are."

From that moment, Pilate tried hard to set him free but the Jews were shouting, "If you set this man free, you are no friend of Caesar! Anyone who makes himself out to be a king is anti-Caesar!"

When Pilate heard this, he led Jesus outside and sat down upon the Judgment-seat in the place called the Pavement (in Hebrew, Gabbatha). It was preparation day of the Passover and it was now getting on towards midday. Pilate said to the Jews, "Look, here's your king!"

At which they yelled, "Take him away, take him away, crucify him!"

"Am I to crucify your king?" Pilate asked them.

"Caesar is our king and no one else," replied the chief priests. And at this Pilate handed Jesus over to them for crucifixion.

HIS CRUCIFIXION AND DEATH
(also Matthew 27:32-50; Mark 15:21-37; Luke 23:26-46)

John 19:16b-30 - So they (the Roman soldiers) took Jesus and he went out carrying the cross himself, to a place called Skull Hill (in Hebrew, Golgotha). There they crucified him, and two others, one on either side of him with Jesus in the middle. Pilate had a placard written out and put on the cross, reading, JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS. This placard was read by many of the Jews because the place where Jesus was crucified was quite near Jerusalem, and it was written in Hebrew as well as in Latin and Greek. So the chief priests said to Pilate, "You should not write 'The King of the Jews', but 'This man said, I am King of the Jews.'"

To which Pilate retorted, "Indeed? What I have written, I have written."

When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they divided his clothes between them, taking a quarter-share each. There remained his shirt, which was seamless - woven in one piece from the top to the bottom. So they said to each other, "Don't let us tear it; let's draw lots and see who gets it."

This happened to fulfil the scripture which says -

'They divided my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots' (Psalm 22:18)

Jesus provides for his mother from the cross

While the soldiers were doing this, Jesus' mother was standing near the cross with her sister, and with them Mary, the wife of Clopas ....

Clopas - "Cleopas" or "Cleophas", possibly "Alphaeus" in Aramaic. He may be one of the two disciples Jesus met on the road to Emmaus after his resurrection. Some commentators describe Clopas as a brother of Joseph and hence an uncle to Jesus -

.... and Mary of Magdala. Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved (probably the apostle John, author of this Gospel) standing by her side, and said to her, "Look, there is your son!" And then he said to the disciple, "And there is your mother!"

And from that time the disciple took Mary into his own home.

After this, Jesus realising that everything was now completed said (fulfilling the saying of scripture), "I am thirsty."

There was a bowl of sour wine standing there. So they soaked a sponge in the wine, put it on a spear, and pushed it up towards his mouth. When Jesus had taken it, he cried, "It is finished!" His head fell forward, and he died.

HIS BURIAL
(also Matthew 27:57-66; Mark 15:42-47; Luke 23:50-56)

John 19:31-42 - As it was the day of preparation for the Passover, the Jews wanted to avoid the bodies being left on the crosses over the Sabbath (for that was a particularly important Sabbath), and they requested Pilate to have the men's legs broken and the bodies removed. So the soldiers went and broke the legs of the first man and of the other who was crucified with Jesus. But when they came to him, they saw that he was already dead and they did not break his legs. But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there was an outrush of blood and water. And the man who saw this(the apostle John) is our witness: his evidence is true. (He is

certain that he is speaking the truth, so that you may believe as well.) For this happened to fulfil the scripture,

'Not one of his bones shall be broken.' (Exodus 12:46, Numbers 9:12, Psalm 34:20)

And again another scripture says -

'They shall look on him whom they pierced.' (Zechariah 12:10)

After it was all over, Joseph (who came from Arimathaea and was a disciple of Jesus, though secretly for fear of the Jews) requested Pilate that he might take away Jesus' body, and Pilate gave him permission. So he came and took his body down. Nicodemus also (a Pharisee and leading member of the Sanhedrin), the man who had come to him at the beginning by night (John 3:1-21), arrived bringing a mixture of myrrh (a gift of the wise men at Jesus' birth, and the drugged drink at his crucifixion) and aloes (crushed scented wood), weighing about a hundred pounds. So they took his body and wound it round with linen strips with the spices, according to the Jewish custom of preparing a body for burial. In the place where he was crucified, there was a garden containing a new tomb in which nobody had yet been laid. Because it was the preparation day and because the tomb was conveniently near, they laid Jesus in this tomb.

The life and ministry of Jesus on earth is over - tortured to death on a Roman cross and consigned to the grave. Everything he did, no matter how wonderful or wise - his miracles, his parables, the Sermon on the Mount - mark him as a superb teacher, a miracle-worker, a man of unsurpassed personality, but still a man. And sometimes,almost a madman from his seemingly more outrageous statements and claims.

In evidence of failure, his followers are desolate, mostly scattered and without hope. The few that remain prepare to give him a proper burial. There seems nothing left to suggest the birth, 2,000 years ago of a life and world-changing religion that claims to be unique, to

come directly from the creator God of the universe, and which is offered freely to all the people of Earth and perhaps beyond.

THE NEW BEGINNING Spring cAD30

John 20:1-31

THE EMPTY TOMB
(also Matthew 28:1-8,11-15; Mark 16:1-8; Luke 24:1-12)

John 20:1-13 - But on the first day of the week, Mary of Magdala arrived at the tomb, very early in the morning, while it was still dark, and noticed that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. At this she ran, found Simon Peter and the other disciple whom Jesus loved (the apostle John), and told them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb and we don't know where they have put him."

Peter and the other disciple set off at once for the tomb, the two of them running together. The other disciple (the younger John) ran faster than Peter and was the first to arrive at the tomb. He stooped and looked inside and noticed the linen cloths lying there but did not go in himself. Hard on his heels came Simon Peter and went straight into the tomb. He noticed that the linen cloths were lying there, and that the handkerchief, which had been round Jesus's head, was not lying with the linen cloths but was rolled up by itself, a little way apart. Then the other disciple, who was the first to arrive at the tomb, came inside as well, saw what had happened and believed. (They did not yet understand the scripture which said that he must rise from the dead.) So the disciples went back again to their homes.

But Mary (Magdalene) stood just outside the tomb, and she was crying. And as she cried, she looked into the tomb and saw two angels in white who sat, one at the head and the other at the foot of the place where the body of Jesus had lain.

The angels spoke to her, "Why are you crying?" they asked.

"Because they have taken away my Lord, and I don't know where they have put him!" she said.

THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS AND HIS APPEARANCES TO HIS DISCIPLES
(also Matthew 28:9-10,16-17; Mark 16:9-14; Luke 24:13-44; Acts 1:1-5; 1 Corinthians 15:3-8)

John 20:14-31 - Then she (Mary of Magdala, crying outside the tomb) turned and noticed Jesus standing there, without realising that it was Jesus.

"Why are you crying?" said Jesus to her. "Who are you looking for?"

She, supposing that he was the gardener, said, "Oh, sir, if you have carried him away, please tell me where you have put him and I will take him away."

Jesus said to her, "Mary!"

At this she turned right round and said to him, in Hebrew, "Master!"

"No!" said Jesus, "do not hold me now. I have not yet gone up to the Father. Go and tell my brothers that I am going up to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God."

And Mary of Magdala went off to the disciples, with the news, "I have seen the Lord!", and she told them what he had said to her.

In the evening of that first day of the week, the disciples had met together with the doors locked for fear of the Jews. Jesus came and stood right in the middle of them and said, "Peace be with you!"

Then he showed them his hands and his side, and when they saw the Lord the disciples were overjoyed.

Jesus said to them again, "Yes, peace be with you! Just as the Father sent me, so I am now going to send you."

And then he breathed upon them and said, "Receive holy spirit. If you forgive any men's sins, they are forgiven, and if you hold them unforgiven, they are unforgiven."

The risen Jesus and Thomas

But one of the twelve, ("doubting") Thomas (called the Twin), was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples kept on telling

him, "We have seen the Lord", but he replied, "Unless I see in his own hands the mark of the nails, and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will never believe!"

Just over a week later, the disciples were indoors again and Thomas was with them. The doors were shut, but Jesus came and stood in the middle of them and said, "Peace be with you!"

Then he said to Thomas, "Put your fingers here - look, here are my hands. Take my hand and put it in my side. You must not doubt, but believe."

"My Lord and my God!" cried Thomas.

"Is it because you have seen me that you believe?" Jesus said to him. "Happy are those who have never seen me and yet have believed!"

Jesus gave a great many other signs in the presence of his disciples which are not recorded in this book. But these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is Christ, the Son of God, and that in that faith you may have life as his disciples.

John 21:1-25

THE APPEARANCES OF JESUS - Concluded

The risen Jesus and Peter

John 21:1-14 - Later on (after Jesus had appeared to "doubting" Thomas), Jesus showed himself again to his disciples on the shore of Lake Tiberias (the Sea of Galilee), and he did it in this way. Simon Peter, Thomas (called the Twin), Nathanael (also known as Bartholomew) from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee (James and John) and two other disciples were together, when Simon Peter said, "I'm going fishing."

"All right," they replied, "we'll go with you."

So they went out and got into the boat and during the night caught nothing at all. But just as dawn began to break, Jesus stood there on the beach, although the disciples had no idea that it was Jesus.

"Have you caught anything, lads?" Jesus called out to them.

"No," they replied.

"Throw the net on the right side of the boat," said Jesus, "and you'll have a catch."

So they threw out the net and found that they were now not strong enough to pull it in because it was so full of fish! At this, the disciple that Jesus loved (John) said to Peter, "It is the Lord!"

Hearing this, Peter slipped on his clothes, for he had been naked, and plunged into the sea The other disciples followed in the boat, for they were only about a hundred yards from the shore, dragging in the net full of fish. When they had landed, they saw that a charcoal fire was burning, with a fish placed on it, and some bread. Jesus said to them, "Bring me some of the fish you've just caught."

So Simon Peter got into the boat and hauled the net ashore full of large fish, one hundred and fifty-three altogether (the number of known types of fish in the Sea of Galilee or the world according to one of the various traditions). But in spite of the large number the net was not torn.

Then Jesus said to them, "Come and have your breakfast."

None of the disciples dared to ask him who he was; they knew it was the Lord.

Jesus went and took the bread and gave it to them and gave them all fish as well. This is already the third time that Jesus showed himself to his disciples after his resurrection from the dead.

HIS COMMISSION TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO THE WORLD (also Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-18; Luke 24:45-50;; Acts 1:6-8)

John 21:15-23 - When they had finished breakfast (of fish at the lake-side) Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these others?"

"Yes, Lord," he replied, "you know that I am your friend."

"Then feed my lambs," returned Jesus. Then he said for the second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?"

"Yes, Lord," returned Peter. "You know that I am your friend."

"Then care for my sheep," replied Jesus. Then for the third time, Jesus spoke to him and said, "Simon, son of John, are you my friend?"

Peter was deeply hurt because Jesus' third question to him was "Are you my friend?", and he said, "Lord, you know everything. You know that I am your friend!"

"Then feed my sheep," Jesus said to him. "I tell you truly, Peter, that when you were younger, you used to dress yourself and go where you liked, but when you are an old man, you are going to stretch out your hands and someone else will dress you and take you where you do not want to go." (He said this to show the kind of death - by crucifixion - by which Peter was going to honour God.)

Then Jesus said to him, "You must follow me."

Then Peter turned round and noticed the disciple whom Jesus loved (the apostle John) following behind them. (He was the one who had his head on Jesus' shoulder at supper and had asked, "Lord, who is the one who is going to betray you?") So he said, "Yes, Lord, but what about him?"

"If it is my wish," returned Jesus, "for him to stay until I come, is that your business, Peter? You must follow me."

This gave rise to the saying among the brothers that this disciple (John) would not die. Yet, of course, Jesus did not say, "He will not die,", but simply, "If it is my wish for him to stay until I come, is that your business?" (According to tradition, John was the only apostle not martyred and who died a natural death in old age.)

EPILOGUE TO THE GOSPELS

John 21:24-25 - Now it is this same disciple (the apostle John) who is hereby giving his testimony to these things and has written them down. We know that his witness is reliable. Of course, there are many other things which Jesus did, and I suppose that if each one

were written down in detail, there would not be room in the whole world for all the books that would have to be written.

ACTS of the APOSTLES

With people, places, definitions, map .....

In 6 Parts

Writer: Luke, a Gentile and the "beloved physician" (Colossians 4:14), a friend and travelling companion of Paul;

Date: c AD63, towards the end of Paul's Roman captivity;

Where written: Rome, but possibly drafted in part, or material collected in Caesarea;

Reader: The unknown Theophilus, either a senior Roman official who was also a Christian, or symbolically the entire Gentile Church;

Why: To record that part of the history of the early Church from the resurrection of Jesus to the imprisonment of Paul in Rome 30 years later. It bridges much of the period between the Gospel story of Jesus and the Letters to the Church. One interesting theory is that it was written as part of the preparation for Paul's legal defence in Rome some years after his arrest in Jerusalem.

According to Some Modern Scholarship: Still probably written by Luke, but perhaps c AD80 as a continuation of his Gospel. It probably used material collected from Paul during his imprisonment at Caesarea in c AD58-60

The Jewish Period

INTRODUCTION TO ACTS; THE ASCENSION OF JESUS

Acts 1:1-11 - My Dear Theophilus, In my first book (Luke's Gospel) I gave you some account of all that Jesus began to do and teach until the time of his ascension. Before he ascended he gave his instructions, through the Holy Spirit, to the special messengers of his choice. For after his suffering he showed himself alive to them in many convincing ways, and appeared to them repeatedly over a period of forty days talking with them about the affairs of the kingdom of God.

Jesus' parting words before his ascension

On one occasion, while he was eating a meal with them, he emphasised that they were not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for the Father's promise.

"You have already heard me speak about this," he said, "for John (the Baptist) used to baptise with water, but before many days are passed you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit."

This naturally brought them all together, and they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you are going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"

To this he replied, "You cannot know times and dates which have been fixed by the Father's sole authority. But you are to be given power when the Holy Spirit has come to you. You will be witnesses to me, not only in Jerusalem, not only throughout Judea, not only in Samaria, but to the very ends of the earth!"

When he had said these words he was lifted up before their eyes till a cloud hid him from their sight. While they were still gazing up into the sky as he went, suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them and said, "Men of Galilee, why are you standing here looking up into the sky? This very Jesus who has been taken up from you into Heaven will come back in just the same way as you have seen him go."

THE CHURCH MEETS; MATTHIAS APPOINTED AN APOSTLE

Acts 1:12-26 - At this (the ascension of Jesus) they returned to Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives which is near the city, only a sabbath day's journey away (three-quarters of a mile). On entering

Jerusalem they went straight to the upstairs room where they had been staying (where the Last Supper was possibly held). There were Peter, John, James, Andrew, Philip ....

Philip (Greek Philippus) - Three Philips appear in the New Testament:

In the Gospels:

(1) This Philip the apostle;

(2) Philip, tetrarch of Iturea and Trachonitis 4BC-34AD; and

In the Acts of the Apostles:

(3) Philip the Evangelist, one of the first "deacons".

A fourth Philip appears in other contemporary accounts:

(4) Philip, the member of the Herod family originally married to Herodias. Their daughter was Salome -

.... Thomas, Bartholomew, Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, Simon the Patriot, and Judas the son of James (the eleven remaining apostles). By common consent all these men together with the women who had followed Jesus, Mary his mother ....

Mary - This is the last time the mother of Jesus appears in the New Testament -

.... as well as his brothers ....

Brothers of Jesus - Probably included James, later head of the church in Jerusalem, and author of the Letter of James. Also Judas (or Jude), author of the Letter of Jude -

.... devoted themselves to prayer.

Judas' place is filled

It was during this period that Peter stood among the brothers - there were about a hundred and twenty present at the time - and said, "My brothers, the prophecy of scripture given through the Holy Spirit by the lips of David (in his psalms) concerning Judas (Iscariot) was bound to come true. He was the man who acted as guide to those who arrested Jesus, though he was one of our number and he had a share in this ministry of ours."

(This man had bought a piece of land with the proceeds of his infamy, but his body swelled up and his intestines burst. This fact became well known to all the residents of Jerusalem so that the piece of land came to be called in their Aramaic language Akeldama, which means "the field of blood".)

"Now it is written in the book of psalms of such a man:

'Let his habitation be desolate, and let no one live in it' (Psalm 69:25), and

'Let another take his office' (Psalm 109:8).

"It becomes necessary then that whoever joins us must be someone who has been in our company during the whole time the Lord Jesus lived his life with us, from the beginning when John baptised him until the day when he was taken up from us. This man must be an eye-witness with us to the resurrection of Jesus."

Two men were put forward, Joseph called Barsabbas who was also called Justus. ....

Justus - Three men with this surname appear in the New Testament:

In the Acts of the Apostles:

(1) Joseph Barsabbas or Justus above;

(2) Titius Justus, a Gentile, whose home in Corinth Paul stayed in after being forced out of the synagogue c AD52; and

In the Letter to the Colossians:

(3) Jesus Justus, a Jewish Christian and companion of Paul during his imprisonment in Rome, c AD61-63 -

and Matthias. ....

Matthias - Nothing more is heard of Mathias in the New Testament -

.... Then they prayed, "You, O Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which of these two you have chosen to take part in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place." Then they drew lots for these men, and the lot fell to Matthias, and thereafter he was considered equally an apostle with the eleven.

PENTECOST and THE COMING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Acts 2:1-13 - Then when the actual day of Pentecost came ....

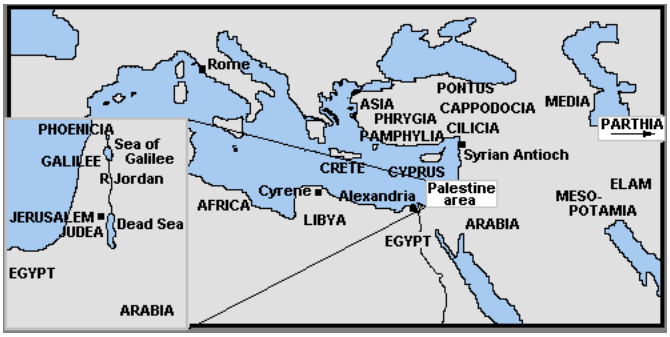
Pentecost - The "birthday" of the Church. Greek for the "fiftieth", or 50 days after Easter. On this first occasion, it was held around the time of the Jewish Festival of Weeks, the annual Spring thanksgiving for the first grain harvest -

.... they were all assembled together. Suddenly there was a sound from heaven like the rushing of a violent wind, and it filled the whole house where they were seated. Before their eyes appeared tongues like flames which separated off and settled above the head of each one of them. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different languages as the Spirit gave them power to proclaim his message.

The Church's first impact on devout Jews

Now there were staying in Jerusalem (for the Festival of Weeks) Jews of deep faith from every nation of the world (Map following). When they heard this sound a crowd quickly collected and were completely bewildered because each one of them heard these men speaking in his own language. They were absolutely amazed and said in their astonishment, "Listen, surely all these speakers are Galileans? Then how does it happen that every single one of us can hear the particular language he has known from a child? There are Parthians, Medes and Elamites; there are men whose homes are in Mesopotamia, in Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, and the parts of Africa near Cyrene, as well as visitors from Rome! There are Jews and proselytes, men from Crete and men from Arabia, yet we can all hear these men speaking of the magnificence of God in our native language."

Some of the Many Centres of Jewish Population Outside Israel - the 'Dispersion' or 'Diaspora'



Everyone was utterly amazed and did not know what to make of it, Indeed they kept saying to each other, "What on earth can this mean?"

But there were others who laughed mockingly and said, "These fellows have drunk too much new wine!"

PETER SPEAKS TO JEWS VISITING JERUSALEM FOR PENTECOST

- In this first recorded sermon, the apostle Peter explains to Jews visiting Jerusalem, how the followers of the crucified Jesus are able to speak to them in their own foreign languages. As foretold by the Old Testament prophet Joel, they are filled with the Holy Spirit, promised by Jesus after his death and resurrection.

The change in the courage of the apostle Peter who so recently denied Jesus three times before the cock crowed is quite remarkable:

Acts 2:14-36 - Then Peter, with the eleven (apostles) standing by him, raised his voice and addressed them: "Fellow Jews, and all who are living in Jerusalem, listen carefully to what I say while I explain to you what has happened! These men are not drunk as you suppose - it is after all only nine o'clock in the morning of this great feast day. No, this is something which was predicted by the prophet Joel (of Judah, c 800BC, in his Book of that name),

'And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions, your old men shall dream dreams. And on my menservants and on my maidservants I will pour out my Spirit in those days and they shall prophesy. I will show wonders in heaven above and signs in the earth beneath: blood and fire and vapour of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great and notable day of the Lord. And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.' (Joel 2:28-32)

"Men of Israel, I beg you to listen to my words. Jesus of Nazareth was a man proved to you by God himself through the works of power, the miracles and the signs which God showed through him here amongst you - as you very well know. This man, who was put into your power by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed up and murdered, and you used for your purpose men without the Law (the Gentile Romans)! But God would not allow the bitter pains of death to touch him. He raised him to life again - and indeed there was nothing by which death could hold such a man.
When (King) David speaks about him he says,

'I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is at my right hand, that I may not be shaken; therefore my heart rejoiced, and my tongue was glad; moreover my flesh will also rest in hope, because you will not leave my soul in Hades (hell or the grave), nor will you allow your holy one to see corruption. You have made known to me the ways of life; you will make me full of joy in your presence.' (Psalm 16:8-11)

"Men and brother-Jews, I can surely speak freely to you about the patriarch David (the psalmist and King of Israel). ....

Patriarch - "Family ruler" in Greek. Fathers of the human race, and of the Jewish nation, including Abraham, his son Isaac, his grandson Jacob, later called Israel, and the twelve sons of Israel -

.... There is no doubt that he (David) died and was buried, and his grave is here among us (in Jerusalem) to this day. But while he was alive he was a prophet. He knew that God had given him a most solemn promise that he would place one of his descendants upon his throne. He foresaw the resurrection of Christ, and it is this of which he is speaking. Christ was not deserted in death and his body was never destroyed. 'Christ is the man Jesus, whom God raised up - a fact of which all of us are eye-witnesses!' He has been raised to the right hand of God; he has received from the Father and poured out upon us the promised Holy Spirit - that is what you now see and hear! David never ascended to Heaven, but he certainly said,

'The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool'. (Psalm 110:1)

"Now therefore the whole nation of Israel must know beyond the shadow of a doubt that this Jesus, whom you crucified, God has declared to be both Lord and Christ (the promised Messiah of the Jewish people)."

MANY ARE CONVERTED

Acts 2:37-47 - When they heard this they were cut to the quick, and they cried to Peter and the other apostles, "Men and fellow-Jews, what shall we do now?"

Peter told them, "You must repent and every one of you must be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ, so that you may have your sins forgiven and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For this great promise is for you and your children - yes, and for all who are far away, for as many as the Lord our God shall call to himself!"

Peter said much more than this as he gave his testimony and implored them, saying, "Save yourselves from this perverted generation!"

The first large-scale conversion

Then those who welcomed his message were baptised, and on that day alone about three thousand souls were added to the number of disciples. They continued steadily learning the teaching of the apostles, and joined in their fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayer.

Everyone felt a deep sense of awe, while many miracles and signs took place through the apostles. All the believers shared everything in common; they sold their possessions and goods and divided the proceeds among the fellowship according to individual need. Day after day they met by common consent in the Temple (the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem, as the early converts were Jewish Christians); they broke bread together in their homes, sharing meals with simple joy. They praised God continually and all the people respected them. Every day the Lord added to their number those who were finding salvation.

PETER and JOHN HEAL A CRIPPLED MAN

Acts 3:1-11 - One afternoon Peter and John were on their way to the Temple for the three o'clock hour of prayer. A man who had been lame from birth was being carried along in the crowd, for it was the daily practice to put him down at what was known as the Beautiful Gate of the Temple, so that he could beg from the people as they went in. As this man saw Peter and John just about to enter he asked them to give him something. Peter looked intently at the man and so did John. Then Peter said, "Look straight at us!"

The man looked at them expectantly, hoping that they would give him something.

"If you are expecting silver or gold," Peter said to him, "I have neither, but what I have I will certainly give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk!"

Then he took him by the right hand and helped him up. At once his feet and ankle bones were strengthened, and he positively jumped to his feet, stood, and then walked. Then he went with them into the Temple, where he walked about, leaping and thanking God. Everyone noticed him as he walked and praised God and recognised him as the same beggar who used to sit at the Beautiful Gate, and they were all overcome with wonder and sheer astonishment at what had happened to him. Then while the man himself still clung to Peter and John all the people in their excitement ran together and crowded round them in Solomon's Porch.

PETER EXPLAINS THE HEALING OF THE CRIPPLED MAN

- Outside the Jerusalem Temple in his second recorded sermon, Peter explains to the crowd how the crippled man was healed in the name of the risen Jesus. He is the Christ foretold by the prophets, and through whom God wants all people to repent of their sins:

Acts 3:12-26 - When Peter saw this (the excited reaction to the healing) he spoke to the crowd. "Men of Israel, why are you so surprised at this, and why are you staring at us as though we had made this man walk through some power or piety of our own? It is the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, who has done this thing to honour his servant Jesus - the man whom you betrayed and denied in the presence of Pilate, even when he had decided to let him go. But you disowned the holy and righteous one, and begged to be granted instead a man (Barabbas) who was a murderer! You killed the prince of life, but God raised him from the dead - a fact of which we are eye-witnesses. It is the name of this same Jesus, it is faith in that name, which has cured this man whom you see and recognise. Yes, it was faith in Christ which gave this man perfect health and strength in full view of you all.

Peter explains ancient prophecy

"Now of course I know, my brothers, that you had no idea what you were doing any more than your leaders had. But God had foretold through all his prophets that his Christ must suffer and this was how his words came true. Now you must repent and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out, that time after time your souls may know the refreshment that comes from the presence of God. Then he will send you Jesus, your long-heralded Christ (or Messiah), although for the time he must remain in Heaven until that universal restoration of which God spoke in ancient times through all his holy prophets. For Moses said,

'The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brethren. Him you shall hear in all things, whatever he says to you. And it shall come to pass that every soul who will not hear that prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.' (Deuteronomy 18:15,18,19)

Indeed, all the prophets from Samuel (c 1100BC, the Judge and prophet who appointed Saul and David to be the first kings of Israel) onwards who have spoken at all have foretold these days. You are the sons of the prophets and heirs of the agreement which God made with our fathers when he said to Abraham,

'And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.' (Genesis 22:18; 26:4)

It was to you first that God sent his servant after he had raised him up, to bring you great blessing by turning every one of you away from his evil ways."

THEY ARE TAKEN BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN

Acts 4:1-22 - While they were still talking to the people the priests, the captain of the Temple guard and the Sadducees (who do not believe in resurrection) moved towards them, thoroughly incensed that they should be teaching the people and should assure them that the resurrection of the dead had been proved through the rising of Jesus. So they arrested them and, since it was now evening, kept them in custody until the next day. Nevertheless, many of those who had heard what they said believed, and the number of men alone rose to about five thousand.

Peter's boldness at formal questioning

Next day the leading members of the council, the elders and scribes, met in Jerusalem with Annas the High Priest, Caiaphas (both of whom took part in the arrest and trial of Jesus), John, Alexander ....

Alexander - The name Alexander appears five times in the New Testament:

In the Gospels:

(1) Alexander, son of Simon of Cyrene who carried the cross of Jesus to Calvary;

In the Acts of the Apostles:

(2) This Alexander, a member of the Sanhedrin;

(3) Alexander, a Jew of Ephesus present during the silversmith's riot towards the end of the apostle Paul's stay there, c AD56 or 57. He was either trying to defend Paul's companions,Gaius and Aristarchus, or more likely disclaiming Jewish responsibility for Paul's teaching;

In the two Letters to Timothy:

(4) Alexander the false teacher expelled by Paul along with Hymenaeus from the church (probably at Ephesus, or Troas?), described in Paul's First Letter to Timothy (1:20), written c AD66; and

(5) Alexander the coppersmith, who in Paul's words as he awaits execution in Rome in c AD67 "did me a great deal of harm". Alexander may have been in Ephesus by then as Paul warns Timothy to be careful of him (2 Timothy 4:14)

Alexander (4) and (5) could be the same man, and possibly the same as Alexander (3). After the Ephesus riots, Alexander the Jew could have become a Christian, but over the years turned against Paul. He may than have shared responsibility for Paul's arrest at Ephesus or Troas, where Paul left his cloak and books (2 Timothy 4:13) -

.... and the whole of the High Priest's family. They had the apostles brought in to stand before them and they asked them formally, "By what power and in whose name have you done this thing?"

- Peter explains to the Sanhedrin (Acts 4:8-12 following), how the crippled man was healed in the name of the risen Jesus Christ, the only name by which men and women can be saved -

(Verse 8 starts ...) At this Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, spoke to them, "Leaders of the people and elders, if we are being called in question today over the matter of a kindness done to a helpless man and as to how he was healed, it is high time that all of you and the whole people of Israel knew that it was done in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth! He is the one whom you crucified but whom God

raised from the dead, and it is by his power that this man at our side stands in your presence perfectly well. He is the

'stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone' (Psalm 118:22).

In no one else can salvation be found. For in all the world no other name has been given to men but this, and it is by this name that we must be saved!"

The embarrassment of the authorities

(Verse 13 continues....) When they saw the complete assurance of Peter and John, who were obviously uneducated and untrained men, they were staggered. They recognised them as men who had been with Jesus, yet since they could see the man who had been cured standing beside them, they could find no effective reply. All they could do was to order them out of the Sanhedrin (the Jewish council) and hold a conference among themselves.

"What are we going to do with these men?" they said to each other. "It is evident to everyone living in Jerusalem that an extraordinary miracle has taken place through them and that is something we cannot deny. Nevertheless, to prevent such a thing spreading further among the people, let us warn them that if they say anything more to anyone in this name (of Jesus) it will be at their peril."

So they called them in and ordered them bluntly not to speak or teach a single further word about the name of Jesus. But Peter and John gave them this reply: "Whether it is right in the eyes of God for us to listen to what you say rather than to what he says, you must decide; for we cannot help speaking about what we have actually seen and heard!"

After further threats they let them go. They could not think of any way of punishing them because of the attitude of the people. Everybody was thanking God for what had happened - that this miracle of healing had taken place in a man who was more then forty years old.

THE DISCIPLES PRAY AND ALL ARE FILLED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

Acts 4:23-31 - After their release the apostles went back to their friends and reported to them what the chief priests and elders had said to them. When they heard it they raised their voices to God in united prayer and said,

"Lord, you are God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them, who by the mouth of your servant David have said:

'Why did the nations rage, and the people plot vain things? The kings of the earth took their stand, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against his Christ' (Psalm 2:1-2) -

(the prayer continues ....) For truly against your holy servant Jesus whom you anointed, both Herod (Antipas) and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel were gathered together to do whatever your hand and your purpose determined before to be done. Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to your servants that with all boldness they may speak your word, by stretching out your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of your holy servant Jesus.'

When they had prayed their meeting-place was shaken; they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the Word of God fearlessly.

BELIEVERS SHARE ALL; BARNABAS JOINS THEM; ANANIAS and SAPPHIRA TRY TO CHEAT

Acts 4:32-5:11 - Among the large number who had become believers there was complete agreement of heart and soul. Not one of them claimed any of his possessions as his own but everything was common property. The apostles continued to give their witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus with great force, and a wonderful spirit of generosity pervaded the whole fellowship. Indeed, there was not a single person in need among them. For those who owned land or property would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales and place them at the apostles' feet. They would distribute to each one according to his need.

Generosity and covetousness

It was at this time that Barnabas (the name, meaning son of comfort, given by the apostles to Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus) sold his farm and put the proceeds at the apostles' disposal.

Barnabas - Barnabas plays an important, but often unrecognised part in the growth of the early Church. When the fiery anti-Christian Saul, now the Christian Paul, first arrived back in Jerusalem in c AD37, it was Barnabas who vouched for him (Acts 9:27). When the Jerusalem church heard about the conversion of Gentiles in Syrian Antioch, they sent Barnabas (11:22). And it was Barnabas who brought Paul from Tarsus to work with him there (11:25). A year or two later, Barnabas and Paul took famine relief to Jerusalem (11:30), returning to Syrian Antioch with Barnabas' cousin John Mark (12:25). And it is this team that set out on the First Missionary Journey (13:1).

Barnabas and Paul travelled through Cyprus before crossing to Asia Minor, where at Perga, John Mark left to return to Jerusalem (Acts 13:13). The two continued their often dangerous, but ultimately successful missionary journey through much of southern Asia Minor, bringing the Gospel to many Gentiles before returning to Syrian Antioch (14:26). There, attempts were made by some Jewish Christians to make Gentile converts follow Jewish Law. So Paul and Barnabas (note that Paul's name now comes first) travelled to Jerusalem (Acts 15:4) for what became known as the Council of Jerusalem (15:5). There, vital decisions were made that helped ensured Christianity did not become a Jewish sect (15:12).

Paul and Barnabas returned to Syrian Antioch with two representatives of the Jerusalem church, one of whom was Silas - Silvanus in Greek (Acts 15:30), and prepared for the Second Missionary Journey in c AD49 (15:36). As they did, they clashed over Mark's previous "desertion". So while Paul went with Silas through Asia Minor, Barnabas took Mark on a journey to his home island of Cyprus (15:39).

The only references to Barnabas thereafter are in Paul's letters. In 1 Corinthians 9:6 Paul joins his own name with Barnabas to comment on their treatment as apostles. In Galatians 2:9, he describes their welcome in Jerusalem, probably when they brought famine relief (Acts 11:30). Then, back in Syrian Antioch with the apostle Peter, how Barnabas was nearly led astray by the "Judaisers" (Galatians 2:13). Finally, in Colossians 4:10 he identifies Mark and Barnabas as cousins -

(Chapter 5 - The early Church experiences its first dissension from within - by individuals .....) But there was a man named Ananias ....

Ananias - Three Ananias' appear in the Acts of the Apostles:

(1) The above Ananias, husband of Sapphira;

(2) Ananias, the disciple who heals the blinded Saul (Paul) after his encounter with the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus, c AD34; and

(3) Ananias, the high priest in Jerusalem at the time of Paul's arrest and later trial in Caesarea (c AD58) -

.... who, with this wife Sapphira had sold a piece of property, but with her full knowledge, reserved part of the price for himself. He brought the remainder to put at the apostles' disposal. But Peter said to him, "Ananias, why has Satan so filled your mind that you could cheat the Holy Spirit and keep back for yourself part of the price of the land? Before the land was sold it was yours, and after the sale the disposal of the price you received was entirely in your hands, wasn't it? Then whatever made you think of such a thing as this? You have not lied to men, but to God!"

As soon as Ananias heard these words he collapsed and died. All who were within earshot were appalled at this incident. The young men got to their feet and after wrapping up his body carried him out and buried him.

About three hours later it happened that his wife came in not knowing what had taken place, Peter spoke directly to her, "Tell me, did you sell your land for so much?"

"Yes," she replied, "that was it."

Then Peter said to her, "How could you two have agreed to put the Spirit of the Lord to such a test? Listen, you can hear the footsteps of the men who have just buried your husband coming back through the door, and they will carry you out as well!"

Immediately she collapsed at Peter's feet and died. When the young men came into the room they found her a dead woman, and they carried her out and buried her by the side of her husband. At this happening a deep sense of awe swept over the whole Church and indeed all those who heard about it.

- This act of hypocrisy, and in response, Peter's apparent callousness, can be explained. The Church was, and is filled with imperfect, and sometimes greedy and cruel people. But the fate of this husband and wife can not be so easily set aside. Perhaps their deaths were from shock in an emotionally-charged atmosphere. Or perhaps an almighty God allowed it to happen for his own purposes. Either way it had a powerful impact on the young Church.

MANY ARE HEALED; THE APOSTLES ARE ARRESTED AND MIRACULOUSLY FREED; THEY ARE RE-ARRESTED, QUESTIONED AND RELEASED

Acts 5:12-42 - By common consent they all used to meet now in Solomon's Porch (in the Jerusalem Temple). But as far as the others were concerned no one dared to associate with them, even though their general popularity was very great. Yet more and more believers in the Lord joined them, both men and women in really large numbers.

- and miraculous power radiates from it

Many signs and wonders were now happening among the people through the apostles' ministry. In consequence people would bring out their sick into the streets and lay them down on stretchers or bed, so that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall upon some of them. In addition a large crowd collected from the cities around Jerusalem, bringing with them their sick and those who were suffering from evil spirits. And they were all cured.

Furious opposition reduced to impotence

All this roused the High Priest and his allies the Sadducean party, and in a fury of jealousy they had the apostles arrested and put into the common jail. But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and led them out, saying, "Go and stand and speak in the Temple. Tell the people all about this new life!"

After receiving these instructions they entered the Temple about daybreak, and began to teach. When the High Priest arrived he and his supporters summoned the Sanhedrin and indeed the whole senate of the people of Israel. Then he sent to the jail to have the apostles brought in. But when the officers arrived at the prison they could not find them there. They came back and reported, "We found the prison securely locked and the guard standing on duty at the doors, but when we opened up we found no one inside."

When the captain of the Temple guard and the chief priests heard this report they were completely mystified at the apostles' disappearance and wondered what further developments there would be. However, someone arrived and reported to them, "Why, the men you put in jail are standing in the Temple teaching the people!"

- The irony in this account suggests that here, as elsewhere in the New Testament, some of the writers did not lack a sense of humour -

Then the captain went out with his men and fetched them. They dared not use any violence however, for the people might have stoned them. So they brought them in and made them stand before the Sanhedrin. The High Priest called for an explanation.

"We gave you the strictest possible orders," he said to them, "not to give any teaching in this name (of Jesus). And look what has happened - you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and what is more you are determined to fasten the guilt of that man's death upon us!"

- The apostles explain (Acts 5:29-32 following) that they must obey God and not men -

(Verse 29 starts ....) Then Peter and the apostles answered him, "It is our duty to obey the orders of God rather than the orders of men. It was the God of our fathers who raised up Jesus, whom you murdered by hanging him on a cross of wood. God has raised this man to his own right hand as prince and saviour, to bring repentance and the forgiveness of sins to Israel. What is more, we are witnesses to these matters, and so is the Holy spirit which God gives to those who obey his commands."

Calm counsel temporarily prevails

(Verse 33 continues ....) When the members of the council heard these words they were so furious that they wanted to kill them. But one man stood up in the assembly, a Pharisee by the name of Gamaliel, a teacher of the Law who was held in great respect by the people ....

Gamaliel - Known as the Elder, was a grandson of Hillel, both renowned as Jewish scholars and experts in the Law. Gamaliel represented the more liberal Pharisee tradition compared with the traditional Sadducees. The apostle Paul, in his defence before the crowd in Jerusalem in c AD58 discloses he was trained by Gamaliel (Acts 22:3) -

.... and (Gamaliel) gave orders for the apostles to be taken outside for a few minutes. Then he addressed the assembly: "Men of Israel, be very careful of what action you intend to take against these men! Remember that some time a go a man called Theudas (a Jewish leader proclaiming the coming of the messiah) made himself conspicuous by claiming to be someone or other, and he had a following of four hundred men. He was killed, all his followers were dispersed, and the movement came to nothing. Then later, in the days of the census, that man Judas from Galilee (according to the Jewish historian Josephus, he led a rebellion against the Roman census of AD6) appeared and enticed many of the people to follow him. But he too died and his whole following melted away. My advice to you now therefore is to let these men alone; leave them to themselves. For if this teaching or movement is merely human it will collapse of its own accord. But if it should be from God you cannot defeat them, and you might actually find yourselves to be fighting against God!"

They accepted his advice and called in the apostles. They had them beaten and after commanding them not to speak in the name of Jesus they let them go. So the apostles went out from the presence of the Sanhedrin full of joy that they had been considered worthy to bear humiliation for the sake of the name (of Jesus). Then day after day in the Temple and in people's houses they continued to teach unceasingly and to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ.

THE FIRST "DEACONS" ARE CHOSEN; STEPHEN IS ACCUSED OF BLASPHEMY

Deacons - From the Greek for "servant". Members of the Church chosen to look after the charitable needs of the early Christians. The position later developed into a responsibility for other practical needs of the Church. The first use of the actual title of deacon is in Philippians 1:1 -

Acts 6:1-15 - (The Church experiences its second dissension from within, but now by a group .....) About this time, when the number of disciples was continually increasing, the Greeks (Greek-speaking Jews from outside Palestine) complained that in the daily distribution of food the Hebrew widows (traditional Aramaic-speaking Palestinian Jews) were being given preferential treatment. The twelve(apostles) summoned the whole body of the disciples together and said, "It is not right that we should have to neglect preaching the Word of God in order to look after the accounts. You, our brothers, must look round and pick out from your number seven men of good reputation who are both practical and spiritually-minded and we will put them in charge of this matter. Then we shall devote ourselves whole-heartedly to prayer and the ministry of the Word."

This brief speech met with unanimous approval and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit .....

Stephen - He is later accused of blasphemy, and after defending himself before the Sanhedrin, is stoned to death. The future apostle Paul, at this time fully committed to Judaism and the destruction of the Jesus cult, looked on with approval. Stephen's death led to members of the Church being scattered throughout the Roman Empire and beyond, and thus to its rapid growth. Some 25 year later, in his own defence in Jerusalem, Paul describes the death of Stephen to the Jewish crowd (Acts 22:20) -

.... Philip ....

Philip - After the death of Stephen, Philip, known as the Evangelist successfully preached the Gospel in Samaria (Acts 8:5), and shortly after, baptised the Ethiopian eunuch on the road to Gaza (Acts 8:26). He then went on to Caesarea, where we meet him some 25 years later, when Paul and Luke, the author of Acts, stay with Philip (Acts 21:8) on the last leg of their journey to Jerusalem and Paul's arrest -

.... Prochurus (or Procorus), Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas of Antioch who had previously been a convert to the Jewish faith (all were of Greek background). ....

Nicolas (or Nicola) - Nothing more is heard of Nicolas. There is little reason to associate him with the "hated" Nicolaitans of the cities of Ephesus and Pergamum in Revelation chapter 2 -

.... They brought these men (later called deacons to distinguish them from the apostles and other disciples) before the apostles, and they, after prayer, laid their hands upon them.

So the Word of God gained more and more ground. The number of disciples in Jerusalem very greatly increased, while a considerable proportion of the (Jewish) priesthood (some of whom no doubt had rejected Jesus as the Messiah during his life on earth) accepted the faith.

The attack on the new deacon, Stephen

Stephen, full of grace and spiritual power, continued to perform miracles and remarkable signs among the people. However, members of a Jewish synagogue known as the Libertines (or Freedmen - most likely the descendants of Jews taken to Rome as slaves and later freed), together with some from the synagogues of Cyrene (present-day Libya) and Alexandria (Egypt), as well as some men from Cilicia(possibly including Saul of Tarsus) and Asia (Turkey), tried debating with Stephen, but found themselves quite unable to stand up against either his practical wisdom or the spiritual force with which he spoke. In desperation they bribed men to allege, "We have heard this man making blasphemous statements against Moses and against God." At the same time they worked upon the feelings of the people, the elders and the scribes. Then they suddenly confronted Stephen, seized him and marched him off before the Sanhedrin. There they brought forward false witnesses to say, "This man's speeches are one long attack against this holy place and the Law. We have heard him say that Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place (the Temple) and change the customs which Moses handed down to us." All who sat there in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, and as they looked his face appeared to them like the face of an angel.

STEPHEN DEFENDS HIMSELF AGAINST THE CHARGES

- Stephen, one of the first "deacons" is brought before the Sanhedrin to answer charges of blasphemy. In describing the history of Israel, he shows how the Jewish people have always rejected the prophets and disobeyed God's Law.

Stephen's account of Abraham, the Patriarchs, and Moses, is a summary of Genesis chapters 11-50 and the Book of Exodus.

Acts 7:1-53 -

(i) THE TIME OF ABRAHAM

Then the High Priest said, "Is this statement true?" (... that Jesus will destroy the Temple and change the customs of Moses.)

And Stephen answered, "My brothers and my fathers, listen to me. Our glorious God appeared to our forefather Abraham while he was in Mesopotamia (Ur of the Chaldees c 1,800BC, in present-day Iraq) before he ever came to live in Haran (the Turkish-Syrian border area), and said to him,

'Get out of your country and from your relatives, and come to a land that I will show you.' (Genesis 12:1)

That was how he came to leave the land of the Chaldeans and settle in Haran. And it was from there after his father's death that God moved him into this very land where you are living today (Judea). Yet God gave him no part of it as an inheritance, not a foot that he could call his own, and yet promised that it should eventually belong to him and his descendants - even though at the time he had no descendant at all. And this is the way in which God spoke to him: he told him that his descendants should live as strangers in a foreign land (Egypt) where they would become slaves and be ill-treated for four hundred years,

'And the nation to whom they will be in bondage I will judge,' (Genesis 15:14) said God:

'and after that they shall come out and serve me in this place.' (Exodus 3:12)

"Further, he gave him the agreement of circumcision, so that when Abraham became the father of Isaac he circumcised him on the eighth day.

(ii) THE PATRIARCHS

"Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob (later called Israel) the father of the twelve patriarchs (or tribes of Israel). Then the patriarchs in their jealousy of Joseph (of the "coat of many colours") sold him as a slave into Egypt. But God was with him and saved him from all his troubles and gave him favour and wisdom in the eyes of Pharaoh the king of Egypt. Pharaoh made him governor of Egypt and put him in charge of his own entire household.

"Then came the famine over all the land of Egypt and Canaan which caused great suffering, and our forefathers could find no food. But when Jacob heard that there was corn in Egypt he sent our forefathers out of their own country for the first time. It was on their second visit that Joseph was recognised by his brothers, and his ancestry became plain to Pharaoh. Then Joseph sent and invited to come and live with him his father and all his kinsmen, seventy-five people in all. So Jacob came down to Egypt and both he and our fathers ended their days there. After their deaths they were carried back into Shechem and laid in the tomb which Abraham had bought with silver from the sons of Hamor in Shechem.

"But as the time drew near for the fulfilment of the promise which God had made to Abraham, our people grew more and more numerous in Egypt. Finally another king came to the Egyptian throne who knew nothing of Joseph. This man cleverly victimised our race. He treated our forefathers abominably, forcing them to expose our infant children so that the race should die out.

Stephen's defence:

(iii) GOD'S PROVIDENCE AND MOSES

"It was at this very time that Moses was born (c 1,300BC). He was a child of remarkable beauty, and for three months he was brought up in his father's house, and then when the time came for him to be abandoned Pharaoh's daughter adopted him and brought him up as her own son. So Moses was trained in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and became not only an excellent speaker but a man of action as well.

Moses' first abortive attempt at rescue

"Now when he was turned forty the thought came into his mind that he should go and visit his own brothers, the sons of Israel. He saw one of them being unjustly treated, went to the rescue and paid rough justice for the man who had been ill-treated by striking down the Egyptian (and killing him). He fully imagined that his brothers would understand that God was using him to rescue them. But they did not understand. Indeed, on the very next day he came upon two of them who were quarrelling and urged them to make peace, saying, 'Men, you are brothers. What good can come from your injuring each other?' But the man who was wronging his neighbour pushed Moses aside saying,

'Who made you a ruler and judge over us? Do you want to kill me as you killed that Egyptian yesterday?' (Exodus 2:14)

At that retort Moses fled and lived as an exile in the land of Midian (the north western part of present-day Saudi Arabia), where he became the father of two sons.

Moses hears the voice of God

"It was forty years later (at the age of 80) in the desert of Mount Sinai that an angel appeared to him in the flames of a burning bush, and the sight filled Moses with wonder. As he approached to look at it more closely the voice of the Lord spoke to him, saying,

'I am the God of your fathers - the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' (Exodus 3:6)

Then Moses trembled and was afraid to look any more. But the Lord spoke to him and said,

'Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground. I have certainly seen the oppression of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their groaning and have come down to deliver

them. And now come, I will send you to Egypt.' (Exodus 3:5,7,8,10)

But Israel rejects Moses

"So this same Moses whom they had rejected in the words, 'Who made you a ruler and a judge?' God sent to be both ruler and deliverer with the help of the angel who had appeared to him in the bush. This is the man who showed wonders and signs in Egypt and in the Red Sea, the man who led them out of Egypt and was their leader in the desert for forty years. He was Moses, the man who said to the sons of Israel,

'The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brethren. Him you shall hear.' (Deuteronomy 18:15)

In that church in the desert this was the man who was the mediator between the angel who used to talk with him on Mount Sinai and our fathers. This was the man who received words, living words, which were to be given to you; and this was the man to whom our forefathers turned a deaf ear! They disregarded him, and in their hearts hankered after Egypt. They said to Aaron,

'Make us gods to go before us; as for this Moses who brought us out of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.' (Exodus 32:1)

In those days they even made a (golden) calf, and offered sacrifices to their idol. They rejoiced in the work of their own hands. So God turned away from them and left them to worship the Host of Heaven, as it is written in the book of the prophets,

'Did you offer me slaughtered animals and sacrifices during forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel? Yes, you took up the tabernacle of Moloch, and the star of your god Remphan, images which you made to worship; and I will carry you away beyond Babylon.' (Amos 5:25-27)

God's privileges to Israel

"There in the desert our forefather possessed the Tabernacle of witness made according to the pattern which Moses saw when God instructed him to build it. This Tabernacle was handed down to our forefathers, and they brought it here when the Gentiles (of Canaan) were defeated under Joshua (c 1,200BC, the successor of Moses who led the tribes of Israel into the "promised land" at the end of the Exodus, and the subject of the Book of Joshua), for God drove them out as our ancestors advanced. Here it stayed until the time of David (c 1,000BC). David won the approval of God and prayed that he might find a habitation for the God of Jacob, even though it was not he but Solomon (King David's son) who actually built a house for him. Yet of course the most high does not live in man-made houses. As the prophet says,

'Heaven is my throne. and earth is my footstool. What house will you build for me? says the Lord, or what is the place of my rest? Has my hand not made all these things?' (Isaiah 66:1,2)

Yet Israel is blind and disobedient

"You obstinate people, heathen in your thinking, heathen in the way you are listening to me now! It is always the same - you never fail to resist the Holy Spirit! Just as your fathers did so are you doing now. Can you name a single prophet whom your fathers did not persecute? They killed the men who long ago foretold the coming of the just one (the Messiah), and now in our own day you have become betrayers and his murderers. You are the men who have received (from Moses) the Law of God miraculously, by the hand of angels, and you are the men who have disobeyed it!" (... at which the listeners go wild with fury.)

STEPHEN IS STONED TO DEATH

The truth arouses murderous fury

Acts 7:54-8:1a - These words (Stephen's defence) stung them to fury and they ground their teeth at him in rage. Stephen, filled through all his being with the Holy Spirit, looked steadily up into Heaven. He saw the glory of God, and Jesus himself standing at his right hand.

"Look!" he exclaimed, "the heavens are opened and I can see the Son of Man standing at God's right hand!"

At this they put their fingers in their ears. Yelling with fury, as one man they made a rush at him and hustled him out of the city and stoned him. The witnesses of the execution flung their clothes at the feet of a young man by the name of Saul (of Tarsus, later the apostle Paul).

So they stoned Stephen while he called upon God, and said, "Jesus, Lord, receive my spirit!"

Then, on his knees, he cried in ringing tones, "Lord, forgive them for this sin."

And with these words he fell into the sleep of death, (verse 8:1a ....) while Saul gave silent assent to his execution.

The Earliest Missionary Journeys

THE CHURCH SCATTERS; PHILIP EVANGELISES SAMARIA AND BAPTISES THE ETHIOPIAN EUNUCH

- Philip brings the Gospel to two disadvantaged groups - the outcast Samaritans, and a mutilated eunuch (Map following). The Church thus moves further away from an exclusive and strict Jewish religion, towards being the body of Christ for all people -

Map - The Earliest Missionary Journeys - Philip the Evangelist

Map Key: **1.** The journeys of Philip the Evangelist as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. Also in text in [red square brackets]

Acts 8:1b-40 - On that very day (the death of Stephen) a great storm of persecution burst upon the Church in Jerusalem [1]. All Church members except the apostles were scattered over the countryside of Judea [2] and Samaria [3]. While reverent men buried Stephen and mourned deeply over him, Saul (later the apostle Paul) harassed the Church bitterly. He would go from house to house, drag out both men and women and have them committed to prison. Those who were dispersed by this action went throughout the country, preaching the good news of the message as they went. Philip (the "deacon" and Evangelist), for instance, went down to the city of Samaria [4] and preached Christ to the people there. His words met with a ready and sympathetic response from the large crowds who listened to him and saw the miracles which he performed. With loud cries evil spirits came out of those who had been possessed by them; and many paralysed and lame people were cured. As a result there was great rejoicing in that city.

A magician believes in Christ

But there was a man named Simon in that city ....

Simon - Apart from the seven Simons in the Gospels, two more appear in Acts. The first is this Simon the magician living in Samaria. Later, the apostle Peter stays with Simon the tanner in Joppa (Acts 9:43) -

.... who had been practising magic for some time and mystifying the people of Samaria. He pretended that he was somebody great and everyone from the lowest to the highest was fascinated by him. Indeed, they used to say, "This man must be that great power of God." He had influenced them for a long time, astounding them by his magical practises. But when they had come to believe Philip as he proclaimed to them the good news of the kingdom of God and of the name of Jesus Christ, men and women alike were baptised. Even Simon himself became a believer and after his baptism attached himself closely to Philip. As he saw the signs and remarkable demonstrations of power which took place, he lived in a state of constant wonder.

God confirms Samaria's acceptance of the Gospel

When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the Word of God, they sent (the apostles) Peter and John down to them. When these two had arrived they prayed for the Samaritans that they might receive the Holy Spirit for as yet he had not fallen upon any of them. They were living simply as men and women who had been baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus. So then and there they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit.

Simon's monstrous suggestion is sternly rebuked

When Simon saw how the Spirit was given through the apostles' laying their hands upon people he offered them money with the words, "Give me this power too, so that if I were to put my hands on anyone he could receive the Holy Spirit."

But Peter said to him, "To hell with you and your money! How dare you think you could buy the gift of God! You can have no share or place in this ministry, for your heart is not honest before God. All you can do now is to repent of this wickedness of yours and pray earnestly to God that the evil intention of your heart may be forgiven. For I can see inside you, and I see a man bitter with jealousy and bound with his own sin!"

To this Simon answered, "Please pray to the Lord for me that none of these things that you have spoken about may come upon me!"

When Peter and John had given their clear witness and spoken the Word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the good news to many Samaritan villages as they went.

Philip is given an unique opportunity

But an angel of the Lord said to Philip (the Evangelist), "Get up and go south down the road which runs from Jerusalem to Gaza [5], out in the desert."

Philip arose and began his journey. At this very moment an Ethiopian eunuch, a minister and in fact the treasurer to Candace (not a name, but the title of the queens of what is now the Sudan), queen of the Ethiopians, was on his way home after coming to Jerusalem to worship (presumably as a Jewish convert. As a eunuch, he would be restricted in his ability to worship, Deuteronomy 23:1). He was sitting in his carriage reading the prophet Isaiah. The Spirit said to Philip, "Approach this carriage, and keep close to it."

- Philip (Acts 8:30-38 following) explains a prophecy of Isaiah, preaches the Gospel of Jesus, and at the eunuch's request, baptises him. The baptised Ethiopian carries the Gospel on to Africa -

(Verse 30 starts ...) Then as Philip ran forward he heard the man reading the prophet Isaiah, and he said, "Do you understand what you are reading?"

And he replied, "How can I unless I have someone to guide me?"

And he invited Philip to get up and sit by his side. The passage of scripture he was reading was this:

'He was led as a sheep to the slaughter, and like a lamb silent before its shearer, so he opened not his mouth. In his humiliation his justice was taken away. And who will declare his generation? For his life is taken from the earth.' (Isaiah 53:7-8)

The eunuch turned to Philip and said, "Tell me, I beg you, about whom is the prophet saying this - is he speaking about himself or about someone else?"

Then Philip began, and using this scripture as a starting point, he told the eunuch the good news about Jesus. As they proceeded along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, "Look, here is some water; is there any reason why I should not be baptised now?"

And he gave orders for the carriage to stop. Then both of them went down to the water and Philip baptised the eunuch. (Verse 39 continues ....) When they came up out of the water the Spirit of the Lord took Philip away suddenly and the eunuch saw no more of him, but proceeded on his journey with a heart full of joy. Philip found himself at Azotus [6] and as he passed through the countryside he went on telling the good news in all the cities until he came to Caesarea [7] (where we meet him 25 years later during a visit by Paul).

SAUL IS CONVERTED; HE PREACHES IN DAMASCUS BUT HAS TO ESCAPE; HE REACHES JERUSALEM, AND IS SENT ON TO TARSUS

Map - The Conversion and Earliest Journeys of Saul (Paul) of Tarsus c AD34-45

Map Key: 1. The early journeys of Paul as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles and his Letter to the Galatians. Also in text in [red square brackets]
Part of Paul's early Christian life (locations 4,5 and 9) is covered in his Letter to the Galatians chapters 1 and 2

Acts 9:1-30 - But Saul (of Tarsus [1]), still breathing murderous threats against the disciples of the Lord, went to the High Priest (in Jerusalem [2]) and begged him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus [3], so that if he should find there any followers of the Way (of Jesus Christ), whether men or women, he could bring them back to Jerusalem as prisoners. (The authority of the Sanhedrin could be extended to Jews living outside Palestine.)

Tarsus - Capital of Cilicia in Asia Minor, and Paul's home. A Greek-speaking, Roman province in south-eastern Asia Minor, an important city, and major centre of learning. Tarsus was on the highway linking Syrian Antioch and the rest of the Middle East, with the provinces of Galatia and Asia to the west -

Damascus - Capital of modern Syria. "The Pearl of the East", an ancient and important city of Syria, standing at over 2,000 feet in a large oasis. One of the city-states of The Decapolis, and a great centre of trade;

But on his journey, as he neared Damascus, a light from Heaven suddenly blazed around him, and he fell to the ground. Then he heard a voice speaking to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?"

"Who are you, Lord?" he asked.

"I am Jesus whom you are persecuting," was the reply. "But now stand up and go into the city and there you will be told what you must do."

His companions on the journey (officers of the Sanhedrin) stood there speechless, for they had heard the voice but could see no one. Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see

nothing. So they took him by the hand and led him into Damascus. There he remained sightless for three days, and during that time he had nothing either to eat or drink.

God's preparation for the converted Saul

Now in Damascus there was a disciple by the name of Ananias. ....

Ananias - 25 years later, Paul defends himself before the Jewish crowds in Jerusalem. He describes how Ananias, a reverent and highly respected Jew had, at God's command, played an important part in his conversion (Acts 22:12) -

.... The Lord spoke to this man (Ananias) in a dream. calling him by his name.

"I am here, Lord," he replied.

Then the Lord said to him, "Get up and go down to the street called Straight (still in existence in Damascus, 2,000 years later) and enquire at the house of Judas (of Damascus) for a man named Saul from Tarsus. At this moment he is praying and he sees in his mind's eye a man by the name of Ananias coming into the house, and placing his hands upon him to restore his sight."

But Ananias replied, "Lord, I have heard on all hands about this man and how much harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem! Why even now he holds powers from the chief priests to arrest all who call upon your name."

But the Lord said to him, "Go on your way, for this man is my chosen instrument to bear my name before the Gentiles and their kings, as well as to the sons of Israel. Indeed, I myself will show him what he must suffer for the sake of my name."

Then Ananias set out and went to the house, and there he laid his hands upon Saul, and said, "Saul, brother, the Lord has sent me - Jesus who appeared to you on your journey here - so that you may recover your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit."

Immediately something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got to his feet and was baptised. Then he took some food and regained his strength.

- According to Paul's own account in his Letter to the Galatians 1:17, he then went away to Arabia [4], before returning to Damascus [5] -

Saul's conversion astounds the disciples

Saul stayed with the disciples in Damascus for some time. Without delay he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues declaring that he is the Son of God. All his hearers were staggered and kept saying, "Isn't this the man who so bitterly persecuted those who called on the name (of Jesus) in Jerusalem, and came down here with the sole object of taking back all such people as prisoners before the chief priests?"

But Saul went on from strength to strength, reducing to confusion the Jews who lived at Damascus by proving beyond doubt that this man is Christ.

The long revenge on the "renegade" begins

After some time the Jews made a plot to kill Saul, but news of this came to his ears. Although in their murderous scheme the Jews watched the gates day and night for him, Saul's disciples took him one night and let him down through an opening in the wall by lowering him in a basket.

At Jerusalem Saul is suspect: Barnabas conciliates

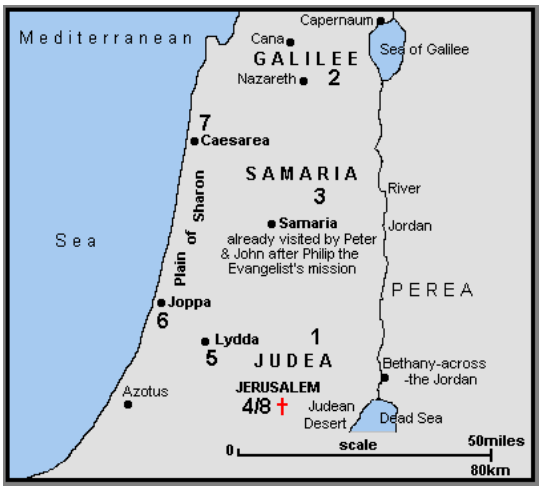
When Saul reached Jerusalem [6], he tried to join the disciples. But they were all afraid of him, finding it impossible to believe that he was a disciple. Barnabas (last heard selling his farm and giving the proceeds to the apostles), however, took him by the hand and introduced him to the apostles, and explained to them how he had seen the Lord on his journey, and how the Lord had spoken to him. He further explained how Saul had spoken in Damascus with the utmost boldness in the name of Jesus. After that Saul joined with them in all their activities in Jerusalem, preaching fearlessly in the name of the Lord. He used to talk and argue with the Greek-speaking Jews, but they made several attempts on his life. When the brothers realised this they took him down to Caesarea [7] and sent him off to

Tarsus [8] (after which he preached in Cilicia and Syria [9], Galatians 1:21. Sometime later still, Paul is brought from Tarsus by Barnabas to work in Syrian Antioch, Acts 11:25 [10]).

PETER HEALS AT LYDDA & JOPPA; PETER'S VISION; HE BAPTISES CORNELIUS A GENTILE

Map - The Earliest Missionary Journeys - the Apostle Peter

Map Key: 1. The early journeys of the Apostle Peter as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. Also in text in [red square brackets]



Acts 9:31-43 - The whole Church throughout Judea [1], Galilee [2] and Samaria [3] now enjoyed a period of peace. It became established and as it went forward in reverence for the Lord and in the strengthening presence of the Holy spirit, continued to grow in numbers.

Peter heals at Lydda

Now it happened that (the apostle) Peter, in the course of travelling (from Jerusalem [4]) about among them all, came to God's people living at Lydda [5]. There he found a man called Aeneas who had been bed-ridden for eight years through paralysis. Peter said to him "Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you! Get up and make your bed."

He got to his feet at once. And all those who lived in Lydda and (the Plain of) Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.

And again at Joppa

Then there was a woman in Joppa [6], a disciple called Tabitha, whose name in Greek was Dorcas (meaning Gazelle). She was a woman whose whole life was full of good and kindly actions, but in those days she became seriously ill and died. So when they had washed her body they laid her in an upper room. Now Lydda is quite near Joppa, and when the disciples heard that Peter was in Lydda, they sent two men to him and begged him, "Please come to us without delay."

Peter got up and went back with them, and when he arrived in Joppa they took him to the room upstairs. All the widows stood around him with tears in their eyes, holding out for him to see dresses and cloaks which Dorcas used to make for them while she was with them. But Peter put them all outside the room and knelt down and prayed. Then he turned to the body and said, "Tabitha, get up!"

She opened her eyes, and as soon as she saw Peter she sat up. He took her by the hand, helped her to her feet, and then called out to the believers and widows and presented her to them alive.

This became known throughout the whole of Joppa and many believed in the Lord. Peter himself remained there for some time, staying with a tanner called Simon.

Simon the tanner - The second Simon in Acts. The first was Simon the magician in Samaria (Acts 8:9).

God speaks to a good-living Gentile

Acts 10:1-33 - There was a man in Caesarea [7] by the name of Cornelius, a centurion in what was called the Italian Regiment ....

Italian Regiment - Compared with other locally-raised units of the Roman army, the Italian Regiment or "cohort" was probably recruited in Italy to serve as bodyguard to the procurator of Judea. His headquarters would have been in Caesarea. At this time, or some time before, the procurator was Pontius Pilate, dismissed in AD36 -

..... He (Cornelius) was a deeply religious man who reverenced God, as did all his household. He made many charitable gifts to the people and was a real man of prayer. About three o'clock one afternoon he saw perfectly clearly in a dream an angel of God coming into his room, approaching him, and saying, "Cornelius!"

He stared at the angel in terror, and said, "What is it, Lord?"

The angel replied, "Your prayers and your deeds of charity have gone up to Heaven and are remembered before God. Now send men to Joppa for a man called Simon, who is also known as Peter. He is staying as a guest with another Simon, a tanner, whose house is down by the sea."

When the angel who had spoken to him had gone, Cornelius called out for two of his house-servants and a devout soldier, who was one of his personal attendants. He told them the whole story and then sent them off to Joppa.

Peter's startling vision

Next day, while these men were still on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up about mid-day on to the flat roof of the house to pray. He became very hungry and longed for something to eat. But while the meal was being prepared he fell into a trance and saw the heavens open and something like a great sheet descending upon the earth, let down by its four corners. In it were all kinds of animals, reptiles and birds. Then came a voice which said to him, "Get up, Peter, kill and eat!"

But Peter said, "Never, Lord! For not once in my life have I ever eaten anything common or unclean."

Then the voice spoke to him a second time, "You must not call what God has cleansed common."

This happened three times, and then the thing was gone, taken back into heaven.

The meaning of the vision becomes apparent

While Peter was still puzzling about the meaning of the vision which he had just seen, the men sent by Cornelius had arrived asking for the house of Simon. They were in fact standing at the very doorway of the house calling out to enquire if Simon, surnamed Peter, were lodging there. Peter was still thinking deeply about the vision when the (Holy) Spirit said to him, "Three men are here looking for you. Get up and go downstairs. Go with them without any misgivings, for I myself have sent them."

So Peter went down to the men and said, "I am the man you are looking for; what brings you here?"

They replied, "Cornelius the centurion, a good-living and God-fearing man, whose character can be vouched for by the whole Jewish people, was commanded by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house, and to listen to your message."

Then Peter invited them in and entertained them.

Peter, obeying the Spirit, disobeys Jewish law

On the next day he got up and set out with them, accompanied by some of the brothers from Joppa, arriving at Caesarea on the day after that. Cornelius was expecting them and had invited together all his relations and intimate friends. As Peter entered the house Cornelius met him by falling on his knees before him and worshipping him. But Peter roused him with the words, "Stand up, I am a human being too!"

Then Peter went right into the house in deep conversation with Cornelius and found that a large number of people had assembled. Then he spoke to them, "You all know that it is forbidden for a man who is a Jew to associate with, or even visit, a man of another nation (such as Cornelius, a non-Jewish Gentile,

even though he worshipped the God of the Jews). But God has shown me plainly that no man must be called 'common' or 'unclean'. That is why I came here when I was sent for without raising any objection. Now I want to know what made you send for me."

Then Cornelius replied, "Three days ago, about this time, I was observing the afternoon hour of prayer in my house, when suddenly a man in shining clothes stood before me and said, 'Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your charitable gifts have been remembered before God. Now you must send to Joppa and invite here a man called Simon whose surname is Peter. He is staying in the house of a tanner by the name of Simon, down by the sea.' So I sent to you without delay and you have been most kind in coming. Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything that the Lord has commanded you to say."

PETER PREACHES TO THE GENTILE CENTURION CORNELIUS

- The God-fearing Cornelius, a Roman centurion stationed in Caesarea, has a vision telling him to send for the apostle Peter, then staying in Joppa. Peter has his own vision in which God teaches him that the Gospel of Jesus is for all peoples. Peter travels to Caesarea and contrary to Jewish Law enters Cornelius' Gentile home. He preaches the Gospel, and Cornelius becomes the first named Gentile Christian:

Acts 10:34-46a - .... Peter began to speak, "In solemn truth I can see now that God is no respecter of persons (whether Jew or Gentile), but that in every nation the man who reverences him and does what is right is acceptable to him! He has sent his message to the sons of Israel by giving us the good news of peace through Jesus Christ - he is the Lord of us all. You must know the story of Jesus of Nazareth - why, it has spread through the whole of Judea, beginning with Galilee after the baptism that John proclaimed. You must have heard how God anointed him with the power of the Holy Spirit, of how he went about doing good and healing all who suffered from the devil's power - because God was with him. Now we (his disciples and apostles) are eye-witnesses of everything that he did, both in the Judean country and in Jerusalem itself, and yet they murdered him by hanging him on a cross. But on the third day God raised that same Jesus and let him be clearly seen, not indeed by the whole people, but by witnesses whom God had previously chosen. We are those witnesses, we who ate and drank with him after he had risen from the dead! Moreover, we are the men whom he commanded to preach to the people and bear fearless witness to the fact that he is the one appointed by God to be the judge of both the living and the dead. It is to him that all the prophets bear witness, that every man who believes in him may receive forgiveness of sins through his name."

The Holy Spirit confirms Peter's action

Acts 10:44-48 - While Peter was still speaking these words the Holy Spirit fell upon all who were listening to his message. The Jewish believers who had come with Peter were absolutely amazed that the gift of the Holy Spirit was being poured out on Gentiles also; for they heard them speaking in foreign tongues and glorifying God.

The Peter exclaimed, "Could anyone refuse water or object to these men being baptised - men who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did ourselves?"

And he gave orders for them to be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ. Afterwards they asked him to stay with them for some days.

The uncircumcised Cornelius becomes the first named Gentile baptised into the Church of Jesus Christ.

PETER DEFENDS HIS ACTIONS BEFORE THE JERUSALEM CHURCH; GENTILE BAPTISM IS ACCEPTED

Acts 11:1-18 - Now the apostles and the brothers who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received God's message. So when Peter next visited Jerusalem the circumcision-party (later referred to as"Judaisers" - Jewish Christians who treated Christianity as a Jewish cult, insisting that non-Jewish converts must be circumcised and obey the Law) were full of criticism, saying to him, "You actually went in and shared a meal with uncircumcised men!"

Peter's explanation

But Peter began to explain how the situation had actually arisen.

"I was in the city of Joppa praying," he said, "and while completely unconscious of my surroundings I saw a vision - something like a great sheet coming down towards me, let down from heaven by its four corners. It came right down to me and when I looked at it closely I saw animals and wild beasts, reptiles and birds. Then I heard a voice say to me, 'Get up, Peter, kill and eat.' But I said, 'Never, Lord, for nothing common or unclean has ever passed my lips.' But the voice from Heaven spoke a second time and said, 'You must not call what God has cleansed common.' This happened three times, and then the whole thing was drawn up again into heaven. The extraordinary thing is that at that very moment three men arrived at the house where we were staying, sent to me personally from Caesarea.
The (Holy) Spirit told me to go with these men without any misgiving. And these six of our brothers accompanied me and we went into the man's house. He told us how he had seen the angel standing in his house, saying, 'Send to Joppa and bring Simon, surnamed Peter. He will give you a message which will save both you and your whole household.' While I was beginning to tell them this message the Holy spirit fell upon them just as on us at the beginning. There came into my mind the words of our Lord when he said, 'John indeed baptised with water, but you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit.' If then God gave them exactly the same gift as he gave to us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could hinder the working of God?"

The flexibility of the young Church

When they heard this they had no further objection to raise. And they praised God, saying, "Then obviously God has given to the Gentiles as well the gift of repentance which leads to life."

The travels of the apostle Peter - Apart from his journeys with Jesus, and the visit with the apostle John to Samaria after the work of Philip the Evangelist, Peter can be linked to three other locations:

(1) According to Galatians 2:11, he visited Syrian Antioch;

(2) He may have visited Corinth according to 1 Corinthians 1:12 as he was certainly known there;

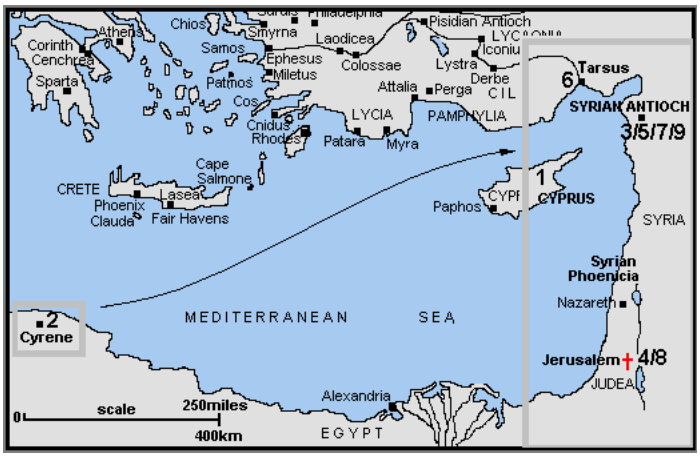
(3) Traditionally he lived in Rome, and was martyred there in c AD64 or 67

SYRIAN ANTIOCH CHURCH GAINS GENTILE CONVERTS; BARNABAS & SAUL TEACH THE "CHRISTIANS"; THEY TAKE FAMINE AID TO JERUSALEM

Syrian Antioch - present day Antakya in southern Turkey. This Antioch was known as "Queen of the East", capital of the province of Syria, and the third largest city in the Roman Empire after Rome and Alexandria. With a population of over half a million people, it was located on the River Orontes, and a junction of trade routes between East and West. It should not to be confused with Pisidian Antioch, a Phrygian town in the Roman province of Galatia -

Map - The Church in Syrian Antioch Grows and Gains Gentile Converts

Map Key: 1. The order of events in the growth of the Syrian Antioch Church as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. Also in text in [red square brackets]



Acts 11:19-30 - Now those who had been dispersed by the persecution which arose over Stephen travelled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and (Syrian) Antioch, giving the message as they went to Jews only. However, among their number were natives of Cyprus [1] and Cyrene [2], and these men, on their arrival at (Syrian) Antioch [3], proclaimed their message to the Greeks as well (... an important development by Jewish Christians in the transition from a Jewish towards a Gentile Church), telling them the good news of the Lord Jesus. The hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number (of Gentiles) believed and turned to the Lord. News of these things came to the ears of the Church in Jerusalem [4] and they sent Barnabas to Antioch [5]. When he arrived and saw this working of God's grace, he was delighted. He urged them all to be resolute in their faithfulness to the Lord, for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. So it happened that a considerable number of people became followers of the Lord.

Believers are called "Christians" for the first time

Then Barnabas went to Tarsus [6] to find Saul (Paul). When he found him he brought him up to Antioch [7]. Then for a whole year they met together with the Church and taught a large crowd. It was in Antioch that the disciples were first given the name of "Christians".

The young Church and famine relief

During this period some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. One of them by the name of Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there was to be a great famine throughout the world. (This actually happened in the days of Claudius - emperor of Rome, AD41-53.) ...

Agabus - He re-appears 15 years later in c AD58 at the home of Stephen the Evangelist in Caesarea. This time he warns Paul not to continue his journey to Jerusalem where he will be arrested and handed over to the Romans (Acts 21:10) -

... The disciples determined to send relief to the brothers in Judea, each contributing as he was able. This they did, sending their contribution to the elders there (in Jerusalem [8]) personally through Barnabas and Saul (who later return to Syrian Antioch [9]).

Elders - From the Old English "old". A title found throughout the Old Testament, and also in the New Testament Gospels and Acts of the Apostles to describe Jewish religious officials. Here it is used for the first time for leaders in the early Christian Church. Later in Acts, and in the Letters of 1 Timothy, Titus, James, and 1 Peter, it refers to those who both taught and preached.

Elders are also referred to as "presbyters" - Greek for "elder". The title probably evolved into that of priest or pastor in the church. The Book of Revelations also refers to elders in the Kingdom of Heaven.

HEROD AGRIPPA I KILLS THE APOSTLE JAMES; PETER IS ARRESTED AND MIRACULOUSLY FREED; HEROD DIES

Acts 12:1-24 -It was at this time that King Herod (Agrippa I, ruler of all Palestine, AD41-44) laid violent hands on some of the Church members. James, John's brother (both the son's of Zebedee), he executed with the sword, and when he found this action pleased the Jews he went on to arrest Peter as well. It was during the days of unleavened bread (the Passover in Spring) that he actually made the arrest. He put Peter in prison with no less than four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending to bring him out to the people after the Passover. So Peter was closely guarded in the prison, while the Church prayed to God earnestly on his behalf.

Peter's miraculous rescue

On the very night that Herod was planning to bring him out, Peter was asleep between two soldiers, chained with double chains, while guards maintained a strict watch in the doorway of the prison. Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared, and light shone in the cell. He tapped Peter on the side and woke him up, saying, "Get up quickly." His chains fell away from his hands and the angel said to him, "Fasten your belt and put on your sandals."

And he did so. Then the angel continued, "Wrap your cloak round you and follow me." So Peter followed him out, not knowing whether what the angel was doing were real - indeed he felt he must be taking part in a vision. So they passed right through the first and second guard-points and came to the iron gate that led out into the city. This opened for them of its own accord, and they went out and had passed along the street when the angel suddenly vanished from Peter's sight. Then Peter came to himself and said aloud, "Now I know for certain that the Lord has sent his angel to rescue me from the power of Herod and from all that the Jewish people are expecting." As the truth broke upon him he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John surnamed Mark ....

John Mark or Mark - The "interpreter" of the apostle Peter and author of Mark's Gospel. Also possibly the young man who ran naked from Gethsemane when Jesus was arrested (Mark 14:51). His mother Mary's house was traditionally where the Last Supper was held, where the disciples waited for the Holy Spirit before Pentecost, and thereafter a centre of worship. Barnabas was his cousin (Colossians 4:10).

When Barnabas and Paul returned to Syrian Antioch from their famine relief journey to Jerusalem, they took John Mark with them (Acts 12:25). He was their assistant at the start of the First Missionary Journey (Acts 13:5), travelling through Cyprus and sailing across to Perga. There Mark left them and returned to Jerusalem (Acts 13:13). By the time Paul and Barnabas were ready for the Second Journey (Acts 15:36), Paul would not take Mark because of his "desertion". Barnabas instead took Mark on a mission to his home island of Cyprus.

Over the next 12 years, Paul and Mark were reconciled. By the time of Paul's Rome imprisonment, c AD61-63, Mark is with him, and apparently ready to visit Colossae (Colossians 4:10), and is included in the greetings from Rome to Philemon (v24). He appears at the end of Paul's life in c AD67, when in the Second Letter to Timothy (4:11) in Ephesus, Paul asks Timothy to bring Mark to Rome.

The apostle Peter, having seemingly reached Rome at this time or earlier (c AD64), refers in the greetings in his First Letter (5:13), to Mark as his (spiritual) son -

.... where (at the house of Mary, mother of John Mark) many were gathered together in prayer. As he (Peter) knocked at the door a young maid called Rhoda came to answer it, but on recognising Peter's voice failed to open the door from sheer joy. Instead she ran inside and reported that Peter was standing on the doorstep. At this they said to her, "You must be mad!"

But she insisted that it was true. Then they said, "Then it is his angel."

But Peter continued to stand there knocking on the door, and when they opened it and recognised him they were simply amazed. Peter, however, made a gesture to them to stop talking while he explained to them how the Lord had brought him out of prison. Then he said, "Go and tell James (brother of Jesus, and now apparently a leader of the church in Jerusalem) and the other brothers what has happened."

After this he (Peter) left them and went on to another place (first in Judea and then to Caesarea).

Peter's escape infuriates Herod

But when morning came there was a great commotion among the soldiers as to what could have happened to Peter. When Herod had had a search put out for him without success, he cross-examined

the guards and then ordered their execution. Then he left Judea and went down to Caesarea and stayed there.

But Herod dies a terrible death

Now Herod (Agrippa I) was very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon (where Jesus had healed the Syrophoenician woman's daughter). They approached him in a body and after winning over Blastus the king (Herod)'s chamberlain , they begged him for peace. They were forced to do this because their country's food supply was dependent on the king's dominions. So on an appointed day Herod put on his royal robes, took his seat on the public throne and made a speech to them. At this people kept shouting, "This is a god speaking, not a mere man!" Immediately an angel of the Lord struck him down because he did not give God the glory. And in fearful agony he died.

- The dispute between Tyre and Sidon in Syrian Phoenicia and Herod Agrippa I was probably political and economic. Tyre and Sidon depended on Palestine for food, some of which was exported. If Herod diverted this produce and trade though his own Samaritan port of Caesarea, Tyre and Sidon would suffer.

Herod Agrippa I died in AD43. His death is reported by the Jewish historian Josephus quite independently, and in circumstances similar to those in Luke's Gospel. According to Josephus, Herod was in Caesarea celebrating the return of emperor Claudius from his expedition to Britain, and appeared dressed in dazzling silver robes. As the people worshipped him as a god, he saw an owl which had been prophesied as an omen of his approaching death. He died five days later.

The message continues to spread

But the Word of the Lord continued to gain ground and increase its influence.

BARNABAS & SAUL RETURN TO ANTIOCH WITH MARK; THEY LEAVE ON PAUL'S FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY

Acts 12:25-13:3 - Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had completed their (famine relief) mission there, bringing with them John whose surname was Mark.

Saul and Barnabas are called to a special task

(Chapter 13 .....) Now there were in the Church at Antioch (by now an important Christian centre with many Gentile converts) both prophets and teachers - Barnabas, for example, Simeon surnamed Niger ....

Simeon - Nothing more is heard of this Simeon -

.... Lucius the Cyrenian ....

Lucius - Two men with this name appear in the New Testament. Here, in Acts in c AD46, as a leader of the church in Antioch, who came from Cyrene in North Africa. Then a decade later, in Romans 16:21, Paul lists a Lucius who sends greetings from Corinth to the church in Rome. These could be the same man -

.... Manaen the foster-brother of the governor Herod ....

Manaen - As a foster-brother, he would have been brought up with Herod - the tetrarch Herod Antipas, who was banished in AD39. Luke's Gospel also reports that Jesus' women followers included a member of this same Herod's household - Joanna the wife of Chuza, his agent (Luke 8:3).

.... and Saul. While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit spoke to them, saying, "Set Barnabas and Saul apart for me for a task to which I have called them."

At this, after further fasting and prayer, they laid their hands on them and set them free for this work.

Possibly around this period - the fifth decade AD - the Letter of James was written for Jewish Christians. Although James' Letter may be one of the first Christian writings still in existence, it appears towards the end of the New Testament:

Paul's First Missionary Journey & the Council at Jerusalem

Map - Paul's First Missionary Journey, with Barnabas to Cyprus and Asia Minor c AD46-48, and the Council at Jerusalem

Map Key: 1. Paul's First Journey as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. Also in text in [red square brackets]

BARNABAS & PAUL REACH CYPRUS; THE ROMAN PROCONSUL IS CONVERTED

Acts 13:4-12 - So these two (Barnabas and Paul), sent at the Holy Spirit's command, went down (from Syrian Antioch [1]) to Seleucia [2] and from there sailed off to Cyprus. On their arrival at Salamis [3]they began to proclaim God's message in the Jewish synagogues, having John (Mark) as their assistant. As they made their way through the island as far as Paphos [4] they came across a man named Bar-Jesus, a Jew who was both a false prophet and a magician. This man was attached to Sergius Paulus, the proconsul (or Roman governor of the island province of Cyprus), who was himself a man of intelligence. ....

Sergius Paulus - An inscription with his name was found in Cyprus thus confirming his governorship. The writings of Pliny the Elder, the famous Roman naturalist and scholar, also describe Paulus as "an intelligent man" -

.... He (Sergius Paulus) sent for Barnabas and Saul as he was anxious to hear God's message. But Elymas the magician (for that -"magician" - is the translation of his name), opposed them doing his best to dissuade the proconsul from accepting the faith. Then Saul (who is also called Paul - for the first time in the New Testament), filled with the Holy Spirit, eyed him closely and said, "You son of the devil, you enemy of all true goodness, you monster of trickery and evil, is it not time you gave up trying to pervert the truth of the Lord? Now listen, the Lord himself will touch you, for some time you will not see the light of the sun - you will be blind!"

Immediately a mist and then utter blackness came over his eyes, and he went round trying to find someone to lead him by the hand. When the proconsul (Sergius Paulus) saw what had happened he believed, for he was shaken to the core at the Lord's teaching.

THEY CROSS TO ASIA MINOR AND ENTER GALATIA; IN PISIDIAN ANTIOCH THE JEWS REJECT, THE GENTILES ACCEPT THE GOSPEL

Galatia - A large Roman province in Asia Minor, extending almost from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean through the mountains and plains of modern central Turkey. Settled by Gauls from central Asia in the 3rd century BC, Galatia included the Phrygian town of Pisidian Antioch; not to be confused with Syrian Antioch:

Acts 13:13-15 - Then Paul and his companions set sail from Paphos and went to Perga [5] in Pamphylia. There John (Mark) left them and turned back to Jerusalem (an action which later led to a split between Barnabas and Paul), but they continued their journey through Perga to the Antioch in

Pisidia [6]. They went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day and took their seats. After the reading of the Law and Prophets, the leaders of the synagogue sent to them with a message, "Men and brothers, if you have any message of encouragement for the people, by all means speak."

PAUL ADDRESSES THE JEWS IN THE SYNAGOGUE AT PISIDIAN ANTIOCH IN ASIA MINOR

- This is the only complete sermon of Paul's recorded out of the many hundreds, or even thousands he must have given in his thirty year ministry. After a brief history of Israel, he leads in to the coming of Jesus, who as prophesied, was put to death by the people he came to save. Paul, in an early reference to the doctrine of "justification by faith", asserts that it is only through believing in Jesus that the sins of all God's people can be forgiven. Not by any amount of good works they may do in meeting the old Jewish Law. He finishes by warning his listeners not to repeat the mistakes of previous generations, and to reject the prophets:

Acts 13:16-41 - So Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand, began: "Men of Israel and all of you who fear God, listen to me. The God of this people Israel chose our fathers and prospered the people while they were exiles in the land of Egypt. Then he lifted up his arm and led them out of that land (in the Exodus). Yes, and he bore with them for forty years in the desert. He destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan before he gave them that land as their inheritance for some four hundred and fifty years. After that he gave them judges until the time of the prophet Samuel. Then when they begged for a king God gave them Saul (who was anointed by Samuel as the first king of Israel) the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, to be their king for forty years. After he deposed him he raised David to the throne, a man of whom God himself bore testimony in the words,

'I have found David (Psalm 89:20) .... the son of Jesse .... a man after my own heart, who will do all my will.' (a paraphrase of 1 Samuel 13:14)

From the descendants of this man (David), according to his promise, God has brought Jesus to Israel to be their saviour. John (the Baptist) came before him to prepare his way preaching the baptism of repentance for all the people of Israel. Indeed, as John reached the end of his time he said these words: 'What do you think I am? I am not he. But know this, someone comes after me whose shoe-lace I am not fit to untie!' (... from Mark 1:7b).

Now the message is urgent and contemporary

"Men and brothers, sons of the (Jewish) race of Abraham, and all among you who fear God, it is to us that this message of salvation has now been sent! For the people of Jerusalem and their rulers refused to recognise him and to understand the voice of the prophets which are read every Sabbath day - even though in condemning him they fulfilled these very prophecies! For though they found no cause for putting him to death, they begged Pilate to have him executed. And when they had completed everything that was written about him, they took him down from the cross and laid him in a tomb. But God raised him from the dead. For many days he was seen by those who had come up from Galilee to Jerusalem with him, and these men are now his witnesses to the people. And as for us we tell you the good news that the promise made to our forefathers has come true - that, in raising up Jesus, God has fulfilled it for us their children. This is endorsed in the second psalm:

'You are my son, today I have begotten you.' (Psalm 2:7)

And as for the fact of God's raising him from the dead, never to return to corruption, he has spoken in these words:

'I will give you the sure mercies of David.' (Isaiah 55:3)

And then going further he says in another psalm,

'You will not allow your holy one to see corruption.' (Psalm 16:10)

For David, remember, after he had served God's purpose in his own generation, fell asleep and was laid with his ancestors. He did in fact 'see corruption', but this man (Jesus) whom God raised never saw corruption! It is therefore imperative, men and brothers, that every one of you should realise that forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you through this man. And through faith in him a man is absolved

from all those things from which the Law of Moses could never set him free. Take care then that this saying of the prophets should never apply to you:

'Behold, you despisers, marvel and perish; for I work a work in your days, a work which you will by no means believe, though one were to declare it to you.' (Habakkuk 1:5)"

Paul succeeds in arousing deep interest -

Acts 13:42-50 - As they were going out (from the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch) the people kept on asking them to say all this again on the following Sabbath. After the meeting of the synagogue broke up many of the Jews and devout proselytes (Gentile converts to Judaism) followed Paul and Barnabas (the first time Paul's name is placed before Barnabas') who spoke personally to them and urged them to put their trust in the grace of God.

- but a week later he meets bitter opposition

On the next Sabbath almost the entire population of the city assembled to hear the message of God, but when the Jews saw the crowds they were filled with jealousy and contradicted what Paul was saying, covering him with abuse.....

After being rejected by the Jews, Paul uses scripture (Acts 13:46-47 following) to show that the Gospel of Jesus Christ must be taken to the Gentiles:

(Verse 46 starts ...) At this Paul and Barnabas did not mince their words but said, "We felt it our duty to speak the message of God to you first, but since you spurn it and evidently do not think yourselves fit for eternal life, watch us now as we turn to the Gentiles! Indeed the Lord has commanded us to do so with the words: 'I have set you to be a light to the Gentiles, that you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.' (Isaiah 49:6)"

(Verse 48 continues ...) When the Gentiles heard this they were delighted and thanked God for his message. All those who were destined for eternal life believed, and the Word of the Lord spread over the whole country. But the Jews worked upon the feelings of religious and respectable women and some of the leading citizens, and succeeded in starting a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from the district.

THEY GO ON TO ICONIUM. EJECTED FROM ICONIUM, THEY HEAL IN LYSTRA AND ARE TAKEN FOR "GODS"; THEY PREACH AT DERBE

Acts 13:51-14:21a - But they on their part simply shook off the dust from their feet in protest and went on to Iconium [7]. And the disciples continued to be full of joy and the Holy Spirit.

Jewish behaviour repeats itself

(Chapter 14 .....) Much the same thing happened at Iconium. On their arrival they went to the Jewish synagogue and spoke with such conviction that a very large number of both Jews and Greeks believed. But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the feelings of the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers. So they remained there for a long time and spoke fearlessly for the Lord, who made it plain that they were proclaiming the Word of his grace, by allowing them to perform signs and miracles. But the great mass of the people of the city were divided in their opinions, some taking the side of the Jews, and some that of the apostles. But when a hostile movement arose from both Gentiles and Jews in collaboration with the authorities to insult and stone them, they got to know about it, fled to the Lycaonian cities of Lystra [8] and Derbe [9], and the surrounding countryside - and from there they continued to proclaim the Gospel.

A miracle in a completely pagan city

Now it happened one day at Lystra that a man was sitting who had no power in his feet. He had in fact been lame from birth and had never been able to walk. He was listening to Paul as he spoke, and Paul, looking him straight in the eye and seeing that he had the faith to be made well, said in a loud voice, "Stand straight up on your feet!"

And he sprang to his feet and walked. When the crowd saw what Paul had done they shouted in the Lycaonian language, "The gods have come down to us in human form!"

They began to call Barnabas Jupiter (the principal god of the Romans, known to the Greeks as Zeus), and Paul Mercury (the Roman messenger of the gods, or the Greek Hermes), since he was the chief speaker. What is more, the high priest of Jupiter whose temple was at the gateway of the city, brought garlanded oxen to the gates and wanted to offer sacrifice with the people. But when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul (the first time disciples other than the original twelve plus Matthias are called apostles), heard of their intention they tore their clothes and rushed into the crowd, crying at the top of their voices, "Men, men, why are you doing these things? We are only human beings with feelings just like yours! .....

- Paul and Barnabas (Acts 14:15b-17 following) shout to the crowd about the greatness of God -

(Verse 15b starts ...) We are here to tell you good news - that you should turn from these meaningless things to the living God! He is the one who made heaven and earth, the sea and all that is in them. In generations gone by he allowed all nations to go on in their own ways - not that he left men without evidence of himself. For he has shown kindnesses to you; he has sent you rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, giving you food and happiness to your hearts' content."

(Verse 18 continues ....) Yet even with these words, they only just succeeded in restraining the crowd from making sacrifices to them.

Paul is dogged by his Jewish enemies

Then some Jews arrived from Antioch and Iconium (probably the same people who earlier hounded Paul and Barnabas from these cities) and after turning the minds of the people against Paul they stoned him and dragged him out of the city thinking he was dead. But while the disciples were gathered in a circle round him, Paul got up and walked back to the city. And the very next day he went out with Barnabas to Derbe, and when they had preached the Gospel to that city and made many disciples,.....

PAUL & BARNABAS RETURN THROUGH LYSTRA, ICONIUM & ANTIOCH, AND SAIL BACK TO SYRIAN ANTIOCH

Acts 14:21b-28 - ..... they turned back to Lystra [10], Iconium [11] and Antioch [12]. They put fresh heart into the disciples there, urging them to stand firm in the faith, and reminding them that it is "through many tribulations that we must enter into the kingdom of God." (A message similar to the opening verses of James' Letter possibly written around this time.) They appointed elders for them in each Church, and with prayer and fasting commended these men to the Lord in whom they had believed. They then crossed Pisidia and arrived in Pamphylia. They proclaimed their message in Perga [13] and then went down to Attalia [14]. From there they sailed back to Antioch (in Syria) [15] where they had first been commended to the grace of God for the task which they had now completed. When they arrived there they called the Church together and reported to them how greatly God had worked with them and how he had opened the door of faith for the Gentiles. And here at Antioch they spent a considerable time with the disciples.

GENTILES ARE TOLD TO OBEY JEWISH LAW; PAUL & BARNABAS CANNOT ACCEPT THIS AND GO TO JERUSALEM

Acts 15:1-3 - Then (sometime after the return of Paul and Barnabas from the First Journey) some men (the "Judaisers") came down from Judea and began to teach the brothers, saying "unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses you cannot be saved" (thus turning Christianity into a Jewish sect). Naturally this caused a serious upset among them and much earnest discussion followed with Paul and Barnabas. Finally it was agreed that Paul and Barnabas should go to Jerusalem with some of their own people to confer with the apostles and elders about the whole question.

The Church sent them off on their journey and as they went through (Syrian) Phoenicia [16] and Samaria [17] they told the story of the conversion of the Gentiles, and all the brothers were overjoyed to hear about it.

THE COUNCIL AT JERUSALEM; PETER & JAMES SUPPORT PAUL & BARNABAS

Acts 15:4-35 - On their arrival at Jerusalem [18] they (Paul and Barnabas) were welcomed by the Church, by the apostles and elders, and they reported how greatly God had worked with them. But some members of the Pharisees' party who (in spite of Jesus' earlier confrontations with them) had

become believers stood up and declared that it was absolutely essential that these men be told that they must be circumcised and observe the Law of Moses.

- The apostle Peter (Acts 15:6-20 following) supports Paul and Barnabas, reminding those present how the centurion Cornelius, a Gentile, received God's Holy Spirit. James continues, doing the same through scripture, but proposes a set of simple rules to guide Gentiles in their relations with Jewish converts:

Peter declares that God is doing something new

(Verse 6 starts ...) The apostles and elders met to consider the matter. After an exhaustive enquiry (the apostle) Peter stood up and addressed them in these words: "Men and brothers, you know that from the earliest days God chose me (the apostle Peter, not Paul at this stage in the Church's development) as the one from whose lips the Gentiles should hear the Word and should believe it. Moreover, God who knows men's inmost thoughts has plainly shown that this is so, for when he had cleansed their hearts though their faith he gave the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles exactly as he did to us. Why then must you now strain the patience of God by trying to put on the shoulders of these disciples a burden which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? Surely the fact is that it is by the grace of the Lord Jesus that we are saved by faith, just as they are!"

These words produced absolute silence, and they listened to Barnabas and Paul while they gave a detailed account of the signs and wonders which God had worked through them among the Gentiles.

James expresses the feeling of the meeting

Silence again followed their words and then James (the brother of Jesus) made this reply: "Men and brothers, listen to me. Symeon (or Simeon, that is Simon Peter) has shown how in the first place God chose a people (the Jews) from among the nations who should bear his name. This is in full agreement with what the prophets wrote, as in this scripture:

'After this I will return and will rebuild the tabernacle of David which has fallen down. I will rebuild its ruins, and I will set it up, so that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, even all the Gentiles who are called by my name, says the Lord who does all these things. (Amos 9:11,12)

'Known to God from eternity are all his works.'

"I am firmly of the opinion that we should not put any additional obstacles before any Gentiles who are turning towards God. Instead, I think we should write to them telling them to avoid anything polluted by idols, sexual immorality, eating the meat of strangled animals, or tasting blood.....

- The rules are of two kinds - social and moral. Avoiding meat from animals sacrificed in pagan temples, and from those not slaughtered according to Jewish tradition, meant Gentile converts could eat with Jewish Christians without causing offence. As for sexual immorality; in the liberal and immoral society of the time, chastity other than between a husband and wife in marriage, meant Christians making a major and observable moral break with the world about them -

(Verse 21 continues....) ..... For after all (said James), for many generations now Moses has had his preachers in every city and has been read aloud in the synagogues every Sabbath day."

The Church's deputation: the message to Gentile Christians

Then the apostles, the elders and the whole Church agreed to choose representatives and send them to Antioch (in Syria) with Paul and Barnabas. Their names were Judas, surnamed Barsabbas, and Silas, both leading men of the brotherhood.....

Judas Barsabbas - He should not be confused with Joseph or Justus Barsabbas, one of the two disciples short-listed as the new twelfth apostle (Acts 1:23) nearly 20 years earlier;

Silas (or Silvanus) - Like Barnabas, Silas had an important role in the early life of the Church. By c AD49 he must have held a position of some authority in Jerusalem, before travelling to Syrian Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. According to some early manuscripts he then stayed, and did not return to Jerusalem with Judas Barsabbas (Acts 15:34).

After Paul's dispute with Barnabas about John Mark's "desertion", he selected Silas as his companion on the Second Missionary Journey (Acts 15:40). Later joined by Timothy, Silas shared much of Paul's

experiences, including beatings and imprisonment in Philippi (Acts 16:22), opposition in Thessalonica (Acts 17:1), and some success in Berea (Acts 17:10). When Paul is forced to go on to Athens, Silas and Timothy remained in Berea. They later rejoined Paul in Corinth (Acts 18:5).

When Paul writes his First and Second Letters to Thessalonica from Corinth in c AD52, he includes Silvanus (Silas) in his opening greetings (verses 1:1). Then in his Second Letter to the Corinthians, c AD57, Paul refers to the work of Silas and Timothy during their stay in Corinth (2 Corinthians 1:19).

We last hear of Silas, probably in Rome c AD64, as secretary to the apostle Peter (1 Peter 5:12).

..... They (Judas and Silas) carried with them a letter bearing this message:

"The apostles and elders who are your brothers send their greetings to the brothers who are Gentiles in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia. Since we have heard that some of our number (the "Judaisers") have caused you deep distress and have unsettled your minds by giving you a message which certainly did not originate from us, we are unanimously agreed to send you chosen representatives with our well-loved Barnabas and Paul - men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. So we have sent you Judas and Silas who will give you the same message personally by word of mouth. For it has seemed right to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay no further burden upon you except what is absolutely essential, namely, that you avoid what has been sacrificed to idols, tasting blood, eating the meat of whatever has been strangled and sexual immorality. Keep yourselves clear of these things and you will make good progress. Farewell."

The message is received with delight

So this party, sent off by the Church, went down to Antioch [19] and after gathering the congregation together, they handed over the letter to them. And they, when they read it, were delighted with the encouragement it gave them. Judas and Silas were themselves both inspired preachers and greatly encouraged and strengthened the brothers by many talks to them. Then, after spending some time there, the brothers sent them back in peace to those who commissioned them (in Jerusalem). Paul and Barnabas however stayed on in Antioch teaching and preaching the Gospel of the Word of the Lord in company with many others.

PAUL & BARNABAS PLAN TO RETURN TO CYPRUS & ASIA MINOR; THEY CLASH OVER MARK; PAUL TAKES SILAS

Acts 15:36-39 - Some days later (or some time later, after returning to Antioch) Paul spoke to Barnabas, "Now let us go back and visit the brothers in every city (in Cyprus and Asia Minor) where we have proclaimed the Word of the Lord to see how they are."

Barnabas wanted to take John, surnamed Mark, as their companion. But Paul strongly disapproved of taking with them a man who had deserted them in Pamphylia and was not prepared to go on with them in their work. There was a sharp clash of opinion, so much so that they went their separate ways, Barnabas taking Mark and sailing to Cyprus .....

Paul's Second Missionary Journey

Map - Paul's Second Missionary Journey, with Silas returning to Asia Minor and on into Europe c AD49-52

Map Key: 1. Paul's Second Journey as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. Also in text in [red square brackets]

PAUL & SILAS CROSS ASIA MINOR AND REACH TROAS; PAUL'S VISION OF THE MACEDONIAN MAN IN EUROPE

Acts 15:40-16:9 - (Barnabas & Mark sail for Cyprus ....) while Paul chose Silas and set out on his journey (from Syrian Antioch [1]), commended to the grace of the Lord by the brothers as he did so. He travelled through Syria [2] and Cilicia [3] and strengthened the churches.

Paul chooses Timothy as companion

(Chapter 16 ....) He also went to Derbe [4] and Lystra [5]. At Lystra there was a disciple by the name of Timothy whose mother (Eunice) was a Jewish Christian, though his father was a Greek. ....

Timothy - Over the next 18 years, Timothy is frequently found working alongside Paul. After joining him at Lystra at the start of the Second Journey, they travel to Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea. There Paul is forced to leave and taken to Athens, while Timothy and Silas stay (Acts 17:14). They later join Paul, and from Athens, Timothy, and probably Silas are sent north again to Thessalonica to encourage the church (1 Thessalonians 3:1-2). Later, back with Paul who is now in Corinth (Acts 18:5), they give a favourable report (1 Thessalonians 3:6) and Paul writes his First, and later Second Letters to the Thessalonians, c AD52. Both Timothy and Silas are included in the opening greetings (verses 1:1).

During the Third Journey c AD53-58, we next meet Timothy at Ephesus, being sent by Paul to help the church at Corinth (1 Corinthians 4:17). The Corinthians are asked to support him on his arrival (1 Corinthians 16:10). Later, back in Ephesus, he and Erastus are sent on ahead of Paul to Macedonia (Acts 19:22).

When Paul reaches Macedonia and writes his Second Letter to the Corinthians c AD57, Timothy is included in the opening greetings (1:1). He also refers to Timothy as one of those who preached the Gospel in Corinth five years earlier during the Second Journey (2 Corinthians 1:19).

As the Third Journey comes to a close, they arrive in Corinth from Macedonia, and when Paul writes his Letter to the Romans, Timothy is again listed in the greetings (Romans 16:21). Then as Paul returns to Jerusalem, Timothy is one of his travelling companions, c AD58 (Acts 20:4).

A few years later, c AD61-63, Timothy is staying in Rome with the imprisoned Paul, and included in the opening greetings of three Letters - to the Philippians, the Colossians, and to Philemon (all verses 1:1). The Letter to Philippi includes the hope that the much valued Timothy would pay them a visit (Philippians 2:19,22).

After Paul's presumed release, Paul writes his First Letter to Timothy (1:2,18; 6:20), perhaps from Macedonia. Then his Second Letter (1:2), but this time from prison in Rome just before his execution c AD67. Both Letters are sent to Ephesus where Timothy is a minister, to instruct, encourage and strengthen him.

Finally, the author of Hebrews (13:23) reports that "brother Timothy is now at liberty", but the circumstances are not known.

Eunice - 2 Timothy 1:5 identifies Eunice as Timothy's mother, and Lois as his grandmother

.... Timothy was held in high regard by the brothers at Lystra and Iconium, and Paul wanted to take him on as his companion. Everybody knew his father was a Greek, and Paul therefore had him circumcised because of the attitude of the Jews in these places. ....

- After the battles so recently fought in Jerusalem over the acceptance of Gentiles into the Church, it may seem strange that Paul has Timothy circumcised. But as his mother was a Jew, the uncircumcised Timothy would not have been accepted by other Jews -

.... As they went on their way through the cities they passed on to them for their observance the decisions which had been reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem (during the Church Council to discuss Gentile converts). Consequently the churches grew stronger and stronger in the faith and their numbers increased daily.

Paul and Silas find their journey divinely directed

They made their way through Phrygia [6] and Galatia [7], but the Holy Spirit prevented them from speaking God's message in Asia. When they came to Mysia [8] they tried to enter Bithynia, but again the (Holy) Spirit of Jesus would not allow them. So they passed by Mysia and came down to Troas [9], where one night Paul had a vision of a Macedonian man standing and appealing to him in the words: "Come over to Macedonia (in Europe) and help us!" .....

THEY CROSS TO EUROPE AND REACH PHILIPPI; LYDIA, AND THEN PAUL'S JAILER ARE CONVERTED

Philippi - The ruins of Philippi are near modern Kavalla in northern Greece. It was then a city of Macedonia founded by Philip, the father of Alexander the Great. A Roman colony and military centre, governed directly from Rome, Philippi was situated on the Via Egnatian, the highway running east and west linking Rome to Byzantium (Istanbul):

Acts 16:10-40 - These verses include the first of four "We" sections (Acts 16:10-17) in which Luke, the author of Acts apparently gives an eye-witness account:

.... As soon as Paul had seen this vision we made every effort to get on to Macedonia, convinced that God had called us to give them the good news.

- Another momentous step in the recorded expansion of the Church. As Macedonia is in Europe, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, starting in Asia, and carried into Africa, is about to enter a third continent -

The Gospel comes to Europe: a business-woman is converted

So we set sail from Troas and ran a straight course to (the island of) Samothrace [10], and on the following day to Neapolis [11]. From there we went to Philippi [12] (to where Paul wrote his Letter to the Philippians), a Roman garrison-town and the chief city in that part of Macedonia. We spent some days in Philippi and on the Sabbath day we went out of the city gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place for prayer. There we sat down and spoke to the women who had assembled. One of our hearers was a woman named Lydia. (She came from Thyatira and was a dealer in purple-dyed cloth.) ....

Lydia - Her home-town of Thyatira in the province of Asia is one of the seven churches John later wrote to in Revelations 2:18-29. As a dealer in purple-dyed cloth - the dye, Tyrian purple, came from a rare sea-shell and the expensive cloth was only worn by the wealthy - she must have been a successful business-woman. Also, as a woman, she is the first named convert in Europe, and as there was no synagogue, and of course, no churches, her home may have served as the first church in Philippi, and thus Europe. Luke also appears to have stayed there during his time in Philippi. Unfortunately, this is the first and almost the last time we hear of her -

.... She (Lydia) was already a believer in God, and she opened her heart to accept Paul's words. When she and her household had been baptised, she appealed to us, saying, "If you are satisfied that I am a true-believer in the Lord, then come down to my house and stay there."

And she insisted on our doing so.

Conflict with evil spirits and evil men

One day while we were going to the place of prayer we were met by a young girl who had a spirit of clairvoyance and brought her owners a good deal of profit by foretelling the future. She would follow Paul and the rest of us, crying out, "These men are servants of the most high God, and they are telling you the way of salvation." (the first "We" section now ends. Verse 18 continues ....) She continued this behaviour for many days, and then Paul, in a burst of irritation, turned round and spoke to the spirit in her. "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her!"

And it came out immediately. but when the girl's owners saw that their hope of making money out of her had disappeared, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them before the authorities in the market-square. There they brought them before the chief magistrates, and said, "These men are Jews and are causing a great disturbance in our city. They are proclaiming customs which it is illegal for us as Roman citizens (Philippi was a colonial town established for discharged Roman soldiers, Roman citizens by right) to accept or practise."

At this the crowd joined in the attack, and the magistrates had them stripped and ordered them to be beaten with rods. Then, after giving them a severe beating, they threw them into prison, instructing the jailer to keep them safe. On receiving such strict orders, he hustled them into the inner jail and fastened their feet securely in the stocks.

The midnight deliverance: the jailer becomes a Christian

But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God while the other prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was a great earthquake, big enough to shake the foundations of the prison. Immediately all the doors flew open and everyone's chains were unfastened. When the jailer woke and saw that the doors of the prison had been opened he drew his sword and was on the point of killing himself (... jailers and guards suffered the same fate as an escaping prisoner was sentenced to), for he imagined that all the prisoners had escaped. But Paul called out to him at the top of his voice, "Don't hurt yourself - we are all here!"

Then the jailer called for lights, rushed in, and trembling all over, fell at the feet of Paul and Silas.

- Paul preaches a very brief sermon (Acts 16:30-31 following) on how to be saved through Jesus Christ -

(Verse 30 starts ....) He (the jailer) led them outside, and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

And they (Paul and Silas) replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus and then you will be saved, you and your household."

(Verse 32 continues....) Then they told him and all the members of his household the message of God. There and then in the middle of the night he took them aside and washed their wounds and he himself and all his family were baptised without delay. Then he took them into his house and offered them food, he and his whole household overjoyed at finding faith in God.

Paul, in a strong position, makes the authorities apologise

When morning came, the magistrates sent their constables with the message, "Let those men go." The jailer reported this message to Paul, saying, "The magistrates have sent to have you released. So now you can leave this place and go on your way in peace."

But Paul said to the constables, "They beat us publicly without any kind of trial; they threw us into prison despite the fact that we are Roman citizens. And now do they want to get rid of us in this underhand way? Oh no, let them come and take us out themselves!"

Roman citizens - They were only a small proportion of the total population, say 5 million in an Empire of 50-100 million - the rest being either free men or slaves. Citizenship offered special privileges, and was only granted to Italians, important or valued people from the provinces, inhabitants of Roman colonial towns such as Pisidian Antioch, Philippi and Corinth, and soldiers enrolled in the legions. They were subject to Roman Law and not to that of the provinces. To be born a citizen, Paul must have come from a highly privileged family -

The constables reported this to the magistrates, who were thoroughly alarmed when they heard that they were Romans. So they came in person and apologized to them, and after taking them outside the prison, requested them to leave the city. But on leaving the prison Paul and Silas went to Lydia's house, and when they had seen the brothers and given them fresh courage, they took their leave (of Philippi).

IN THESSALONICA THEY ARE REJECTED BY THE JEWS; IN BEREA, THEY ARE ACCEPTED, BUT HAVE TO LEAVE

Thessalonica - Modern Salonika or Thessalonika. A free city, capital of the Roman province of Macedonia in northern Greece. Thessalonica was a major port, and like Philippi, located on the east-west Egnatian highway, and thus an important centre of trade by land and by sea:

Acts 17:1-14 - Next day they journeyed through Amphipolis [13] and Apollonia [14] and arrived at Thessalonica [15] (later in this, his Second Missionary Journey, Paul wrote the First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians, probably from Corinth). Here there was a synagogue of the Jews which Paul entered, following his usual custom.

- Paul proclaims very clearly to the Jews (Acts 17:2-3 following) that Jesus is their long-awaited Messiah -

(Verse 2 starts ....) On three Sabbath days he argued with them from the scriptures, explaining and quoting passages to prove the necessity for the death of Christ and his rising again from the dead. "This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you," he concluded, "is God's Christ!" (Verse 4 continues....) Some of them were convinced and threw in their lot with Paul and Silas, and they were joined by a great many believing Greeks and a considerable number of influential women. But the Jews, in a fury of jealousy, got hold of some of the unprincipled loungers of the market-place, gathered a crowd together and set the city in an uproar. Then they attacked Jason's house ....

Jason - Two Jason's appear in the New Testament. Paul's host, here in Thessalonica whose house has been attacked and himself arrested. Then in Romans 16:21, Paul includes greetings from a Jason, presumably in Corinth to the church at Rome. These may well be the same man -

.... in an attempt to bring Paul and Silas out before the people. When they could not find them they hustled Jason and some of the brothers before the civic authorities, shouting, "These are the men who have turned the world upside down and have now come here, and Jason has taken them into his house. What is more, all these men act against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king called Jesus!" By these words the Jews succeeded in alarming both the people and the authorities, and they only released Jason and the others after binding them over to keep the peace.

- followed by encouragement at Beroea

Without delay the brothers despatched Paul and Silas off to Beroea (or Berea) [16] that night. On their arrival there they went to the Jewish synagogue. The Jews proved more generous-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they accepted the message most eagerly and studied the scriptures every day to see if what they were now being told were true. Many of them became believers, as did a number of Greek women of social standing and quite a number of men. But when the Jews at Thessalonica found out that God's message had been proclaimed by Paul at Beroea as well, they came there too to cause trouble and spread alarm among the people. The brothers at Beroea then sent Paul off at once to make his way to the sea-coast (near Beroea) [16], but Silas and Timothy remained there.

PAUL IS TAKEN TO ATHENS; HE ADDRESSES THE "PHILOSOPHERS", BUT TO LITTLE APPARENT EFFECT

Acts 17:15-21, 32-34 - The men who accompanied Paul took him as far as Athens [17] and returned with instructions for Silas and Timothy (still in Berea) to rejoin Paul as soon as possible.

Paul is irritated by the idols of Athens

Paul had some days to wait at Athens for Silas and Timothy to arrive, and while he was there his soul was exasperated beyond endurance at the sight of a city so completely idolatrous. He felt compelled to discuss the matter with the Jews in the synagogue as well as the God-fearing Gentiles, and he even argued daily in the open market-place with the passers-by. While he was speaking there some Epicurean and Stoic philosophers came across him, and some of them remarked, "What is this cock-sparrow trying to say?"

- The various Greek philosophies were a powerful intellectual force in the Roman Empire. Very roughly, the Epicureans believed the highest good came from the pursuit of personal happiness; the Stoics from controlling feelings and passions:

Others said,"He seems to be trying to proclaim some more gods to us, and outlandish ones at that!"

For Paul was actually proclaiming "Jesus" and "the resurrection". So they got hold of him and conducted him to their council, the Areopagus (... Greek for the "Hill of Mars"; normally used as the meeting place for the Upper Council or high court of Athens). There they asked him, "May we know what this new teaching of yours really is? You talk of matters which sound strange to our ears, and we should like to know what they mean." (For all Athenians, and even foreign visitors to Athens, had an obsession for any novelty and would spend their whole time talking about or listening to anything new.)

PAUL ADDRESSES THE PHILOSOPHERS OF ATHENS ABOUT THEIR "UNKNOWN GOD"

- After Paul was driven from Thessalonica and Berea in Macedonia, he was taken south by ship to Athens in the province of Achaia. While waiting for Silas and Timothy to join him from Berea, he has the opportunity to address a group of philosophers. They are prepared to listen to him talk about God, but when he comes to Jesus and his resurrection from the dead, Paul is soon brought to a halt:

Acts 17:22-31 - So Paul got to his feet in the middle of their council (the "Areopagus" where the philosophers of Athens could meet to discuss new ideas), and began, "Gentlemen of Athens, my own eyes tell me that you are in all respects an extremely religious people (... Paul uses the philosopher's own debating style). For as I made my way here and looked at your shrines I noticed one altar (one of a number in Athens) on which were inscribed the words, TO GOD THE UNKNOWN. It is this God whom you are worshipping in ignorance that I am here to proclaim to you! God who made the world and all that is in it, being Lord of both Heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by human hands, nor is he ministered to by human hands, as though he had need of anything - seeing that he is the one who gives to all men life and breath and everything else. From one forefather (Adam) he has created every race of men to live over the face of the whole earth. He has determined the times of their existence and the limits of their habitation, so that they might search for God, in the hope that they might feel for him and find him - yes, even though he is not far from any one of us. Indeed, it is in him that we live and move and have our being. Some of your own poets (... Aratus, Cleanthes and Epimenides speaking about the god Zeus) have endorsed this in the words, 'For we are indeed his children'. If then we are the children of God, we ought not to imagine God in terms of gold or silver or stone, contrived by human art or imagination. Now while it is true that God has overlooked the days of ignorance he now commands all men everywhere to repent (because of the gift of his son Jesus). For he has fixed a day on which he will judge the whole world in justice by the standard of a man whom he has appointed. That this is so he has guaranteed to all men by raising this man (Jesus) from the dead."

Acts 17:32-34 - But when his audience heard Paul talk about the resurrection from the dead some of them laughed outright, but others said, "We should like to hear you speak again on this subject."

So with this mixed reception Paul retired from their assembly. Yet some did in fact join him and accept the faith, including Dionysius a member of the Areopagus, a woman by the name of Damaris, and some others as well.

Dionysius & Damaris - No more is heard of them in the New Testament. Traditionally, Damaris was the wife of Dionysius, and he became the first bishop of Athens.

PAUL GOES TO CORINTH; MEETS AQUILA & PRISCILLA; APPEARS BEFORE GALLIO; STAYS FOR 18 MONTHS

Corinth - The original Corinth is near modern Corinth in southern Greece. An ancient Greek city, and chief town of the Roman province of Achaia, it was at this time governed by proconsul Gallio. Located near the narrow strip of land separating the Adriatic from the Aegean Seas, and through which ran the north-south highway linking the rest of Greece with the southern Peloponnesus, Corinth was a vital centre of commerce. A cosmopolitan city with the temple of Aphrodite - goddess of love and fertility - and with two nearby ports including Cenchrea, Corinth was well known for its sexual immorality -

Acts 18:1-18a - Before long Paul left Athens and went on to Corinth [18] (to where Paul sent the First and Second Letters, and possibly others, to the Corinthian Christians) where he found a Jew called Aquila, a native of Pontus. This man had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla because Claudius had issued a decree that all Jews should leave Rome. ....

Emperor Claudius, who ruled Rome from AD41-54, decreed in c AD50, that Jewish agitators, stirred up by "Chrestus" (Christ) should be expelled from Rome. This is confirmed by the Roman historians Dio Cassius and Suetonius;

Aquila & Priscilla (or Prisca) - After meeting Paul in Corinth, they sail with him from Cenchrea as he returns to Palestine in c AD52 at the close of his Second Journey (Acts 18:18). However, they remain at Ephesus, and after meeting Apollos the Alexandrian Jew, teach him about the Gospel of Jesus (Acts 18:26). Still in Ephesus, they are included in Paul's greetings to the church in Corinth (1 Corinthians 16:19) written in c AD56 or 57 during his Third Journey.

The edict against the Jews in Rome having been lifted or found unworkable, Aquila and Priscilla apparently returned to Rome by c AD57 because they are listed in Paul's greetings to the Christians of the imperial city (Romans 16:3). The last mention of them is in Paul's Second Letter to Timothy 4:19 in c AD67. Paul sends his greetings to Ephesus, which they were either visiting or had moved back to possibly for business reasons (tent-making). This one couple shows how people of the Roman Empire could travel with an ease that was not to return until the mid-19th century.

In the seven mentions of this much valued husband and wife team, Priscilla is placed first five times - perhaps reflecting her important role in the early church -

.... He (Paul) went to see them (Aquila and Priscillla) in their house and because they practised the same trade as himself he stayed with them. They all worked together, for their trade was tent-making. Every Sabbath Paul used to speak in the synagogue trying to persuade both Jews and Greeks. By the time Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia Paul was completely absorbed in preaching the message, showing the Jews as clearly as he could that Jesus is Christ. However, when they turned against him and abused him he shook his garments at them, and said, "Your blood be on your heads! From now on I go with a perfectly clear conscience to the Gentiles."

Then he left them and went to the house of a man called Titius Justus, a man who reverenced God and whose house was next door to the synagogue. Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, became a believer in the Lord, with all his household, and many of the Corinthians who heard the message believed and were baptised.....

Titius Justus - He is only mentioned this one time;

Crispus - Later identified by Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:14 as one of the few people he personally baptised in Corinth -

..... Then one night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision.

"Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and let no one silence you, for I myself am with you and no man shall lift a finger to harm you. There are many in this city who belong to me."

So Paul settled down there for eighteen months (his second longest recorded stay in a city during his three Missionary Journeys) and taught them God's message.

Paul's enemies fail to impress the governor

Then, while Gallio was governor of Achaia ....

Gallio - The Roman governor or proconsul of the province of Achaia, was appointed by the emperor Claudius in c AD51 or 52. As Gallio's appointment was included in an inscription discovered in Greece in 1905, this is an important event in Paul's travels, one of the few that can be dated with any real accuracy. Gallio's brother was the famous Stoic philosopher Seneca, tutor to the emperor Nero who reigned AD54-68 -

.... the Jews banded together to attack Paul, and took him to court, saying, "This man is perverting men's minds to make them worship God in a way that is contrary to the Law."

Paul was all ready to speak, but before he could utter a word Gallio said to the Jews, "Listen, Jews! If this were a matter of some crime or wrong-doing I might reasonably be expected to put up with you. But since it is a question which concerns a word and names and your own Law, you must attend to it yourselves. I flatly refuse to be judge in these matters."

And he had them ejected from the court. Then they got hold of Sosthenes, the synagogue-leader, and beat him in front of the court-house. But Gallio remained completely unmoved.

Sosthenes - The only other Sosthenes is found in the First Letter to the Corinthians 1:1, written from Ephesus back to Corinth some 5 years later. Here Paul refers to a Christian brother of this name. It is quite possible that only a few years after being one of those accusing Paul of "perverting men's minds", and being beaten for his efforts, Sosthenes the synagogue-leader had become a follower of Christ, and secretary to Paul -

Paul returns, reports to Jerusalem and Antioch

Paul stayed for some time (in Corinth) after this incident .....

- During the stay in Corinth, Paul is believed to have written his First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians, visited earlier in this, his Second Missionary Journey. The two letters are introduced shortly. But first his return to Syrian Antioch via Jerusalem:

PAUL SAILS FOR PALESTINE VIA EPHESUS; VISITS THE JERUSALEM CHURCH AND RETURNS TO SYRIAN ANTIOCH

Acts 18:18b-23a - ..... and then (Paul) took leave of the brothers and sailed for Syria, taking Priscilla and Aquila with him. At Cenchrea [19] (one of the two ports of Corinth) he had his hair cut short, for he had taken a solemn vow. ....

Vow - Probably a Nazarite vow taken by Jews to give thanks to God for his goodness. This is described in the Old Testament in Numbers 6:1-2.1. It involved not taking meat or wine for a period and letting the hair grow. Then an offering was made, and the hair shorn and burnt at the altar. Although a strictly Jewish custom, Paul does not appear to have persuaded any Jewish Christians to abandon their ancient practises. It would therefore be natural for him to show his gratitude to God in a time-honoured way -

.... They all arrived at Ephesus [20] and there Paul left Aquila and Priscilla, but he himself went into the synagogue and debated with the Jews. When they asked him to stay longer he refused, bidding them farewell with the words, "If if is God's will I will come back to you again" (which he does on his Third Missionary Journey). Then he set sail from Ephesus and went down to Caesarea [21]. Here he disembarked and after paying his respects to the Church in Jerusalem [22], he went down to Antioch [23] (Syrian Antioch!). He spent some time there before he left (on his Third Journey) .....

Paul's two Letters to the Thessalonians, probably written from Corinth during his recent stay there, are now introduced. Although these may be the earliest of Paul's surviving letters, they are fairly short, and

therefore placed towards the end of his Epistles in the New Testament. His Letters start with Romans, the longest:

Paul's Third Missionary Journey

Map - Paul's Third Missionary Journey, returning to Asia Minor and Greece c AD53-58

Map Key: 1. Paul's Third Journey as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. Also in text in [red square brackets]

PAUL STARTS HIS THIRD JOURNEY; APOLLOS ARRIVES IN EPHESUS; HE IS TAUGHT BY PRISCILLA & AQUILA, AND CROSSES TO ACHAIA

Acts 18:23b-28 - (After spending some time in Syrian Antioch [1], Paul starts on his Third Missionary Journey, and ....) proceeded to visit systematically throughout Galatia [2] and Phyrgia [3] (two large areas in which Paul must have spent quite a few months), putting new heart into all the disciples as he went.

Apollos speaks powerfully at Ephesus and Corinth

Now a Jew called Apollos, a native of Alexandria and a gifted speaker, well-versed in the scriptures, arrived at Ephesus. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with burning zeal, teaching the facts about Jesus faithfully, even though he only knew the baptism of John (the Baptist). This man began to speak with great boldness in the synagogue. but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him they took him aside and explained the Way of God to him more accurately. Then as he wanted to cross into Achaia (and the city of Corinth), the brothers gave him every encouragement and wrote a letter to the disciples there, asking them to make him welcome. On his arrival he proved a source of great strength to those who believed through grace, for by his powerful arguments he publicly refuted the Jews, quoting from the scriptures to prove that Jesus is Christ.

Apollos - After Priscilla and Aquila had taught him more about Christ's Gospel, Apollos moved from Ephesus to Corinth (Acts 19:1). As an eloquent and persuasive preacher, he obviously made such an impact on the Corinthian Christians, they split into factions - some for Paul, others for Apollos or Cephas (the apostle Peter). Some even for Christ! Later in Paul's Third Journey, c AD56/57, Apollos was back in Ephesus working with Paul, who dealt with these splits in his First Letter to the Corinthians (1:12; 3:4-6). At the end of the Letter (16:12), Paul tells them that Apollos will return to Corinth as soon as "God wills". According to tradition Apollos became the first bishop of Corinth.

Ten years later in c AD66, Apollos is in Crete with Titus, and about to leave on another journey (Titus 3:13).

PAUL REACHES EPHESUS AND STAYS FOR NEARLY THREE YEARS

Ephesus - South of modern Izmir or Smyrna in Western Turkey, and at that time capital of the Roman province of Asia. One of the three greatest cities of the eastern Mediterranean with a population of perhaps 250,000 - the other two being Alexandria in Egypt and Syrian Antioch, Ephesus was an important port with good access to the interior of Asia Minor. As a centre for the worship of Artemis or Diana - the Asian goddess of fertility, her temple was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. The great theatre could hold 25,000 people:

Acts 19:1-22 - While Apollos was in Corinth Paul journeyed through the upper parts of the country (the high inland plateau of Asia Minor) and arrived at Ephesus [4] (on the coast). There he discovered some disciples, and he asked them, ...

- In Acts 19:2b-5 following, Paul baptises a number of Christian disciples in the Holy Spirit:

(Verse 2b starts ....) "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?"

"No", they replied, "we have never even heard that there is a Holy Spirit."

"Well then, how were you baptised?" asked Paul.

"We were baptised with John (the Baptist)'s baptism," they replied.

"John's baptism was a baptism to show a change of heart," Paul explained, "but he always told the people that they must believe in the one who should come after him, that is, in Jesus."

When these men heard this they were baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus, (Verse 6 continues ....), and then, when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them and they began to speak with tongues and the inspiration of prophets. (There were about twelve of them in all.)

Paul's two-year ministry at Ephesus

Then Paul made his way into the synagogue there and for three months he spoke with the utmost confidence, using both argument and persuasion as he talked of the kingdom of God. But when some of them hardened in their attitude towards the message and refused to believe it, and, what is more, spoke offensively about the Way (of Jesus Christ) in public, Paul left them, and withdrew his disciples, and held daily discussions in the lecture-hall of Tyrannus (a philosopher or teacher in Ephesus). He continued this practice for two years (... Paul's longest recorded stay in any one location during his three Missionary Journeys), so that all who lived in Asia (not just Ephesus, but the surrounding country), both Greeks and Jews, could hear the Lord's message. God gave most unusual demonstrations of power through Paul's hands, so much so that people took to the sick any handkerchiefs or small-clothes which had been in contact with his body, and they were cured of their diseases and their evil spirits left them.

The violence of evil and the power of the "name"

But there were some itinerant Jewish exorcists who attempted to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus when dealing with those who had evil spirits. They would say, "I command you in the name of Jesus whom Paul preaches." Seven brothers, sons of a chief priest called Sceva, were engaged in this practice on one occasion, when the evil spirit answered, "Jesus I know, and I am acquainted with Paul, but who on earth are you?" And the man in whom the evil spirit was living sprang at them and over-powered them all with such violence that they rushed out of that house wounded, with their clothes torn off their backs. This incident became known to all the Jews and Greeks who were living in Ephesus, and a great sense of awe came over them all, while the name of the Lord Jesus became highly respected. Many of those who had professed their faith began openly to admit their former practices. A number of those who had previously practised magic collected their books and burned them publicly. (They estimated the value of these books and found it to be no less than five thousand pounds - 50,000 drachma, a drachma being a day's wage; say £2-3 million sterling!) In this way the Word of the Lord continued to grow irresistibly in power and influence.

- Towards the end of his 3 year stay in Ephesus, Paul probably wrote his First Letter to the church in Corinth. This and his Second Letter are introduced shortly -

Paul speaks of his plans

After these events Paul set his heart on going to Jerusalem by way of Macedonia and Achaia, remarking, "After I have been there I must see Rome as well."

Then he despatched to Macedonia (the province that included the cities of Philippi and Thessalonica) two of his assistants, Timothy and Erastus, while he himself stayed for a while in Asia.

Erastus - The name appears three times in the New Testament, and may all refer to the same man:

(1) This Erastus, who is in Ephesus at the end of Paul's long stay there. He now goes with Timothy to Macedonia in advance of Paul. The visits to Macedonia and on to Achaia (including Corinth) were probably to collect gifts for the church in Jerusalem;

(2) Erastus, town clerk of Corinth, included in Paul's greetings from the Christians in Corinth to the Romans, one or two years later in c AD57/58 (Romans 16:23);

(3) While Paul was in prison in Rome before his execution in c AD67, he notes that Erastus stayed on at Corinth (2 Timothy 4:20).

A NEAR RIOT IN EPHESUS; PAUL LEAVES AND TRAVELS THROUGH MACEDONIA, AND SOUTH TO GREECE

Acts 19:23-20:3a - Now it happened about this time that a great commotion arose concerning the Way (of Jesus Christ). A man by the name of Demetrius, a silversmith who made silver shrines for Diana, provided considerable business for his craftsmen. ....

Demetrius - The name appears twice in the New Testament:

(1) This Demetrius, the silversmith of Ephesus;

(2) Another Demetrius, commended in the Third Letter of John sent from Ephesus to Gaius towards the end of the 1st century (3 John 12) -

.... He (Demetrius) gathered these men together with workers in similar trades and spoke to them, "Men," he said, "you all realise how our prosperity depends on this particular work. If you use your eyes and ears you also know that not only in Ephesus but practically throughout (the province of) Asia this man Paul has succeeded in changing the minds of a great number of people by telling them that gods made by human hands are not gods at all. Now the danger is not only that this trade of ours might fall into disrepute, but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana herself might come to be lightly regarded. There is a further danger, that her actual majesty might be degraded, she who the whole of Asia, and indeed the whole world, worships!"

When they heard this they were furiously angry, and shouted, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!"

Soon the whole city was in an uproar, and on a common impulse the people rushed into the theatre dragging with them Gaius and Aristarchus, two Macedonians who were Paul's travelling companions. ....

Gaius - The name appears five times, referring to three or four different men:

(1) Gaius, here linked with Aristarchus as a fellow Macedonian;

(2) Gaius from Derbe, one of Paul's companions taking gifts to Jerusalem a few months later. On that occasion, Aristarchus is not linked with this Gaius, but with Secundus as the "two Thessalonians" (Acts 20:4).

If, as in some ancient texts, Doberus in Macedonia should be read for Derbe (in Asia Minor), then they may be the same man;

(3) Gaius, whom Paul remembers baptising in Corinth four or five years earlier as he writes his First Letter to the Corinthians (1:14);

(4) Gaius, Paul's host in Corinth, included in the greetings from Corinth to the church in Rome (Romans 16:23).

Gaius (3) and (4) are probably the same man;

(5) Gaius who receives the Third Letter from John. A rich man who lived in the Ephesus area towards the end of the century (3 John 1);

Aristarchus - Shortly in Acts, Aristarchus is one of Paul's companions travelling to Jerusalem with him (Acts 20:4). Two or three years later he is again a companion of Paul in the hazardous voyage to Rome (Acts 27:2). He presumably stayed with Paul in prison, as he is included in the greetings to the church at Colossae (Colossians 4:10) and to Philemon (verse 24) -

.... Paul himself wanted to go in among the crowd, but the disciples would not allow him. Moreover, some high-ranking officials who were Paul's friends sent to him begging him not to risk himself in the theatre. Meanwhile some were shouting one thing and some another, and the whole assembly was at sixes and sevens, for most of them had no idea why they had come together at all. A man called Alexander whom the Jews put forward was pushed into the forefront of the crowd, and there, after making a gesture with his hand, he tried to make a speech of defence to the people. but as soon as they realised that he was a Jew they shouted as one man for about two hours, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!"

Public authority intervenes

But when the town clerk had finally quietened the crowd, he said, "Gentlemen of Ephesus, who in the world could be ignorant of the fact that our city of Ephesus is temple-guardian of the great Diana and of the image which fell down (perhaps an ancient meteorite) from Jupiter himself? These are undeniable facts and it is your plain duty to remain calm and do nothing which you might afterwards regret. For you have brought these men forward, though they are neither plunderers of the temple, nor have they uttered any blasphemy against our goddess. If Demetrius and his fellow-craftsmen have a charge to bring against anyone, well, the courts are open and there are magistrates; let them take legal action. But if you require anything beyond that then it must be resolved in the regular assembly. For all of us are in danger of being charged with rioting over today's events particularly as we have no real excuse to offer for this commotion."

And with these words he dismissed the assembly.

Paul departs on his second journey to Europe

(Chapter 20 .....) After this disturbance had died down, Paul sent for the disciples and after speaking encouragingly said good-bye to them, and went on his way to Macedonia [5]. As he made his way through these districts ....

- of Macedonia, Paul probably wrote his Second Letter to the Corinthians after Titus' return from that city (2 Corinthians 7:5-7);

- Assuming the Letter to the Galatians was written to the churches of north Galatia, Paul might have written it around this time during his journey through Macedonia, or later in Greece -

..... he spoke many heartening words to the people and then went on to Greece [6] (including Corinth), where he stayed for three months.

- During his stay in Corinth, Paul is believed to have written his Letter to the already established church at Rome;

- According to his Letter to the Romans (15:19), either on his way from Macedonia or during his three months stay in Greece, Paul led or organised a mission to Illyricum (Dalmatia) - the area of the old Yugoslavia.

The two Letters to the Corinthians, Galatians, and Romans are now introduced. In the New Testament, these four actually come together as the longest of Paul's letters, but in the order Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians.

They can also be grouped together as the so-called "soteriological" letters (from the Greek for "saviour" and "salvation") as Paul argues in them that the death of Jesus is all that mankind needs to find salvation and to be restored to fellowship with God. It is no wonder these letters, especially Romans,

can be so difficult to understand, and yet have such a profound impact on men and women throughout the ages.

PAUL RETURNS FROM GREECE THROUGH MACEDONIA; HE CROSSES TO TROAS AND PREACHES THERE

Acts 20:3b-12 - Then (after staying in Greece and Corinth for three months ...) when he was on the point of setting sail for Syria the Jews made a further plot against him and he decided to make his way back (by land) through Macedonia [7]. His companions on the journey were Sopater a Beroean, the son of Pyrrhus ....

Sopater - Sopater may be the Jewish Christian Sosipater, included in Paul's greetings in his Letter to the Romans (16:21), especially as this Letter was probably sent from Corinth shortly before this journey back to Jerusalem -

.... two Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus ....

Secundus - Aristarchus has already been introduced. Secundus, also from Thessalonica is not heard of again in the New Testament -

.... Gaius from Derbe ....

Gaius - One of three or four men of this name in the New Testament. If the town of Derbe was actually Doberus in Macedonia as some manuscripts show, then this Gaius is the same man attacked in Ephesus during the near-riot (Acts 19:29) -

.... Timothy, and two Asians, Tychicus ....

Tychicus - Three years later, Paul is in prison in Rome, c AD61-63, and writes the Letters to the Ephesians, the Colossians, and to Philemon for delivery by Tychicus. In Ephesians 6:21 and Colossians 4:7, Paul commends him highly. In Colossians 4:9 we learn Tychicus is taking Onesimus the escaped slave, and subject of the Letter to Philemon back to Colossae.

By c AD66, Paul is planning to send Tychicus from Macedonia or Ephesus to join Titus in Crete (Titus 3:12). Then in c AD67 as Paul prepares to die in Rome, he sends Tychicus back to his home-town of Ephesus (2 Timothy 4:12) -

....and Trophimus ....

Trophimus - On reaching Jerusalem, Trophimus is held partly responsible for the arrest of Paul. Recognized in the city with Paul, the assumption is made that Trophimus, a Gentile from Ephesus has entered the Temple area (Acts 21:29), an offence punishable by death. The only other mention of him is in the Second Letter to Timothy (4:20), when Paul writes that he left the sick Trophimus in Miletus. By tradition, Trophimus was martyred in Rome in c AD67 during the persecutions of Nero.

These companions include representatives of various churches taking gifts to Jerusalem - Sopater from the town of Berea, Aristarchus & Secundus from Thessalonica, Gaius from Derbe (or possibly Doberus in Macedonia), and Tychicus & Trophimus from Ephesus. There are no representatives from Corinth or Philippi - perhaps Luke represented Philippi as he appears to have lived there for some years.

- The following verses include the second of four "We" sections (Acts 20:5-15), in which Luke, the author of Acts apparently gives an eye-witness account:

..... This party proceeded to Troas to await us there while we sailed from Philippi [8] after the days of unleavened bread. and joined them five days later at Troas [9], where we spent a week.

Paul's enthusiasm leads to an accident

On the first day of the week, when we were assembled for the breaking of bread, Paul, since he intended to leave on the following day, began to speak to them and prolonged his address until almost midnight. There were a great many lamps burning in the upper room where we met, and a young man

called Eutychus who was sitting on the window-sill fell asleep as Paul's address became longer and longer. Finally, completely overcome by sleep, he fell to the ground from the third storey and was picked up as dead. But Paul went down, bent over him and holding him gently in his arms, said, "Don't be alarmed; he is still alive."

Then he went upstairs again and, when they had broken bread and eaten, continued a long earnest talk with them until daybreak, and so finally departed. As for the boy (Eutychus), they took him home alive, feeling immeasurably relieved.

PAUL GOES OVERLAND TO ASSOS, AND SAILS TO MILETUS. THERE HE MEETS THE ELDERS FROM EPHESUS

Acts 20:13-18a - Meanwhile we had gone aboard the ship and sailed on ahead for Assos, intending to pick up Paul there, for that was the arrangement he had made, since he himself had planned to go overland. When he met us on our arrival at Assos [10] (Map 21) we took him aboard and went on to Mitylene [11]. We sailed from there and arrived off the coast of Chios [12] the next day. On the day following we crossed to Samos [13], and the day after that we reached Miletus [14]. (End of the second "We" section. Verse 16 continues ....) For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus with the idea of spending as little time as possible in Asia. He hoped, if it should prove possible, to reach Jerusalem in time for the day of Pentecost.

Paul's moving farewell message to the elders of Ephesus

At Miletus he sent to Ephesus to summon the elders of the Church. On their arrival he addressed them in these words:

PAUL'S FAREWELL TO THE ELDERS OF EPHESUS

- As Paul sails from Macedonia for Palestine, he by-passes Ephesus, but calls in at Miletus. From there he summons the elders of Ephesus. On their arrival, Paul talks about his mission to both the Jews and Greeks in the province of Asia. He knows that if he continues on to Jerusalem, he will be persecuted, but must finish the ministry given to him by Jesus Christ. He warns them against the rise of false teachers:

Acts 20:18b-35 - "I am sure you know how I have lived among you ever since I first set foot in Asia (in Asia Minor). You know how I served the Lord most humbly and what tears I have shed over the trials that have come to me through the plots of the Jews. You know I have never shrunk from telling you anything that was for your good, nor from teaching you in public or in your own homes. On the contrary I have most emphatically urged upon both Jews and Greeks repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus. And now here I am, compelled by the Spirit to go to Jerusalem. I do not know what may happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit warns me that imprisonment and persecution await me in every city that I visit. But frankly I do not consider my own life valuable to me so long as I can finish my course and complete the ministry which the Lord Jesus has given me in declaring the good news of the grace of God. Now I know well enough that not one of you among whom I have moved as I preached the kingdom of God will ever see my face again

... according to the "Pastoral Letters", Paul probably did revisit Ephesus, c AD66. Possibly referred to in his First Letter to Timothy 3:14 ....

That is why I must tell you solemnly today that my conscience is clear as far as any of you is concerned, for I have never shrunk from declaring to you the complete will of God. Now be on your guard for yourselves and for every flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you guardians - you are to be shepherds to the Church of God, which he won at the cost of his own blood. I know that after my departure savage wolves (false teachers) will come in among you without mercy for the flock. Yes, and even among you men will arise speaking perversions of the truth, trying to draw away the disciples and make them followers of themselves. This is why I tell you to keep on the alert, remembering that for three years (during Paul's stay in Ephesus and Asia earlier in his Third Journey, Acts 19:1-20:1) I never failed night and day to warn every one of you, even with tears in my eyes. Now I commend you to the Lord and to the message of his grace which can build you up and give you your place among all those who are consecrated to God. I have never coveted anybody's gold or silver or clothing. You know well

enough that these hands of mine have provided for my own needs and for those of my companions. In everything I have shown you that by such hard work, we must help the weak and must remember the words of the Lord Jesus when he said, 'To give is happier than to receive'."

Acts 20:36-38 - With these words he knelt down with them all and prayed. All of them were in tears, and throwing their arms round Paul's neck they kissed him affectionately. What saddened them most of all was his saying that they would never see his face gain. And they went with him down to the ship.

THE VOYAGE TO PALESTINE; PAUL IS WARNED AT CAESAREA NOT TO CONTINUE; HE CARRIES ON TO JERUSALEM

Acts 21:1-15 - The third of Luke's four "We" sections (Acts 21:1-18), are included here in Part 32.34 and the following Part 32.35:

When we had finally said farewell to them (the elders of Ephesus) we set sail, running a straight course to Cos [15], and the next day we went to Rhodes [16] and from there to Patara [17]. Here we found a ship bound for Phoenicia, and we went aboard her and set sail. After sighting Cyprus [18] and leaving it on our left we sailed to Syria and put in at Tyre [19], since that was where the ship was to discharge her cargo. We sought out the disciples there (perhaps including the Syrophoenician woman whose daughter was healed by Jesus all those years before) and stayed with them for a week. They felt led by the (Holy) Spirit again and again to warn Paul not to go up to Jerusalem. But when our time was up we left there and continued our journey. They all came out to see us off, bringing their wives and children with them, accompanying us till we were outside the city. Then kneeling down on the beach we prayed and said good-bye to each other. Then we went aboard the ship while the disciples went back home. We sailed away from Tyre and arrived at Ptolemais [20]. We greeted the brothers there and stayed with them for just one day. On the following day we left and proceeded to Caesarea [21] and there we went to stay at the house of Philip the evangelist (previously associated with Samaria and the Ethiopian eunuch - Acts chapter 8), one of the seven deacons. He had four unmarried daughters, all of whom spoke by the Spirit of God. During our stay there of several days a prophet by the name of Agabus came down from Judea (25 years before, he had prophesied a major famine - Acts 11:28). When he came to see us he took Paul's girdle and used it to tie his own hands and feet together, saying, "The Holy Spirit says this: the man to whom this girdle belongs will be bound like this by the Jews in Jerusalem and handed over to the Gentiles!"

We all warn Paul, but he is immovable

When we heard him say this, we and the people there begged Paul not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered us, "What do you mean by unnerving me with all your tears? I am perfectly prepared not only to be bound but to die in Jerusalem for the sake of the name of the Lord Jesus."

Since he could not be dissuaded all we could do was to say, "May the Lord's will be done," and hold our tongues.

Paul is warmly welcomed at first

After this we made our preparations and went up to Jerusalem [22].

Paul's Arrest in Jerusalem & Journey to Rome

PAUL'S ARRIVAL AND CHRISTIAN WELCOME IN JERUSALEM

Acts 21:16-25 - Some of the disciples from Caesarea accompanied us and they brought us to the house (in Jerusalem) of Mnason, a native of Cyprus and one of the earliest disciples, with whom we were going to stay. On our arrival at Jerusalem the brothers gave us a very warm welcome. On the following day Paul went with us to visit James, and all the elders were present. (End of the third "We" section. Verse 19 continues ....) When he had greeted them he (Paul) gave them a detailed account of all that God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry, and they, on hearing this account, glorified God. Then they said to him, "You know, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews who have become believers (in the 25 years of Paul's Christian life and ministry, and thousands of miles of travel), and that every one of these is a staunch upholder of the Law. They have been told about you - that you teach all Jews who live among the Gentiles to disregard the Law of Moses, and tell

them not to circumcise their children nor observe the old customs (there is no evidence Paul persuaded Jewish converts to abandon their traditional practices). What will happen now, for they are simply bound to hear that you have arrived? Now why not follow this suggestion of ours? We have four men here under a vow. ....

Vow - Already referred to in Acts 18:18 when Paul was returning to Jerusalem at the end of his Second Missionary Journey. Probably a Nazarite vow taken to give thanks to God for his goodness. It involved not taking meat or wine for a period and letting the hair grow. Then an offering was made, and the hair shorn and burnt at the altar -

..... Suppose you join them and be purified with them, pay their expenses so that they may have their hair cut short, and then everyone will know there is no truth in the stories about you, but that you yourself observe the Law. ....

- An expensive and public act that would prove Paul's Jewish piety and generosity. As a Jewish Christian, Paul would probably accept this as a way of smoothing his potentially difficult and dangerous stay in Jerusalem -

As for those Gentiles who have believed, we have sent them a letter with our decision that they should abstain from what has been offered to idols, from blood and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality" (as agreed at the Council at Jerusalem ten years earlier in c AD49, Acts 15:24-29, thus confirming that Paul's vow would not effect Gentile converts).

UPROAR IN THE TEMPLE; PAUL IS ARRESTED BY THE ROMANS

Acts 21:26-39 - So Paul joined the four men and on the following day, after being purified with them, went into the Temple to give notice of the time when the period of purification would be finished and an offering would be made on behalf of each one of them. The seven days were almost over when the Jews from Asia caught sight of Paul in the Temple. ....

- These may have been Jews from the synagogue of Ephesus in Asia who rejected Paul's message (Acts 19:9), and then plotted to kill him when he tried to leave Greece by sea for Jerusalem (Acts 20:3) -

.... They stirred up the whole crowd and seized him, shouting, "Men of Israel, help! This is the man who is teaching everybody everywhere to despise our people, our Law and this place. Why, he has even brought Greeks into the Temple and he has defiled this holy place!" For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian (one of Paul's companions carrying gifts to the church in Jerusalem) with Paul in the city and they had concluded that Paul had brought him into the Temple. The whole city was stirred by this speech and a mob collected who seized Paul and dragged him outside the Temple, and the doors were slammed behind him.

Paul is rescued by Roman soldiers

They were trying to kill him when a report reached the ears of the colonel (Claudius Lysias) of the regiment ....

Claudius Lysias - The "colonel" or tribune of the "regiment" or cohort of approximately 600 men that garrisoned Jerusalem. They were based in the Antonia Fortress, located at the northwest corner of the Temple. Lysias was probably a Greek who bought his Roman citizenship at a high price through the wife of the emperor Claudius -

.... that the whole of Jerusalem was in an uproar. Without a moment's delay he (Claudius Lysias) took soldiers and centurions and ran down to them. When they saw the colonel and the soldiers they stopped beating Paul. The colonel came up to Paul and arrested him and ordered him to be bound with two chains. Then he enquired who the man was and what he had been doing. Some of the crowd shouted one thing and some another, and since he could not be certain of the facts because of the shouting that was going on, the colonel ordered him to be brought to the barracks. When Paul got to the steps he was actually carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the mob. For the mass of the people followed, shouting, "Kill him!" Just as they were going to take him into the barracks Paul asked the colonel, "May I say something to you?"

"So you know Greek, do you?" the colonel replied. "Aren't you that Egyptian who not long ago raised a riot and led those four thousand assassins into the desert? (Josephus mentions this false prophet who

led a group of Zealot "sicarii" or dagger men against Jerusalem, a rebellion put down by procurator Felix).

"I am a Jew," replied Paul. "I am a man of Tarsus, a citizen of that not insignificant city. I ask you to let me speak to the people."

PAUL ADDRESSES THE JERUSALEM CROWD; HE IS RESCUED BY THE ROMANS

Acts 21:40; 22:1-2 - On being given permission Paul stood on the steps and made a gesture with his hand to the people. There was a deep hush as he began to speak to them in Hebrew (or Aramaic).

(Chapter 22 .....) "My brothers and my fathers, listen to what I have to say in my own defence."

As soon as they heard him addressing them in Hebrew (or Aramaic) the silence became intense.

PAUL DEFENDS HIMSELF AND HIS GENTILE MISSION BEFORE THE JERUSALEM CROWDS

- Paul has reached Jerusalem, and partly to placate the Jewish religious authorities, joins four brother Jewish Christians in their purification ceremony in the Temple. Recognised by Jews who have travelled from the province of Asia, he is accused of taking the Gentile Trophimus into the forbidden part of the Temple. Uproar ensues, but Paul is saved from the mob by Roman soldiers. Their commander, tribune Claudius Lysias allows Paul to speak to the crowds. He describes his strict Jewish background, his vision of Jesus on the road to Damascus, and how he had to leave Jerusalem and take the Gospel to the Gentiles:

Acts 22:3-21 - "I myself am a Jew," Paul went on. "I was born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but I was brought up here in the city (of Jerusalem), I received my training at the feet of Gamaliel (... in c AD30 he had counselled calmness in the Sanhedrin after Peter and the apostles had appeared before them, Acts 5:34) and I was schooled in the strictest observance of our father's Law. I was as much on fire with zeal for God as you all are today. I am also the man who persecuted this way (of Jesus) to the death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison, as the High Priest and the whole council can readily testify. Indeed, it was after receiving letters from them to their brothers in Damascus that I was on my way to that city, intending to arrest any followers of the way I could find there and bring them back to Jerusalem for punishment. Then this happened to me. As I was on my journey and getting near to Damascus, about midday a great light from Heaven suddenly blazed around me. I fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?' I replied, 'Who are you, Lord?' He said to me, 'I am Jesus of Nazareth whom you are persecuting.' My companions naturally saw the light, but they did not hear the voice of the one who was talking to me. 'What am I to do Lord?' I asked. And the Lord told me, 'Get up and go to Damascus and there you will be told of all that has been determined for you to do.' I was blinded by the brightness of the light and my companions had to take me by the hand as we went on to Damascus. There, there was a man called Ananias, a reverent observer of the Law and a man highly respected by all the Jews who lived there. He came to visit me and as he stood by my side said, 'Saul, brother, you may see again!' At once I regained my sight and looked up to him. 'The God of our fathers,' he went on, 'has chosen you to know his will, to see the righteous one, to hear words from his own lips, so that you may become his witness before all men of what you have seen and heard. And now what are you waiting for? Get up and be baptised! Be clean from your sins as you call on his name.'

Paul claims that God sent him to the Gentiles

"Then it happened that after my return to Jerusalem (... Paul's first visit after his conversion, Acts 9:26-28), while I was at prayer in the Temple, unconscious of everything else, I saw him, and he said to me, 'Make haste and leave Jerusalem at once, for they will not accept your testimony about me.' And I said, 'But, Lord, they know how I have been through all the synagogues imprisoning and beating all those who believe in you. They know also that when the blood of your martyr Stephen was shed I stood by, giving my approval (Acts 8:1a) - why, I was even holding in my arms, the outer garments of those who killed him.' But he said to me, 'Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles'."

(At this point the crowd goes wild with fury ....)

The consequence of Paul's speech

Acts 22:22-29 - They had listened to him until he said this (... his mission to the Gentiles), but now they raised a great shout, "Kill him, and rid the earth of such a man! He is not fit to live!"

As they were yelling and ripping their clothes and hurling dust into the air, the colonel (Claudius Lysias) gave orders to bring Paul into the barracks and directed that he should be examined by scourging, so that he might discover the reason for such an uproar against him. But when they had strapped him up, Paul spoke to the centurion standing by, "Is it legal for you to flog a man who is a Roman citizen, and untried at that?"

On hearing this the centurion went in to the colonel and reported to him, saying, "Do you realise what you were about to do? This man is a Roman citizen!"

Then the colonel himself came up to Paul, and said, "Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?"

And he said, "Yes."

Whereupon the colonel replied, "It cost me a good deal to get my citizenship."

"Ah," replied Paul, "but I was born a citizen."

Then those who had been about to examine him left hurriedly, while even the colonel himself was alarmed at discovering that Paul was a Roman and that he had had him bound.

PAUL IS TAKEN BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN

Acts 22:30; 23:1-11 - Next day the colonel, determined to get to the bottom of Paul's accusation by the Jews, released him and ordered the assembly of the chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin (under the high priest Ananias, as Paul had been accused of religious offences). Then he took Paul down and placed him in front of them.

Paul again attempts defence

(Chapter 23 .....) Paul looked steadily at the Sanhedrin and spoke to them, "men and brothers, I have lived my life with a perfectly clear conscience before God up to the present day -" Then Ananias the High Priest ordered those who were standing near to strike him in the mouth. At this Paul said to him, "God will strike you, you white-washed wall! How dare you sit there judging me by the Law and give orders for me to be struck, which is clean contrary to the Law?"

Those who stood by said, "Do you mean to insult God's High Priest?"

But Paul said, "My brothers, I did not know that he was the High Priest, for it is written:

'You shall not speak evil of the ruler of your people.' (Exodus 22:28)"

Paul seizes his opportunity

Then Paul, realising that part of the council were Sadducees and the other part Pharisees, raised his voice and said to them, "I am a Pharisee, the son of Pharisees. It is for my hope in the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial!"

At these words an immediate tension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the meeting was divided. For the Sadducees claim that there is no resurrection and that there is neither angel nor spirit, while the Pharisees believe in all three. A great uproar ensued and some of the scribes of the Pharisees' party jumped to their feet and protested violently.

"We find nothing wrong with this man! Suppose some angel or spirit has really spoken to him?"

As the tension mounted the colonel began to fear that Paul would be torn to pieces between them. He therefore ordered his soldiers to come down and rescue him from them and bring him back to the barracks.

God's direct encouragement to Paul

That night the Lord stood by Paul, and said, "Take heart! - for as you have witnessed boldly for me in Jerusalem so you must give your witness to me in Rome."

PLOTS TO KILL PAUL; THE ROMANS ESCORT HIM TO CAESAREA

Acts 23:12-35 - Early in the morning the Jews made a conspiracy and bound themselves by a solemn oath that they would neither eat nor drink until they had killed Paul. Over forty of them were involved in the plot, and they approached the chief priests and elders, and said, "We have bound ourselves by a solemn oath to let nothing pass our lips until we have killed Paul. Now you and the council must make it plain to the colonel that you want him to bring Paul down to you (in Jerusalem), suggesting that you want to examine his case more closely. We shall be standing by ready to kill him before he gets here."

Leakage of information leads to Paul's protection

However, Paul's nephew (of whom nothing more is known) got wind of this plot and he came and found his way into the barracks and told Paul about it. Paul called one of the centurions and said, "Take this young man to the colonel (Claudius Lysias) for he has something to report to him."

So the centurion took him and brought him into the colonel's presence, and said, "The prisoner Paul called me and requested that this young man should be brought to you as he has something to say to you."

The colonel took his hand, and drew him aside (where they could not be overheard), and asked, "What have you got to tell me?"

And he replied, "The Jews have agreed to ask you to bring Paul down to the Sanhedrin tomorrow as though they were going to enquire more carefully into his case. But I beg you not to let them persuade you. For more than forty of them are waiting for him - they have sworn a solemn oath that they will neither eat nor drink until they have killed him. They are all ready at this moment - all they want is for you to give the order."

At this the colonel dismissed the young man with the caution, "Don't let a soul know that you have given me this information."

Then he summoned two of his centurions, and said, "Get two hundred men ready to proceed to Caesarea, with seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen (an indication of Paul's apparent importance), by nine o'clock tonight." (Mounts were also to be provided to carry Paul safely to Felix the governor.)

Felix - Marcus Antonius Felix, Roman procurator of Judea, AD52-60, headquarters Caesarea. Apparently he knew more about the "Way" of Christianity than most people (Acts 24:22). After investigating Paul, he left him in prison for two years until succeeded by Porcius Festus (Acts 24:27). Both the Jewish Josephus and the Roman Tacitus provide information on the life of Felix.

The Roman view of Paul's position

He further wrote a letter to Felix of which this is a copy:

"Claudius Lysias sends greeting to his excellency the governor Felix.

"This man had been seized by the Jews and was on the point of being murdered by them when I arrived with my troops and rescued him, since I had discovered that he was a Roman citizen. Wishing to find out what the accusation was that they were making against him, I had him brought down to their Sanhedrin. There I discovered he was being accused over questions of their laws, and that there was no charge against him which deserved either death or imprisonment. Now, however, that I have received private information of a plot against his life, I have sent him to you without delay. At the same time I have notified his accusers that they must make their charges against him in your presence."

Paul is taken into protective custody

The soldiers, acting on their orders, took Paul and, riding through that night, brought him down to Antipatris. Next day they returned to the barracks, leaving the horsemen to accompany him further. They went into Caesarea and after delivering the letter to the governor, they handed Paul over to him. When the governor had read the letter he asked Paul what province he came from, and on learning that he came from Cilicia, he said, "I will hear your case as soon as your accusers arrive."

Then he ordered him to be kept under guard in Herod's palace.

PAUL'S DEFENCE BEFORE THE PROCURATOR FELIX; HIS IMPRISONMENT

Acts 24:1-10a - Five days later Ananias the High Priest came down himself with some of the elders and a barrister by the name of Tertullus. ....

Tertullus - Probably a Roman orator retained by the Sanhedrin as a prosecuting attorney because of his knowledge of Roman law and court procedure -

.... They (Ananias and the elders) presented their case against Paul before the governor, and when Paul had been summoned, Tertullus began the prosecution in these words: "We owe it to you personally, your excellency, that we enjoy lasting peace, and we know that it is due to your foresight that the nation enjoys improved conditions of living. At all times, and indeed everywhere, we acknowledge these things with the deepest gratitude. However - for I must not detain you too long - I beg you to give us a brief hearing with your customary kindness. The simple fact is that we have found this man a pestilential disturber of the peace among the Jews all over the world. He is a ringleader of the Nazareth sect, and he was on the point of desecrating the Temple when we overcame him (... Paul is now being condemned before the Romans, not as a religious offender, but as a rebel and potential threat to Roman rule). But you yourself will soon discover from the man himself all the facts about which we are accusing him."

Paul is given the chance to defend himself

While Tertullus was speaking the Jews kept joining in, asserting that these were the facts. Then Paul, at a nod from the governor made his reply:

PAUL DEFENDS HIMSELF BEFORE PROCURATOR FELIX

- After his arrest and plots against his life, Paul, as a Roman citizen, is taken under escort from Jerusalem to the Roman headquarters city of Caesarea. The High Priest and members of the Sanhedrin have also arrived, and make their case against Paul. Felix, Roman governor of Judea & Samaria invites Paul to make his reply.

Paul defends himself confidently before procurator Felix. He admits to worshipping God "according to the Way", a sect in Jewish eyes, but he had brought charitable gifts to Jerusalem and was worshipping at the Temple according to tradition when he was arrested. He suggests his only offence is to believe in the resurrection of the dead:

Acts 24:10b-21 - "I am well aware that you have been governor of this nation for many years (since AD53), and I can therefore make my defence with every confidence. You can easily verify the fact that it is not more than twelve days ago that I went up to worship at Jerusalem. I was never found either arguing with anyone in the Temple or gathering a crowd, either in the synagogues or in the open air. These men are quite unable to prove the charges they are now making against me. I will freely admit to you, however, that I do worship the God of our fathers according to the Way which they call a heresy, although in fact I believe in the scriptural authority of both the Law and the Prophets. I have the same hope in God which they themselves hold, that there is to be a resurrection of both good men and bad. With this hope before me I do my utmost to live my whole life with a clear conscience before God and man.

Paul has nothing to hide

"It was in fact after several years' absence from Jerusalem (... five years from c AD53 to AD58) that I came back to make charitable gifts to my own nation and to make my offerings. It was in the middle of these duties that they found me, a man purified in the Temple. There was no mob and there was no disturbance until the Jews from Asia came, who should in my opinion have come before you and made their accusation, if they had anything against me. Or else, let these men themselves speak out now and say what crime they found me guilty of when I stood before the Sanhedrin - unless it was that one sentence that I shouted as I stood among them. All I said was this, 'It is about the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you this day'."

Felix defers decision

Acts 24:22-26 - Then Felix, who was better acquainted with the Way than most people, adjourned the case and said, "As soon as Colonel Lysias arrives I will give you my decision."

Then he gave orders to the centurion to keep Paul in custody, but to grant him reasonable liberty and allow any of his personal friends (possibly including Luke) to look after his needs.

Felix plays for safety - and hope for personal gain

Some days later Felix arrived with his wife Drusilla, herself a Jewess ....

Drusilla - Youngest of the daughters of Herod Agrippa 1 (died AD44), and sister to King Agrippa II and Bernice. Married to the Roman Felix (her second husband, his third wife), their only son was killed in the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in AD79 -

.... and sent for Paul, and heard what he had to say about faith in Christ Jesus. But while Paul was talking about goodness, self-control and the judgment that is to come, Felix became alarmed, and said, "You may go for the present. When I find a convenient moment I will send for you again."

At the same time he nursed a secret hope that Paul would pay him money - which is why Paul was frequently summoned to come and talk with him. .....

TWO YEARS LATER PAUL APPEARS BEFORE PROCURATOR FESTUS; ANOTHER PLOT, AN "APPEAL TO CAESAR"; FESTUS CONSULTS KING HEROD AGRIPPA II

Acts 24:27; 25:1-22 - However, when two full years had passed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus ....

Porcius Festus - Roman procurator of Judea AD60-62, appointed by emperor Nero in succession to Felix. Festus, who died in post, also appears in the works of Josephus -

.... and, as he (Festus) wanted to remain in favour with the Jews, he left Paul still a prisoner.

Felix's successor begins his duties with vigour -

(Chapter 25 .....) Three days after Festus had taken over his province he went up from Caesarea to Jerusalem. The chief priests and elders of the Jews informed him of the case against Paul and begged him as a special favour to have Paul sent to Jerusalem. They themselves had already made a plot to kill him on the way. But Festus replied that Paul was in custody in Caesarea, and that he himself was going there shortly.

"What you must do," he told them, "is to provide some competent men of your own to go down with me and if there is anything wrong with the man they can present their charges against him."

Festus spent not more than eight or ten days among them at Jerusalem and then went down to Caesarea. On the day after his arrival he took his seat on the bench and ordered Paul to be brought in. As soon as he arrived the Jews from Jerusalem stood up on all sides of him, bringing forward many serious accusations which they were quite unable to substantiate. Paul, in his defence, maintained, "I have committed no offence in any way against the Jewish Law, or against the Temple or against Caesar."

- but is afraid of antagonising the Jews

But Festus, wishing to gain the goodwill of the Jews, spoke direct to Paul, "Are you prepared to go up to Jerusalem and stand your trial over these matters in my presence there?"

But Paul replied, "I am standing in Caesar's court and that is where I should be judged. I have done the Jews no harm, as you very well know. It comes to this: if I were a criminal and had committed some crime which deserved the death penalty, I should not try to evade sentence of death. But as in fact there is no truth in the accusations these men have made, I am not prepared to be used as a means of gaining their favour - I appeal to Caesar!" (... to the emperor Nero - a right granted to all Roman citizens charged with offenses involving the death penalty).

Then Festus, after a conference with his advisers, replied to Paul, "You have appealed to Caesar - then to Caesar you shall go!"

Festus outlines Paul's case to Agrippa

Some days later King Agrippa and Bernice ....

King Agrippa II & Bernice (or Berenice) - Brother and sister, and children of Agrippa I, king of the Jews AD37-44. They are believed to have lived incestuously.

On his father's death, the young Agrippa II was too young to inherit the kingdom, but in AD50 was made king of the small territory of Chalcis. In AD53, Chalcis reverted to the Roman province of Syria, and he was granted the tetrarchies of Philip (Iturea & Trachonitis) and Lysanias (Abilene), and later, parts of Galilee & Perea. He survived the Jewish War of AD66-73, retired to Rome, became patron of the historian Josephus, and died c AD100.

Bernice did marry, but later became mistress to the emperor Vespasian and his son and successor Titus -

.... arrived at Caesarea on a state visit to Festus. They (Agrippa and Bernice) prolonged their stay for some days and this gave Festus an opportunity of laying Paul's case before the king.

"I have a man," he said, "who was left a prisoner by Felix. When I was in Jerusalem the chief priests and Jewish elders made allegations against him and demanded his conviction! I told them that the Romans were not in the habit of giving anybody up to please anyone, until the accused had had the chance of facing his accusers personally and been given the opportunity of defending himself on the charges made against him. Since these Jews came back here with me, I wasted no time but on the very next day I took my seat on the bench and ordered the man to be brought in. But when his accusers got up to speak they did not charge him with any such crimes as I had anticipated. ....

- In just one sentence in Acts 25:19 following Festus summarises a major claim Paul makes about Jesus ....

(Verse 19 ....) There differences with him were about their own religion and concerning a certain Jesus who had died, but whom Paul claimed to be still alive. (Verse 20 ....) I did not feel qualified to investigate such matters and so I asked the man if he were willing to go to Jerusalem and stand his trial over these matters there. But when he appealed to have his case reserved for the decision of the emperor himself, I ordered him to be kept in custody until such time as I could send him to Caesar."

Then Agrippa said to Festus, "I have been wanting to hear this man myself" (... as Herod Antipas his great-uncle had wanted to see Jesus at his trial nearly 30 years before, Luke 23:8).

"Then you shall hear him tomorrow," replied Festus.

A FINAL APPEARANCE BEFORE PROCURATOR FESTUS AND HEROD AGRIPPA II

Acts 25:23-27; 26:1-3 - When the next day came, Agrippa and Bernice proceeded to the audience chamber with great pomp and ceremony, with an escort of military officers and prominent townsmen (... another measure of the interest in Paul and the Gospel). Festus ordered Paul to be brought in and then he spoke: "King Agrippa and all who are present, you see here the man about whom the whole Jewish people both at Jerusalem and in this city have petitioned me. They din it into my ears that he ought not to live any longer, but I for my part discovered nothing that he has done which deserves the death penalty. And since he has appealed to Caesar, I have decided to send him to Rome. Frankly, I have nothing specific to write to the emperor about him, and I have therefore brought him forward before you all, and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that from your examination of him there may emerge some charge which I may put in writing. For it seems ridiculous to me to send a prisoner before the emperor without indicating the charges against him."

(Chapter 26 ....) Then Agrippa said to Paul, "You have our permission to speak for yourself."

Paul repeats his story on a state occasion

So Paul, with that characteristic gesture of the hand, began his defence: "King Agrippa, in answering all the charges that the Jews have made against me, I must say how fortunate I consider myself to be in making my defence before you personally today. For I know that you are thoroughly familiar with all the customs and disputes that exist among the Jews. I therefore ask you to listen to me patiently.

PAUL BEFORE PROCURATOR FESTUS & KING HEROD AGRIPPA II

- After Festus has summarised the case against Paul, Agrippa gives him permission to speak. Paul again describes his Jewish background, his encounter with Jesus, and his mission to the Gentiles:

Acts 26:4-23 - "The fact that I lived from my youth upwards among my own people in Jerusalem is well known to all Jews. They have known all the time, and could witness to the fact if they wished, that I lived as a Pharisee according to the strictest sect of our religion. Even today I stand here on trial because of a hope that I hold in a promise that God made to our forefather - a promise for which our twelve tribes (of Israel) served God zealously day and night, hoping to see it fulfilled. It is about this hope, your majesty, that I am being accused by the Jews! Why does it seem incredible to you all that God should raise the dead? I once thought it my duty to oppose with the utmost vigour the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Yes, that is what I did in Jerusalem, and I had many of God's people imprisoned on the authority of the chief priests, and when they were on trial for their lives I gave my vote against them. Many and many a time in all the synagogues I had them punished and I used to try and force them to deny their Lord. I was mad with fury against them, and I hounded them to distant cities. Once, your majesty, on my way to Damascus on this business, armed with the full authority and commission of the chief priests, at midday I saw a light from Heaven, far brighter than the sun, blazing about me and my fellow-travellers. We all fell to the ground and I heard a voice saying to me in Hebrew, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is not for you to kick against your own conscience.' 'Who are you, Lord?' I said. And the Lord said to me, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. Now get up and stand on your feet for I have shown myself to you for a reason - you are chosen to be my servant and a witness to what you have seen of me today, and of other visions of myself which I will give you. I will keep you safe from both your own people and from the Gentiles to whom I now send you. I send you to open their eyes, to turn them from darkness to light, from the power of Satan to God himself, so that they may know forgiveness of their sins and take their place with all those who are made holy by their faith in me.'

After that, King Agrippa, I could not disobey the heavenly vision. But both in Damascus and in Jerusalem, through the whole of Judea, and to the Gentiles, I preached that men should repent and turn to God and live lives to prove their change of heart. This is why the Jews seized me in the Temple and tried to kill me. To this day I have received help from God himself, and I stand here as a witness to high and low, adding nothing to what the prophets foretold should take place, that is, that Christ should suffer, that he should be first to rise from the dead, and so proclaim the message of light both to our people and to the Gentiles!"

At which point Festus cannot contain himself and stops Paul, accusing him of madness ... Shortly "appealing to Caesar", Paul sails for Rome under escort:

Festus concludes that Paul's enthusiasm is insanity

Acts 26:24-32 (Verse 24 continues ....) While he was thus defending himself Festus burst out, "You are raving, Paul! All your learning has driven you mad!"

But Paul replied, "I am not mad, your excellency. I speak nothing but sober truth. The king knows of these matters, and I can speak freely before him. I cannot believe that any of these matters has escaped his notice, for it has been no hole-and-corner business. King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? But I know that you believe them."

"Much more of this, Paul," returned Agrippa, "and you will be making me a Christian!"

"Ah," returned Paul, "whether it means 'much more' or 'only a little', I would to God that both you and all who can hear me this day might stand where I stand - but without these chains.

The Roman officials consider Paul innocent

Then the king rose to his feet and so did the governor and Bernice and those sitting with them, and when they had retired from the assembly they discussed the matter among themselves and agreed, "This man is doing nothing to deserve either death or imprisonment."

Agrippa remarked to Festus, "He might easily have been discharged if he had not appealed to Caesar."

Map - Paul's Journey Under Arrest from Palestine to Rome c AD58-61

Map Key: 1. Paul's Journey to Rome as recorded in the Acts f the Apostles. Also in text in [red square brackets]

PAUL SAILS FOR ITALY; THEY CALL AT CRETE; A TERRIBLE STORM SHIPWRECKS THEM ON MALTA

Acts 27:1-44 - This part includes the last of Luke's four "We" sections (Acts 27:1-28:16). He also reveals something of his apparent sea-going experience with this vivid account of the voyage and shipwreck on Malta:

As soon as it was decided that we should sail away to Italy (two years after Paul's original arrest in Jerusalem [1] and his journey to Caesarea [2]), Paul and some other prisoners were put in charge of a centurion named Julius, of the emperor's own regiment (the Augustan cohort based near Caesarea, an army unit possibly assigned to special imperial duties). We embarked on a ship hailing from Adramyttium, bound for the Asian ports, and set sail. Among our company was Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica ...

- One of Paul's companions on his last journey back to Jerusalem, who also stays with the imprisoned Paul in Rome -

... On the following day we put in at Sidon [3], where Julius treated Paul most considerately by allowing him to visit his friends and accept their hospitality. From Sidon we put to sea again and sailed to leeward of Cyprus [4], since the (northwest) wind was against us. Then, when we had crossed the gulf that lies off the coasts of Cilicia [5] and Pamphylia [6], we arrived at Myra [7] in Lycia. There the centurion found an Alexandrian ship bound for Italy and put us aboard her. ...

- A grain ship from Egypt that had to sail along the coast of Asia Minor to Sicily, rather than directly across the Mediterranean because of the prevailing winds -

... For several days we beat slowly up to windward and only just succeeded in arriving off Cnidus [8]. Then, since the wind was still blowing against us, we sailed under the lee of Crete, and rounded Cape Salmone [9]. Coasting along with difficulty we came to a place called Fair Havens [10], near which is the city of Lasea. We had by now lost a great deal of time and sailing had already become dangerous as it was so late in the year (... the sailing season ended around the end of September).

Paul's warning is disregarded

So Paul warned them, and said, "Men, I can see that this voyage is likely to result in damage and considerable loss - not only to ship and cargo - but even of our lives as well."

But Julius paid more attention to the helmsman and the captain than to Paul's words of warning. Moreover, since the harbour is unsuitable for a ship to winter in, the majority were in favour of setting sail again in the hope of reaching Phoenix [11] and wintering there. Phoenix is a harbour in Crete, facing south-west and north-west. So, when a moderate breeze sprang up, thinking they had obtained just what they wanted, they weighed anchor, and coasted along, hugging the shores of Crete. But before long a terrific gale, which they called a north-easter, swept down upon us from the land. The ship was

caught by it and since she could not be brought up into the wind we had to let her fall off and run before it. Then, running under the lee (sheltered from the wind) of a small island called Clauda [12], we managed with some difficulty to secure the ship's boat. After hoisting it aboard they used cables (passed under the hull) to brace the ship (and prevent it breaking up). To add to the difficulties they were afraid all the time of drifting (southwest) on to the Syrtis banks [13] (the Gulf of Sirte or Sidra off modern Libya), so they shortened sail and lay to, drifting. The next day, as we were still at the mercy of the violent storm, they began to throw cargo overboard. On the third day with their own hands they threw the ship's tackle over the side. Then, when for many days there was no glimpse of sun or stars and we were still in the grip of the gale, all hope of our being saved was given up. (Such storms may seem unlikely in the Mediterranean, but in March 1942 two Italian warships were overwhelmed and sunk in this same area.)

Paul's practical courage and faith

Nobody had eaten for some time, when Paul came forward among the men and said, "Men, you should have listened to me and not set sail from Crete and suffered this damage and loss. However, now I beg you to keep up your spirits for no one's life is going to be lost, though we shall lose the ship. I know this because last night, the angel of the God to whom I belong, and whom I serve, stood by me and said, 'Have no fear, Paul! You must stand before Caesar. And God, as a mark of his favour towards you, has granted you the lives of those who are sailing with you.' Take courage then, men, for I believe God, and I am certain that everything will happen exactly as I have been told. But we shall have to run the ship ashore on some island."

At last we near land

On the fourteenth night of the storm, as we were drifting in the Adriatic [14] (or Adria Sea. Not the modern Adriatic Sea, but the Ionian Sea between southern Italy and Greece), about midnight the sailors sensed that we were nearing land. Indeed, when they sounded they found twenty fathoms (120 feet or 35m), and then after sailing on only a little way they sounded again and found fifteen. So, for fear that we might be hurled on the rocks, they threw out four anchors from the stern and prayed for daylight. The sailors wanted to desert the ship and they got as far as letting down a boat into the sea, pretending that they were going to run out anchors from the bow. But Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, "Unless these men stay aboard the ship there is no hope of your being saved."

At this the soldiers cut the ropes of the boat and let her fall away.

Paul's sturdy commonsense

Then while everyone waited for the day to break Paul urged them to take some food, saying, "For a fortnight now you've had no food - you haven't had a bite while you've been on watch. Now take some food, I beg of you - you need it for your own well-being, for not a hair of anyone's head will be lost."

When he had said this he took some bread and, after thanking God before them all, he broke it and began to eat. This raised everybody's spirits and they began to take food themselves. There were about two hundred and seventy-six of us all told aboard that ship. When they had eaten enough they lightened the ship by throwing the grain over the side.

Land at last - but we lose the ship

When daylight came no one recognised the land. But they made out a bay with a sandy shore where they planned to beach the ship if they could. So they cut away the anchors and left them in the sea, and at the same time cut the ropes which held the steering-oars. Then they hoisted the foresail to catch the wind and made for the beach. But they struck a shoal and the ship ran aground. The bow stuck fast, while the stern began to break up under the strain. The soldiers' plan had been to kill the prisoners in case any of them should try to swim to shore and escape. But the centurion, in his desire to save Paul, put a stop to this, and gave orders that all those who could swim should jump overboard first and get to land, while the rest should follow, some on planks and other on the wreckage of the ship. So it came true that everyone reached the shore (... now St. Paul's Bay, north east coast of Malta) in safety.

PAUL STAYS IN MALTA FOR THREE MONTHS

Acts 28:1-10 - After our escape we discovered that the island was called Melita [15] (Malta). The natives treated us with uncommon kindness. Because of the driving rain and cold they lit a fire and made us all welcome. Then when Paul had collected a large bundle of sticks and was about to put it on the fire, a viper driven out by the heat fastened itself on his hand. When the natives saw the creature hanging from his hand they said to each other, "This man is obviously a murderer. He has escaped from the sea but justice will not let him live." But Paul shook off the viper into the fire without suffering any ill effect . Naturally they expected him to swell up or suddenly fall down dead, but after waiting a long time and seeing nothing untoward happen to him, they changed their minds and kept saying he was a god.

Paul's acts of healing: the islanders' gratitude

In that part of the island were estates belonging to the governor, whose name was Publius. ....

Publius - By tradition, later the first bishop of Malta -

.... This man welcomed us and entertained us most kindly for three days. Now it happened that Publius' father was lying ill with fever and dysentery. Paul visited him and after prayer laid his hands on him and healed him. After that all the other sick people on the island came forward and were cured. Consequently they loaded us with presents, and when the time came for us to sail they provided us with everything we needed.

PAUL COMPLETES HIS JOURNEY TO ROME

Acts 28:11-15 - It was no less than three months later (in the Spring) that we set sail in an Alexandrian ship which had wintered in the island, a ship that had the heavenly twins (Castor and Pollux) as her figurehead. We put in at Syracuse [16] and stayed there three days, and from there we tacked round to Rhegium [17] (modern Reggio). A day later the south wind sprang up and we sailed to Puteoli [18] (near modern Naples, then terminus of the grain and other ships arriving from the eastern Mediterranean), reaching it in only two days. There we found some of the brothers and they begged us to stay a week with them, and so we finally came to Rome.

A Christian welcome awaits us in the capital

The (Christian) brothers there had heard about us and came out from the city to meet us, as far as the Market of Appius [19] (or Appii Forum) and the Three Taverns [20] (both on the famous Appian Way, the road to Rome). When Paul saw them he thanked God and his spirits rose.

UNDER HOUSE ARREST IN ROME FOR TWO YEARS, PAUL CONTINUES TO PREACH THE GOSPEL

Rome - "The Imperial City", and capital of the vast, powerful Roman Empire, wealthy and cosmopolitan, diplomatic and trade centre of the then known world. Probably the greatest city in the ancient world with over a million - perhaps million's of people. Built on seven hills on the River Tiber fifteen miles from the sea.

Acts 28:16-23a - When we reached Rome [21] Paul was given permission to live alone with the soldier who was guarding him (the end of the last "We" section).

Paul explains himself frankly to the Jews in Rome

Three days later Paul invited the leading Jews to meet him, and when they arrived he spoke to them, "Men and brothers, although I have done nothing against our people or the customs of our forefathers, I was handed over to the Romans as a prisoner in Jerusalem. They examined me and were prepared to release me, since they found me guilty of nothing deserving the death penalty. But the attacks of the Jews there forced me to appeal to Caesar - not that I had any charge to make against my own nation. But it is because of this accusation of the Jews that I have asked to see you and talk matters over with you. In actual fact it is on account of the hope of Israel that I am here in chains."

But they replied, "We have received no letters about you from Judea, nor have any of the brothers who have arrived here said anything, officially or unofficially, against you. We want to hear you state your views, although as far as this sect is concerned we do know that serious objections have been raised to it everywhere.

Paul's earnest and prolonged effort to win his own people for Christ

When they had arranged a day for him they came to his lodging in great numbers.

PAUL PREACHES TO THE JEWS OF ROME

- Now under house arrest in Rome, c AD61, Paul preaches to the Jews of Rome. His success is limited, and he declares that the Gospel of Jesus Christ will continue to be taken to the Gentiles:

Acts 28:23b-28 - From morning till evening he explained the kingdom of God to them, giving his personal testimony, trying to persuade them about Jesus from the Law of Moses and the Prophets. As a result several of them were won over by his words, but others would not believe. When they could not reach any agreement among themselves and began to go away, Paul added as a parting shot, "how rightly did the Holy Spirit speak to your forefathers through the prophet Isaiah when he said,

'Go to the people and say, Hearing you will hear, and shall not understand; and seeing you will see, and not perceive; for the heart of this people has grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they should understand with their heart and turn, so that I should heal them.' (Isaiah 6:9-10)

"Let it be plainly understood then that this salvation of our God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they at least will listen to it!"

Some manuscripts include a verse 29 - "And when he had said these words, the Jews departed and had a great dispute among themselves." -

The last glimpse of Paul ...

Acts 28:29-31 - So Paul stayed for two full years in his own rented apartment welcoming all who came to see him. He proclaimed to them all the kingdom of God and gave them the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ with the utmost freedom and without hindrance from anyone.

During these two years (c AD61-63, range AD59-63), Paul is believed to have written his four "prison" Letters - to the churches at Colossae and Ephesus, and to Philemon of Colossae all around the same time, as well as to the church in Philippi.

PAUL'S LETTER TO THE ROMANS

With people, places, definitions, map .....

Writer: The apostle Paul

Date: c AD57 or 58 towards the end of his Third Missionary Journey

Where written: Corinth, during his 3 months stay in Greece

Readers: The Christian church already established in Rome. Paul hoped to visit them for the first time

Why: Probably the most important work ever written on the theory and practise of Christianity. It has had a profound impact on Christians throughout history. It describes our ever-present sinful condition, God's plan to save all mankind through "justification by faith" in his crucified and risen son, Jesus Christ, and our resulting "sanctification" through God's Holy Spirit. There is also a major section on Christian duties and relations with the world.

The Letter to the Romans says more about the reason God chose to send his Son to live and die in this world and to reveal his Gospel, than any other Letter.

To gain the most from these few chapters of unsurpassable spiritual and intellectual depth makes it difficult to avoid using words and phrases normally those of theologists studying the Bible, rather than men, women and children attempting to live by it. Some of the most significant words in general terms are:

JUSTIFICATION - The doctrine that men are made just, proved or shown to be just and right, vindicated, absolved, by faith in Jesus Christ, not by what they do;

FAITH - Trust or confidence, especially in God; belief in the truth of revealed religion

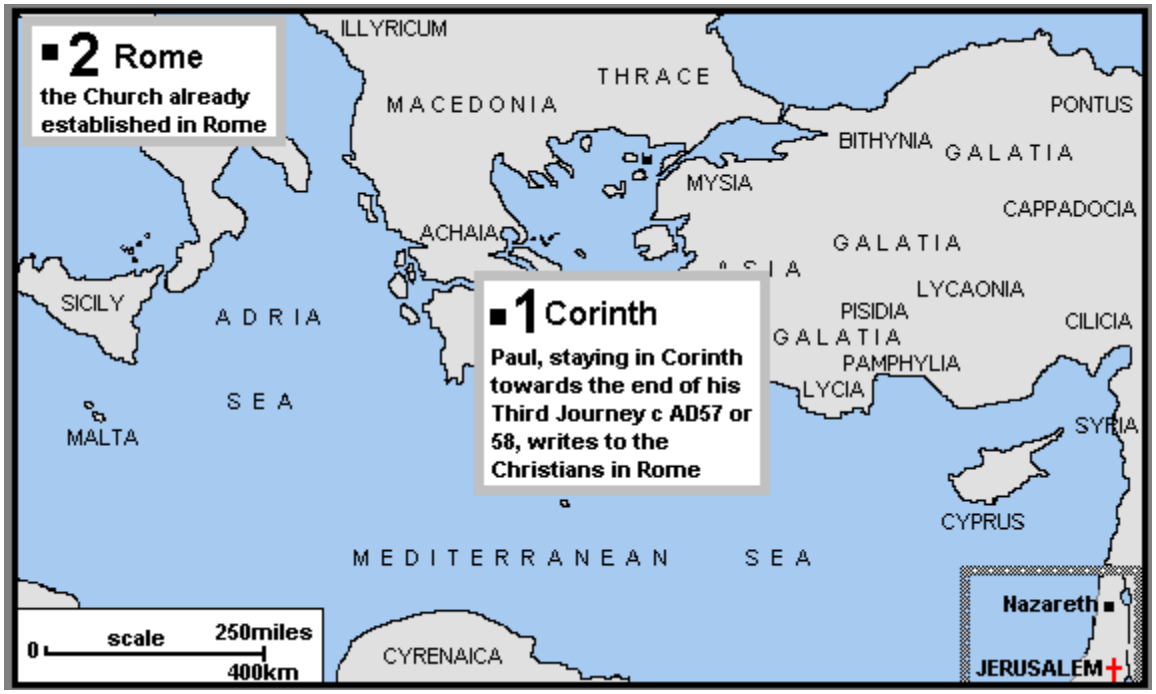
SALVATION - Preserved from evil; the saving of man from the power and penalty of sin; the granting of eternal happiness

SANCTIFICATION - Made, declared, regarded as, shown to be sacred or holy; free from sin or evil; set apart to sacred use

HOLY - Perfect in a moral sense; pure in heart

Map - Paul Writes to the Romans

Map Key: Letter sent from 1 to 2



I - THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST AND "JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH"

PAUL'S EAGERNESS TO SHARE THE GOSPEL WITH THE CHRISTIANS OF ROME

PAUL AN APOSTLE TO ALL GENTILES GREETS THE CHRISTIANS OF ROME

Romans 1:1-7 - This letter comes to you from Paul, servant of Jesus Christ, called as a messenger (an apostle) and appointed for the

service of that Gospel of God which was long ago promised by the prophets in the holy scriptures.

The Gospel is centred in God's Son, a descendant of David by human genealogy (see Matthew and Luke's accounts) and patently marked out as the Son of God by the power of that Spirit of holiness which raised him to life again from the dead. He is our Lord, Jesus Christ, from whom we received grace and our commission in his name to forward obedience to the faith in all nations. And of this great number you at Rome are also called to belong to him.

To you all then, loved of God and called to be Christ's men and women, grace and peace from God the Father and from our Lord Jesus Christ.

PAUL THANKS GOD FOR THE CHURCH IN ROME AND LONGS TO SHARE THE GOSPEL WITH THEM IN PERSON

Romans 1:8-15 - I must begin by telling you how I thank God through Jesus Christ for you all, since the news of your faith has become known everywhere. Before God, whom I serve with all my heart in the Gospel of his Son, I assure you that you are always in my prayers. I am longing to see you: I want to bring you some spiritual strength, and that will mean that I shall be strengthened by you, each of us helped by the other's faith.

Then I should like you to know, my brothers, that I have long intended to come to you (but something has always prevented me), for I should like to see some results among you, as I have among other Gentiles. I feel myself under a sort of universal obligation, I owe something to all men, from cultured Greek to ignorant savage. That is why I want, as far as my ability will carry me, to preach the Gospel to you who live in Rome as well.

THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL IS FOR EVERYONE'S SALVATION

Romans 1:16-17 - For I am not ashamed of the Gospel. I see it as the very power of God working for the salvation of everyone who believes it, both Jew and Greek. I see in it God's plan for imparting righteousness to men, a process begun and continued by their faith. For, as the scripture says:

'The just shall live by faith' (Habakkuk 2:4).

ALL MEN - JEW AND GENTILE, STAND CONDEMNED AND NEED THE SALVATION OF CHRIST'S GOSPEL

THERE IS NO EXCUSE FOR MANKIND'S GODLESSNESS; THEY KNEW OF GOD'S EXISTENCE YET CHOSE IDOLATRY

Romans 1:18-23 - Now the holy anger of God is disclosed from Heaven against the godlessness and evil of those men who render truth dumb and inoperative by their wickedness. It is not that they do not know the truth about God; indeed he has made it quite plain to them. For since the beginning of the world the invisible attributes of God, e.g. his eternal power and divinity, have been plainly discernible through things which he has made and which are commonly seen and known, thus leaving these men without a rag of excuse. They knew all the time that there is a God, yet they refused to acknowledge him as such, or to thank him for what he is or does. Thus they became fatuous in their argumentations, and plunged their silly minds still further into the dark.

Behind a facade of "wisdom" they became just fools, fools who would exchange the glory of the eternal God for an imitation image of a mortal man, or of creatures that run or fly or crawl (... such false religious idols as statues of "gods", birds, animals and reptiles).

HE HAS ALLOWED THEM TO SINK INTO EVERY FORM OF SEXUAL DEPRAVITY AND HUMAN WICKEDNESS

- That a loving God can allow mankind to sink in such a way is hard to understand. There are many interpretations of God's reasons, but what cannot be escaped is the "fact". When men and women (and children) fail to follow the first commandment, and worship anything or anyone other than God, immorality inevitably follows - not just sexual immorality, but every other form, including the twenty-one Paul lists here:

Romans 1:24-32 - They gave up God: and therefore God gave them up - to be the playthings of their own foul desires in dishonouring their own bodies.

The fearful consequence of deliberate atheism

These men deliberately forfeited the truth of God and accepted a lie, paying homage and giving service to the creature instead of to the Creator, who alone is worthy to be worshipped for ever and ever, amen. God therefore handed them over to disgraceful passions. Their women exchanged the normal practices of sexual intercourse for something which is abnormal and unnatural. Similarly the men, turning from natural intercourse with women, were swept into lustful passions for one another. Men with men performed these shameful horrors, receiving, of course, in their own personalities the consequences of sexual perversity.

Moreover, since they considered themselves too high and mighty to acknowledge God, he allowed them to become the slaves of their degenerate minds, and to perform unmentionable deeds. They became filled with ...

wickedness,
rottenness,
greed and
malice; their minds became steeped in ...
envy,
murder,
quarrelsomeness,
deceitfulness and
spite. They became ...
whisperers-behind-doors,

stabbers-in-the-back,
God-haters; they overflowed with ...
insolent pride and
boastfulness, and their minds teemed with ...
diabolical invention. They ...
scoffed at duty to parents, they ...

mocked at learning,
recognised no obligations of honour,
lost all natural affection, and
had no use for mercy. ...
More than this - being well aware of God's pronouncement that all who do these things deserve to die, they not only continued their own practices, but did not hesitate to give their thorough approval to others who did the same. (But .....)

WE ARE NO DIFFERENT, SO NONE OF US HAS ANY RIGHT TO JUDGE

Romans 2:1-4 - Now if you feel inclined to set yourself up as a judge of those who sin, let me assure you, whoever you are, that you are in no position to do so. For at whatever point you condemn others you automatically condemn yourself, since you, the judge, commit the same sins. God's judgment, we know, is utterly impartial in its action against such evil-doers. What makes you think that you who so readily judge the sins of others, can consider yourself beyond the judgment of God? Are you, perhaps, misinterpreting God's generosity and patient mercy towards you as weakness on his part? Don't you realise that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?

NONE OF US WILL ESCAPE judgment FOR OUR WICKEDNESS, NOR FORGO REWARD FOR ANY GOOD WE DO

Romans 2:5-11 - Or are you by your obstinate refusal to repent simply storing up for yourself an experience of the wrath of God in the day when, in his holy anger against evil, he shows his hand in righteous judgment?

There is no doubt at all that he will

'render to every man according to his works' (Psalm 62:12; Proverbs 24:12),

and that means eternal life to those who, in patiently doing good, aim at the unseen (but real) glory and honour of the eternal world. It also means anger and wrath for those who rebel against God's plan of

life, and refuse to obey his rules, and who, in so doing, make themselves the very servants of evil. Yes, it means bitter pain and a fearful undoing for every human soul who works on the side of evil, for the Jew first and then the Greek.

But let me repeat, there is glory and honour and peace for every worker on the side of good, for the Jew first and then the Greek. For there is no preferential treatment with God.

ONLY THOSE WHO OBEY GOD'S LAW, CONSCIOUSLY OR NOT WILL BE SAVED ON judgment DAY

Romans 2:12-16 - All who have sinned without knowledge of the Law will die without reference to the Law; and all who have sinned knowing the Law shall be judged according to the Law. It is not familiarity with the Law that justifies a man in the sight of God, but obedience to it.

When the Gentiles, who have no knowledge of the Law, act in accordance with it by the light of nature, they show that they have a law in themselves, for they demonstrate the effect of a law operating in their own hearts. Their own consciences endorse the existence of such a law, for there is something which condemns or commends their actions.

We may be sure that all this will be taken into account in the day of true judgment, when God will judge men's secret lives by Jesus Christ, as my Gospel plainly states.

IF THE JEWS PREACH GOD'S LAW, BUT DISOBEY IT, THEY DISHONOUR HIS NAME

Romans 2:17-24 - Now you, my reader, who bear the name of Jew, take your stand upon the Law, and are, so to speak, proud of your God. You know his plan, and are able through your knowledge of the Law truly to appreciate moral values. You can, therefore, confidently look upon yourself as a guide to those who do not know the way, and as a light to those who are groping in the dark. You can instruct those who have no spiritual wisdom: you can teach those who, spiritually speaking, are only just out of the cradle. You have a certain grasp of the basis of true knowledge. You have without doubt

very great advantages. But, prepared as you are to instruct others, do you ever teach yourself anything? You preach against stealing, for example, but are you sure of your own honesty? You denounce the practice of adultery, but are you sure of your own purity? You loathe idolatry, but how honest are you towards the property of heathen temples? Everyone knows how proud you are of the Law, but that means a proportionate dishonour to God when men know that you break it! Don't you know that:

'the very name of God is cursed among the Gentiles because of the behaviour of Jews?' (Isaiah 52:5; Ezekiel 36:22)

There is, you know, a verse of scripture to that effect.

CIRCUMCISION HAS NO VALUE TO JEWS UNLESS THEY CHANGE INWARDLY

Romans 2:25-29 - That most intimate sign of belonging to God that we call circumcision does indeed mean something if you keep the Law. But if you (who are Jews) flout the Law you are to all intents and purposes uncircumcising yourself! Conversely, if an uncircumcised man (... a Gentile) keeps the Law's commandments, does he not thereby "circumcise" himself? Moreover, is it not plain to you that those who are physically uncircumcised, and yet keep the Law, are a continual judgment upon you who, for all your circumcision and knowledge of the Law, break it?

I have come to the conclusion that a true Jew is not the man who is merely a Jew outwardly, and a real circumcision is not just a matter of the body. The true Jew is one who belongs to God in heart, a man whose circumcision is not just an outward physical affair but is a God-made sign upon the heart and soul, and results in a life lived not for the approval of man, but for the approval of God.

THE JEWS, ALTHOUGH CHOSEN TO RECEIVE GOD'S LAW, ARE AS MUCH FAITHLESS SINNERS AS THE GENTILES

Romans 3:1-18 - Is there any advantage then in being one of the chosen people? Does circumcision mean anything? Yes, of course, a great deal in every way. You have only to think of one thing to begin with - it was the Jews to whom God's messages were

entrusted. Some of them were undoubtedly faithless, but what then? Can you imagine that their faithlessness could disturb the faithfulness of God? Of course not! Let us think of God as true, even if every living man be proved a liar. Remember the scripture?

'That you may be justified in your words, and may overcome when you are judged' (Psalm 51:4).

But if our wickedness advertises the goodness of God, do we feel that God is being unfair to punish us in return? (I'm using a human tit-for-tat argument.) Not a bit of it! What sort of a person would God be then to judge the world? It is like saying that if my lying throws into sharp relief the truth of God and, so to speak, enhances his reputation, then why should he repay me by judging me a sinner? Similarly, why not do evil that good may be, by contrast all the the more conspicuous and valuable? (As a matter of fact, I am reported as urging this very thing, by some slanderously and others quite seriously! But, of course, such an argument is quite properly condemned.)

Are we Jews then a march ahead of other men? By no means. For I have shown above that all men from Jews to Greeks are under the condemnation of sin. The scriptures endorse this fact plainly enough.

'There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God. They have all gone out of the way; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one' (Psalms 14:1-3; 53:1-3; Ecclesiastes 7:20).

'Their throat is an open tomb; with their tongues they have practised deceit' (Psalm 5:9);

'the poison of asps is under their lips' (Psalm 140:3),

'whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness' (Psalm 10:7).

'Their feet are swift to shed blood; destruction and misery are in their ways; and the way of peace they have not known' (Isaiah 59:7,8).

'There is no fear of God before their eyes' (Psalm 36:1).

THE LAW IS IMPOSSIBLE TO MEET; IT CAN ONLY BE A MEASURE OF OUR SINFULNESS

Romans 3:19-20 - We know what the message of the Law is, to those who live under it - that every excuse may die on the lips of him who makes it and no living man may think himself beyond the judgment of God. No man can justify himself before God by a perfect performance of the Law's demands - indeed it is the straight-edge of the Law that shows us how crooked we are.

MANKIND CAN ONLY BE SAVED FROM GOD'S ANGER BY JUSTIFICATION - THAT IS BY FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST

ALL MANKIND HAS SINNED BUT GOD PROVIDES AN ESCAPE THROUGH THE SACRIFICE OF JESUS CHRIST

Romans 3:21-26 - But now we are seeing the righteousness of God declared quite apart from the Law (though amply testified to by both Law and Prophets) - it is a righteousness imparted to, and operating in, all who have faith in Jesus Christ. (For there is no distinction to be made anywhere: everyone has sinned, everyone falls short of the beauty of God's plan.) Under this divine system a man who has faith is now freely acquitted in the eyes of God by his generous dealing in the redemptive act of Jesus Christ. ...

... God has appointed him (Christ) as the means of

propitiation (or act of atonement - HIS sacrifice for OUR sins),

a propitiation accomplished by the shedding of his blood (on the cross),

to be received and made effective in ourselves by faith (or belief in Jesus Christ).

... God has done this to demonstrate his righteousness both by the wiping out of the sins of the past (the time when he withheld his hand), and by showing in the present time that he is a just God and that he justifies every man who has faith in Jesus Christ.

EVERYONE CAN BE RECONCILED WITH GOD, NOT BY OBSERVING THE LAW BUT THROUGH FAITH IN CHRIST

Romans 3:27-31 - What happens now to human pride of achievement? There is no more room for it. Why, because failure to keep the Law has killed it? Not at all, but because the whole matter is now on a different plane - believing (or having faith in Christ) instead of achieving (by observing the Law). We see now that a man is justified before God by the fact of his faith in God's appointed Saviour and not by what he has managed to achieve under the Law.

And God is God of both Jews and Gentiles, let us be quite clear about that! The same God is ready to justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised by faith also.

Are we then undermining the Law by this insistence on faith? Not a bit of it! We put the Law in its proper place.

ABRAHAM AS AN EXAMPLE OF JUSTIFICATION

ABRAHAM WAS "JUSTIFIED" BY FAITH BEFORE CIRCUMCISION, NOT BY OBEYING THE LAW AFTERWARDS; GOD'S PROMISES ARE FOR BOTH GENTILE AND JEW

Romans 4:1-25 - Now how does all this affect the position of our ancestor Abraham? Well, if justification were by achievement he could quite fairly be proud of what he achieved - but not, I am sure, proud before God. For what does scripture say about him?

'Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness' (Genesis 15:6).

Now if a man works his wages are not counted as a gift but as a fair reward. But if a man, irrespective of his work, has faith as righteousness, then that man's faith is counted as righteousness, and that is the gift of God. This is the happy state of the man whom God accounts righteous, apart from his achievements, as David expresses it:

'Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin' (Psalm 32:1,2).

It is a matter of faith, not circumcision

Now the question, an important one, arises: is this happiness for the circumcised (Jew) only, or for the uncircumcised (Gentile) as well?

Note this carefully. We began by saying that Abraham's faith was counted unto him for righteousness. When this happened, was he a circumcised man? He was not, he was still uncircumcised. It was afterwards that the sign of circumcision was given to him, as a seal upon that righteousness which God was accounting to him as yet an uncircumcised man! God's purpose here is twofold. First, that Abraham might be the spiritual father of all who since that time, despite their circumcision, show the faith that is counted as righteousness. Then, secondly, that he might be the circumcised father of all those who are not only circumcised, but are living by the same sort of faith which he himself had before he was circumcised.

The promise, from the beginning, was made to faith

The ancient promise made to Abraham and his descendants, that they should eventually possess the world, was given not because of any achievements made through obedience to the Law, but because of the righteousness which had its root in faith. For if, after all, they who pin their faith to keeping the Law were to inherit God's world, it would make nonsense of faith in God himself, and destroy the whole point of the promise.

For we have already noted that the Law can produce no promise, only the threat of wrath to come. And, indeed if there were no Law the question of sin would not arise.

The whole thing, then, is a matter of faith on man's part and generosity on God's. He gives the security of his own promise to all men who can be called "children of Abraham", i.e. both those who have lived in faith by the Law, and those who have exhibited a faith like that of Abraham. To whichever group we belong, Abraham is in a real sense our father, as the scripture says:

'I have made you a father of many nations' (Genesis 17:5).

This faith is valid because of the existence of God himself, who can make the dead live, and speak his Word to those who are yet unborn.

Abraham was a shining example of faith

Abraham, when hope was dead within him, went on hoping in faith, believing that he would become "the father of many nations". He relied on the word of God which definitely referred to

'your descendants' (Genesis 15:5).

With undaunted faith he looked at the facts - his own impotence (he was practically a hundred years old at the time) and his wife Sarah's apparent barrenness. Yet he refused to allow any distrust of a definite pronouncement of God to make him waver. He drew strength from his faith, and while giving the glory to God, remained absolutely convinced that God was able to implement his own promise. This was the "faith" which

'was accounted to him for righteousness' (Genesis 15:6).

Now this counting of faith for righteousness was not recorded simply for Abraham's credit, but as a divine principle which should apply to us as well. Faith is to be reckoned as righteousness to us also, who believe in him who raised from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, who was delivered to death for our sins and raised again to secure our justification.

THE RESULT OF JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH IS CHRISTIAN SALVATION - THAT IS SANCTIFICATION, PEACE, IMMORTALITY, THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

WITH FAITH IN CHRIST WE HAVE GOD'S PEACE AND CAN GROW IN SPIRITUAL MATURITY EVEN IN SUFFERING

Romans 5:1-5 - Since then it is by faith that we are justified, let us grasp the fact that we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus

Christ. Through him we have confidently entered into this new relationship of grace, and here we take our stand, in happy certainty of the glorious things he has for us in the future.

This doesn't mean, of course, that we have only a hope of future joys (in heaven) - we can be full of joy here and now (on earth) even in our trials and troubles. Taken in the right spirit these very things will give us patient endurance; this in turn will develop a mature character, and a character of this sort produces a steady hope, a hope that will never disappoint us. Already we have some experience of the love of God flooding through our hearts by the Holy Spirit given to us.

WE ARE SUCH POWERLESS SINNERS AND GOD LOVES US SO MUCH, HE SENT CHRIST TO DIE FOR US

Romans 5:6-8 - And we can see that it was while we were powerless to help ourselves that Christ died for sinful men. In human experience it is a rare thing for one man to give his life for another, even if the latter be a good man, though there have been a few who have had the courage to do it. Yet the proof of God's amazing love is this: that it was while we were sinners that Christ died for us.

WE ARE SAVED AND RECONCILED WITH GOD BECAUSE OF THE BLOOD OF CHRIST

Romans 5:9-11 - Moreover, if he did that for us while we were sinners, now that we are men justified by the shedding of his blood, what reason have we to fear the wrath of God? If, while we were his enemies, Christ reconciled us to God by dying for us, surely now that we are reconciled we may be perfectly certain of our salvation through his living in us. Nor, I am sure, is this a matter of bare salvation - we may hold our heads high in the light of God's love because of the reconciliation which Christ has made.

SIN AND DEATH CAME TO ALL MANKIND THROUGH THE DISOBEDIENCE OF ONE MAN - ADAM

Romans 5:12-14 - This, then, is what happened. Sin made its entry into the world through one man, and through sin, death. The entail of

sin and death passed on to the whole human race, and no one could break it for no one was himself free from sin.

Sin, you see, was in the world long before the Law, though I suppose, technically speaking, it was not "sin" where there was no law to define it. Nevertheless death, the complement of sin, held sway over mankind from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sin was quite unlike Adam's.

Adam, the first man, corresponds in some degree to the man who has to come.

DEATH AND SIN ARE NOW CONQUERED THROUGH THE OBEDIENCE OF ONE MAN - JESUS CHRIST

Romans 5:15-19 - But the gift of God through Christ is a very different matter from the "account rendered" through the sin of Adam. For while as a result of one man's sin death by natural consequence became the common lot of men, it was by the generosity of God, the free giving of the grace of one man Jesus Christ, that the love of God overflowed for the benefit of all men.

Nor is the effect of God's gift the same as the effect of that one man's sin. For in the one case one man's sin brought its inevitable judgment, and the result was condemnation. But, in the other, countless men's sins are met with the free gift of grace, and the result is justification before God.

For if one man's offence meant that men should be slaves to death all their lives, it is a far greater thing that through another man, Jesus Christ, men by their acceptance of his more than sufficient grace and righteousness, should live all their lives like kings!

We see, then, that as one act of sin exposed the whole race of men to God's judgment and condemnation, so one act of perfect righteousness presents all men freely acquitted in the sight of God. One man's disobedience placed all men under the threat of condemnation, but one man's obedience has the power to present all men righteous before God.

AS SIN BROUGHT DEATH, SO GOD'S GOODNESS BRINGS ETERNAL LIFE

Romans 5:20-21 - Now we find that the Law keeps slipping into the picture to point the vast extent of sin. Yet, though sin is shown to be wide and deep, thank God his grace (goodness) is wider and deeper still! The whole outlook changes - sin used to be the master of men and in the end handed them over to death: now grace is the ruling factor, with righteousness as its purpose and its end the bringing of men to the eternal life of God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

THROUGH BAPTISM WE DIE WITH CHRIST; AS HE ROSE AGAIN, SO WE ARE BORN AGAIN; NOW WE LIVE WITH CHRIST, WE SHOULD BE DEAD TO SIN

Romans 6:1-14 - Now what is our response to be? Shall we sin to our heart's content and see how far we can exploit the grace of God? What a ghastly thought! We, who have died to sin - how could we live in sin a moment longer? Have you forgotten that all of us who were baptised into Jesus Christ were, by that very action, sharing in his death? We were dead and buried with him in baptism, so that just as he was raised from the dead by that splendid Revelation of the Father's power so we too might rise to life on a new plane altogether. If we have, as it were, shared his death, let us rise and live our new lives with him! Let us never forget that our old selves died with him on the cross that the tyranny of sin over us might be broken - for a dead man can safely be said to be immune to the power of sin. And if we were dead men with him we can believe that we shall also be men newly alive with him. We can be sure that the risen Christ never dies again - death's power to touch him is finished. He died, because of sin, once: he lives for God for ever. In the same way look upon yourselves as dead to the appeal and power of sin but alive and sensitive to the call of God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Do not, then, allow sin to establish any power over your mortal bodies in making you give way to your lusts. Nor hand over your organs to be, as it were, weapons of evil for the devil's purposes. But, like men rescued from certain death, put yourselves in God's hands as weapons of good for his own purposes. For sin is not

meant to be your master - you are no longer living under the Law, but under grace.

BE SLAVES NOT TO SIN BUT TO GOD; SIN LEADS TO DEATH, GOD TO ETERNAL LIFE

Romans 6:15-23 - Now, what shall we do? Shall we go on sinning because we have no Law to condemn us any more, but are living under grace? Never! Just think what it would mean. You belong to the power which you choose to obey, whether you choose sin, whose reward is death, or God, obedience to whom means the reward of righteousness. Thank God that you, who were at one time the servants of sin, honestly responded to the impact of Christ's teaching when you came under its influence. Then, released from the service of sin, you entered the service of righteousness. (I use an everyday illustration because human nature grasps truth more readily that way.) In the past you voluntarily gave your bodies to the service of vice and wickedness - for the purpose of becoming wicked. So, now, give yourselves to the service of righteousness - for the purpose of becoming really good. For when you were employed by sin you owed no duty to righteousness. Yet what sort of harvest did you reap from those things that today you blush to remember? In the long run those things mean one thing only - death.

But now that you are employed by God, you owe no duty to sin, and you reap the fruit of being made righteous, while at the end of the road there is life for evermore.

Sin pays its servants: the wage is death. But God gives to those who serve him: his free gift is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

AN ILLUSTRATION; AS DEATH BREAKS THE VOWS OF MARRIAGE, SO CHRIST'S DEATH SETS US FREE FROM THE LAW

Romans 7:1-6 - You know very well, my brothers (for I am speaking to those well acquainted with the subject), that the Law can only exercise authority over a man so long as he is alive. A married woman, for example, is bound by law to her husband so long as he is alive. But if he dies, then his legal claim over her disappears. This

means that, if she should give herself to another man while her husband is alive, she incurs the stigma of adultery. But if, after her husband's death, she does exactly the same thing, no one could call her an adulteress, for the legal hold over her has been dissolved by her husband's death.

There is, I think, a fair analogy here. The death of Christ on the cross had made you "dead" to the claims of the Law, and you are free to give yourselves in marriage, so to speak, to another, the one who was raised from the dead, that you may be productive for God.

While we were "in the flesh" the Law stimulated our sinful passions and so worked in our nature that we became productive - for death! But now that we stand clear of the Law, the claims which existed are dissolved by our "death", and we are free to serve God not in the old obedience to the letter of the Law, but in a new way, in the spirit.

THE LAW WAS STILL NEEDED; WITHOUT IT WE WOULD NOT HAVE RECOGNIZED SIN NOR ITS POWER OVER US

Romans 7:7-13 - It now begins to look as if sin and the Law were very much the same thing - can this be a fact? Of course it cannot. But it must in fairness be admitted that I should never have had sin brought home to me but for the Law. For example, I should never have felt guilty of the sin of coveting if I had not heard the Law saying

'You shall not covet' (Exodus 20:17; Deuteronomy 5:21).

But the sin in me, finding in the commandment an opportunity to express itself, stimulated all my covetous desires. For sin, in the absence of the Law, has no chance to function technically as "sin". As long, then, as I was without the Law I was, spiritually speaking, alive. But when the commandment arrived, sin sprang to life and I "died". The commandment, which was meant to be a direction to life, I found was a sentence to death. The commandment gave sin an opportunity, and without my realising what was happening, it "killed" me.

The Law is itself good

It can scarcely be doubted that in reality the Law itself is holy, and the commandment is holy, fair and good. Can it be that something that is intrinsically good could mean death to me? No, what happened was this. Sin, at the touch of the Law, was forced to express itself as sin, and that meant death for me. The contact of the Law showed the sinful nature of sin.

WE ARE RULED BY SIN AND SPIRITUALLY UNABLE TO MEET THE DEMANDS OF THE LAW

Romans 7:14-20 - After all, the Law itself is really concerned with the spiritual - it is I who am carnal, and have sold my soul to sin. In practice, what happens? My own behaviour baffles me. For I find myself not doing what I really want to do but doing what I really loathe. Yet surely if I do things that I really don't want to do, I am admitting that I really agree with the Law. But it cannot be said that "I" am doing them at all - it must be sin that has made its home in my nature. (And indeed, I know from experience that the carnal side of my being can scarcely be called the home of good!) I often find that I have the will to do good, but not the power. That is, I don't accomplish the good I set out to do, and the evil I don't really want to do I find I am always doing. Yet if I do things that I don't really want to do then it is not, I repeat, "I" who do them, but the sin which has made its home within me.

WE WANT TO DO WHAT IS RIGHT BUT OUR SIN STOPS US; ONLY CHRIST CAN SAVE US FROM THIS FATAL DILEMMA

Romans 7:21-25 - When I come up against the Law I want to do good, but in practice I do evil. My conscious mind whole-heartedly endorses the Law, yet I observe an entirely different principle at work in my nature. This is in continual conflict with my conscious attitude, and makes me an unwilling prisoner to the law of sin and death. In my mind I am God's willing servant, but in my own nature I am bound fast, as I say, to the law of sin and death. It is an agonising situation, and who on earth can set me free from the clutches of my sinful nature? I thank God there is a way out through Jesus Christ our Lord.

BECAUSE OF CHRIST, WE ARE SAVED FROM THE LAW

Romans 8:1-4 - No condemnation now hangs over the head of those who are "in" Jesus Christ. For the new spiritual principle of life "in" Christ lifts me out of the old vicious circle of sin and death.

The Law never succeeded in producing righteousness - the failure was always the weakness of human nature. But God has met this by sending his own Son Jesus Christ to live in that human nature which causes the trouble. And, while Christ was actually taking upon himself the sins of men, God condemned that sinful nature. So that we are able to meet the Law's requirements, so long as we are living no longer by the dictates of our sinful nature, but in obedience to the promptings of the Spirit.

THROUGH THE HOLY SPIRIT WE HAVE VICTORY ...

.... OVER SIN

Romans 8:5-8 - The carnal attitude (sinful nature) sees no further than natural things. But the spiritual attitude reaches out after the things of the spirit. The former attitude means, bluntly, death: the latter means life and inward peace. And this is only to be expected, for the carnal attitude is inevitably opposed to the purpose of God, and neither can nor will follow his laws for living. Men who hold this attitude cannot possibly please God.

.... OVER DEATH

Romans 8:9-11 - But you are not carnal but spiritual if the Spirit of God finds a home within you. You cannot, indeed, be a Christian at all unless you have something of his Spirit in you. Now if Christ does live within you his presence means that your sinful nature is dead, but your spirit becomes alive because of the righteousness he brings with him. I said that our nature is "dead" in the presence of Christ, and so it is, because of its sin. Nevertheless once the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead lives within you he will, by that same Spirit, bring to your whole being new strength and vitality.

.... FOR ALL ETERNITY

Romans 8:12-17 - So then, my brothers, you can see that we have no particular reason to feel grateful to our sensual nature, or to live life on the level of the instincts. Indeed that way of living leads to certain spiritual death. But if on the other hand you cut the nerve of your instinctive actions by obeying the Spirit, you are on the way to real living.

Christ is within - follow the lead of his Spirit

All who follow the leading of God's Spirit are God's own sons. Nor are you meant to relapse into the old slavish attitude of fear - you have been adopted into the very family circle of God and you can say with a full heart, "Father (or "Abba" in Aramaic), my Father". The Spirit himself endorses our inward conviction that we really are the children of God. Think what that means. If we are his children we share his treasures, and all that Christ claims as his will belong to all of us as well! Yes, if we share in his suffering we shall certainly share in his glory.

THIS VICTORY DOES NOT SAVE US FROM PRESENT SUFFERING OR EARTHLY FRUSTRATION

Romans 8:18-25 - In my opinion whatever we may have to go through now is less than nothing compared with the magnificent future God has planned for us. The whole creation is on tiptoe to see the wonderful sight of the sons of God coming into their own. The world of creation cannot as yet see reality, not because it chooses to be blind, but because in God's purpose it has been so limited - yet it has been given hope. And the hope is that in the end the whole of created life will be rescued from the tyranny of change and decay, and have its share in that magnificent liberty which can only belong to the children of God!

It is plain to anyone with eyes to see that at the present time all created life groans in a sort of universal travail. And it is plain, too, that we who have a foretaste of the Spirit are in a state of painful tension, while we wait for that redemption of our bodies which will mean that at last we have realised our full sonship in him. We were saved by this hope, but in our moments of impatience let us remember that hope always means waiting for something that we

haven't yet got. But if we hope for something we cannot see, then we must settle down to wait for it in patience.

THE HOLY SPIRIT ACTUALLY SUPPORTS US AT THESE TIMES

Romans 8:26-27 - The Spirit of God not only maintains this hope within us, but helps us in our present limitations. For example, we do not know how to pray worthily as sons of God, but his Spirit within us is actually praying for us in those agonising longings which never find words. And God who knows the heart's secrets understands, of course, the Spirit's intention as he prays for those who love God.

GOD HAS ALWAYS KNOWN US AND ALWAYS CARRIES US

Romans 8:28-30 - Moreover we know that to those who love God, who are called according to his plan, everything that happens fits into a pattern for good. God, in his foreknowledge, chose them to bear the family likeness of his Son, that he might be the eldest of a family of many brothers. He chose them long ago; when the time came he called them, he made them righteous in his sight, and then lifted them to the splendour of life as his own sons.

WE CAN NEVER LOSE AND NOTHING CAN EVER SEPARATE US FROM CHRIST'S LOVE

Romans 8:31-39 - In face of all this, what is there left to say? If God is for us, who can be against us? He that did not hesitate to spare his own Son but gave him up for us all - can we not trust such a God to give us, with him, everything else that we can need?

Who would dare to accuse us, whom God has chosen? The judge himself has declared us free from sin. Who is in a position to condemn? Only Christ, and Christ died for us, Christ rose for us, Christ reigns in power for us, Christ prays for us!

Can anything separate us from the love of Christ? Can trouble, pain or persecution? Can lack of clothes and food, danger to life and limb, the threat of force of arms? Indeed some of us know the truth of the ancient text:

'For your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter' (Psalm 44:22).

No, in all these things we win an overwhelming victory through him who has proved his love for us.

I have become absolutely convinced that neither death nor life, neither messenger of Heaven nor monarch of earth, neither what happens today nor what may happen tomorrow, neither a power from on high nor a power from below, nor anything else in God's whole world has any power to separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord!

THE JEWS OF ISRAEL AND SALVATION THROUGH THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST

PAUL'S SORROW FOR HIS JEWISH BROTHERS

Romans 9:1-5 - Before Christ and my own conscience I assure you that I am speaking the plain truth when I say that there is something that makes me feel very depressed, like a pain that never leaves me. It is the condition of my brothers and fellow-Israelites, and I have actually reached the pitch of wishing myself cut off from Christ if it meant that they (the Jews) could be won for God.

Just think what the Israelites have had given to them. The privilege of being adopted as sons of God, the experience of seeing something of the glory of God, the receiving of the agreements made with God, the gift of the Law, true ways of worship, God's own promises - all these are theirs, and so too, as far as human descent goes, is Christ himself, Christ who is God over all, blessed for ever.

WHY GOD HAS NOT INCLUDED ALL JEWS IN HIS PLAN OF SALVATION

Romans 9:6-13 - Now this does not mean that God's word to Israel has failed. For you cannot count all "Israelites" as the true Israel of God. Nor can all Abraham's descendants be considered truly children of Abraham. The promise was that

'in Isaac your seed shall be called' (Genesis 21:12).

That means that it is not the natural descendants (the Jews) who automatically inherit the promise, but, on the contrary, that the

children of the promise (i.e. sons of God) are to be considered truly Abraham's children. For it was a promise when God said:

'At this time I will come and Sarah shall have a son' (Genesis 18:10,14).

(Everybody, remember, thought it quite impossible for Sarah - Abraham's wife, Genesis 16:1, to have a child.) And then, again, a word of promise came to Rebecca, at the time when she was pregnant with two children by the one man, Isaac our forefather (Genesis 25:21-23). It came before the children were born or had done anything good or bad, plainly showing that God's act of choice has nothing to do with achievements, good or bad, but is entirely a matter of his will. The promise was:

'The older shall serve the younger' (Genesis 25:23).

And we get a later endorsement of this divine choice in the words:

'Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated' (Malachi 1:2,3).

GOD IS NOT UNJUST; IT IS HIS BUSINESS TO WHOM HE SHOWS MERCY AND GRANTS SALVATION

Romans 9:14-29 - Now do we conclude that God is monstrously unfair? Never! God said long ago to Moses:

'I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion' (Exodus 33:19).

It is obviously not a question of human will or human effort, but of divine mercy. The scripture says to Pharaoh:

'Even for this same purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name shall be declared in all the earth' (Exodus 9:16).

It seems plain, then, that God chooses on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will harden in their sin.

Of course I can almost hear your retort: "If this is so, and God's will is irresistible, why does God blame men for what they do?" But the question really is this: "Who are you, a man, to make any such reply

to God?" When a craftsman makes anything he doesn't expect it to turn round and say,

'Why did you make me like this?' (Isaiah 29:16; 45:9)

The potter, for instance, is always assumed to have complete control over the clay, making with one part of the lump a lovely vase, and with another a pipe for sewage. Can we not assume that God has the same control over human clay? May it not be that God, though he must sooner or later expose his wrath against sin and show his controlling hand, has yet most patiently endured the presence in his world of things that cry out to be destroyed? Can we not see, in this, his purpose in demonstrating the boundless resources of his glory upon those whom he considers fit to receive his mercy, and whom he long ago planned to raise to glorious life? And by these chosen people I mean you and me (whether Jew or Gentile), whom he has called out from both Jews and Gentiles. He says in Hosea:

'I will call them my people, who were not my people, and her beloved, who was not beloved' (Hosea 2:23).

'And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them, You are not my people, there they will be called sons of the living God' (Hosea 1:10).

And Isaiah, speaking about Israel, proclaims:

'though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, the remnant will be saved. For he will finish the work and cut it short in righteousness, because the Lord will make a short work upon the earth' (Isaiah 10:22,23).

And previously, Isaiah said:

'Unless the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a seed, we would have become like Sodom and we would have been made like Gomorrah' (Isaiah 1:9).

THE JEWS STILL INSIST ON GOOD WORKS; THE GENTILES ACCEPT THE NEED FOR FAITH IN CHRIST

Romans 9:30-10:4 - Now, how far have we got? That the Gentiles who never had the Law's standard of righteousness to guide them, have attained righteousness, righteousness-by-faith. but Israel, following the Law of righteousness, failed to reach the goal of righteousness. And why? Because their minds were fixed on what they achieved (through following the Law) instead of on what they believed(in faith). They tripped over that very stone the scripture mentions:

'Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offence, and whoever believes on him will not be put to shame' (Isaiah 8:14; 28:16).

(Chapter 10 ....) My brothers, from the bottom of my heart I long and pray to God that Israel may be saved! I know from experience what a passion for God they have, but alas, it is not a passion based on knowledge. They do not know God's righteousness, and all the time they are going about trying to prove their own righteousness they have the wrong attitude to receive his. For Christ means the end of the struggle for righteouness-by-the-Law for everyone who believes in him.

SALVATION COMES FROM BELIEVING IN YOUR HEART THAT JESUS IS LORD, AND LORD OF ALL

Romans 10:5-13 - Moses writes of righteousness-by-the-Law when he says that

'the man who does those things shall live by them' (Leviticus 18:5)

- which is theoretically right but impossible in practice. But righteousness-by-faith says something like this:

'Do not say in your heart, Who will ascend into heaven?' (Deuteronomy 30:12)

to bring Christ down to us, or

'who will descend into the abyss' (Deuteronomy 30:13)

to bring him up from the dead?

'The word is near you, even in your mouth and in your heart' (Deuteronomy 30:14).

It is the secret of faith, which is the burden of our preaching, and it says, in effect, "If you openly admit by your own mouth that Jesus Christ is the Lord, and if you believe in your own heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." For it is believing in the heart that makes a man righteous before God, and it is stating his belief by his own mouth that confirms his salvation. And the scripture says:

'Whoever believes on him will not be put to shame' (Isaiah 28:16).

And that "whoever" means anyone, without distinction between Jew or Greek (or Gentile). For all have the same Lord, whose boundless resources are available to all who turn to him in faith. For:

'Whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved' (Joel 2:32).

THE GOSPEL MUST BE PREACHED BUT STILL THE JEWS WILL NOT LISTEN

Romans 10:14-21 - Now how can they (the Jews) call on one in whom they have never believed? How can they believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how can they hear (the Gospel)unless someone proclaims him? And who will go to tell them unless he is sent (as a Christian minister of the Gospel)? As the scripture puts it:

'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the Gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!' (Isaiah 52:7; Nahum 1:15)

Yet all who have heard have not responded to the Gospel. Isaiah asks, you remember,

'Lord, who has believed our report?' (Isaiah 53:1)

(Belief you see, can only come from hearing the message, and the message is the word of Christ.)

But when I ask myself: "Did they never hear?" I have to answer that they have heard, for

'Their sound has gone out to all the earth, and their word to the ends of the world' (Psalm 19:4).

Then I say to myself: "Did Israel not know?" And my answer must be that they did. For Moses says:

'I will provoke you to jealousy by those who are not a nation. I will anger you by a foolish nation' (Deuteronomy 32:21).

And Isaiah, more daring still, puts these words into the mouth of God:

'I was found by those who did not seek me; I was made manifest to those who did not ask for me' (Isaiah 65:1).

And then, speaking of Israel:

'All day long I have stretched out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people' (Isaiah 65:2).

SOME OF PAUL'S JEWISH BACKGROUND

Romans 11:1 - This (the Jew's rejection of Jesus) leads naturally to the question, "Has God then totally repudiated his people?" Certainly not! I myself, for one, am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham and of the tribe of Benjamin.

A REMNANT OF ISRAEL IS BEING SAVED

Romans 11:2-6 - It is unthinkable that God should have repudiated his own (chosen) people, the people whose destiny he himself appointed. Don't you remember what the scripture says in the story of Elijah? How he pleaded with God on Israel's behalf:

'Lord, they have killed your prophets, and torn down your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life' (1 Kings 19:10,14).

And do you remember God's reply?

'I have reserved for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal' (1 Kings 19:18).

In just the same way, there is at the present time a minority chosen by the grace of God. And if it is a matter of the grace of God, it

cannot be a question of their actions especially deserving God's favour, for that would make grace meaningless.

THE JEW'S LOSS HAS BEEN THE GENTILE'S GAIN

Romans 11:7-12 - What conclusion do we reach now? That Israel did not, on the whole, obtain the object of his striving, but a chosen few "got there", while the remainder became more and more insensitive to the righteousness of God. This is borne out by the scripture:

'God has given them a spirit of stupor, eyes that they should not see and ears that they should not hear, to this very day' (Deuteronomy 29:4; Isaiah 29:10).

And David says of them:

'Let their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a recompense to them; let their eyes be darkened, that they may not see, and bow down their back always' (Psalm 69:22,23).

In the providence of God disaster has been turned to good account

Now I ask myself, "Was this fall of theirs an utter disaster? It was not! For through their failure the benefit of salvation has passed to the Gentiles with the result that Israel is made to see and feel what is has missed. For if their failure has so enriched the world, and their defection proved such a benefit to the Gentiles, think what tremendous advantage their fulfilling of God's plan could mean.

HE HOPES TO SAVE SOME OF THE JEWS FOR CHRIST

Romans 11:13-14 - Now a word to you who are Gentiles. I should like you to know that I make as much as I can of my ministry as "God's messenger to the Gentiles" so as to make my (Jewish) kinsfolk jealous and thus save some of them.

THE GENTILES HAVE DONE NOTHING TO RECEIVE GOD'S SALVATION; THEY HAVE NOTHING TO BOAST OF

Romans 11:15-21 - For if their exclusion from the pale of salvation has meant the reconciliation of the rest of mankind to God, what would their inclusion mean? It would be nothing less than life from

the dead! If the flour is consecrated to God so is the whole loaf, and if the roots of a tree are dedicated to God every branch will belong to him also.

A word of warning

But if some of the branches of the tree have been broken off, while you, like shoots of wild-olive, have been grafted in, and don't share like a natural branch the rich nourishment of the root, don't let yourself feel superior to those former branches. (If you feel inclined that way, remind yourself that you do not support the root, the root supports you.) You may make the natural retort, "But the branches were broken off to make room for my grafting!" It wasn't quite like that. They lost their position because they failed to believe; you only maintain yours because you do believe. The situation does not call for conceit but for a certain wholesome fear. If God removed the natural branches (the Jews) for a good reason, take care that you (the Gentiles) don't give him the same reason for removing you.

GOD CAN STILL RECEIVE BACK THE JEWS, AND HE WILL DO SO IN FULL

Romans 11:22-32 - You must try to appreciate both the kindness and the strict justice of God. Those who fell experienced his justice, while you are experiencing his kindness, and will continue to do so as long as you do not abuse that kindness. Otherwise you too will be cut off from the tree. And as for the fallen branches, unless they are obstinate in their unbelief, they will be grafted in again. Such a restoration is by no means beyond the power of God. And, in any case, if you (the Gentiles) who were, so to speak, cuttings from a wild-olive, were grafted in, is it not a far simpler matter for the natural branches (the Jews) to be grafted back onto the parent stem (the Church of Christ)?

God still has a plan for Israel

Now I don't want you, my brothers, to start imagining things, and I must therefore share with you my knowledge of God's secret plan. It is this, that the partial insensibility which has come to Israel is only to last until the full number (but not necessarily all) of the Gentiles has

been called in. Once this has happened, all Israel will be saved, as the scripture says:

'The deliverer will come out of Zion, and he will turn away ungodliness from Jacob, for this is my covenant with them, when I take away their sins' (Isaiah 59:20,21).

As far as the Gospel goes, they (the Jews) are at present God's enemies - which is to your advantage. But as far as God's purpose in choosing is concerned, they are still beloved for their fathers' sakes. For once they are made, God does not withdraw his gifts of his calling.

The whole scheme looks topsy-turvy, until we see the amazing wisdom of God!

Just as in the past you were disobedient to God but have found that mercy which might have been theirs but for their disobedience, so they, who at the present moment are disobedient, will eventually share the mercy which has been extended to you. God has all men penned together in the prison of disobedience, that he may have mercy upon them all.

GOD'S WISDOM AND MYSTERY

Romans 11:33-36 - Frankly, I stand amazed at the unfathomable complexity of God's wisdom and God's knowledge. How could man ever understand his reasons for action, or explain his methods of working? For:

'Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become his counsellor?' (Isaiah 40:13)

'Or who has first given to him and it shall be repaid to him?' (Job 41:11)

For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things. To him be the glory for ever, amen.

II - PRACTICAL ADVICE AND PERSONAL MATTERS

RELATIONS WITH OTHERS

MATURITY

Romans 12:1-2 - With eyes wide open to the mercies of God, I (Paul) beg you, my brothers, as an act of intelligent worship, to give him your bodies, as a living sacrifice, consecrated to him and acceptable by him. Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould, but let God re-mould your minds from within, so that you may prove in practice that the plan of God for you is good, meets all his demands and moves towards the goal of true maturity.

THE BODY OF CHRIST - THE CHURCH

Romans 12:3-8 - As your spiritual teacher I (Paul) give this piece of advice to each one of you. Don't cherish exaggerated ideas of yourself or your importance, but try to have a sane estimate of your capabilities by the light of the faith that God has given to you all. For just as you have many members in one physical body and those members differ in their functions, so we, though many in number, compose one body in Christ and are all members of one another. Through the grace of God we have different gifts. If our gift is preaching, let us preach to the limit of our vision. If it is serving others let us concentrate on our service; if it is teaching let us give all we have to our teaching; and if our gift be the stimulating of the faith of others let us set ourselves to it. Let the man who is called to give, give freely; let the man who wields authority think of his responsibility; and let the man who feels sympathy for his fellows act cheerfully.

LOVE - ITS PREEMINENCE, also INSINCERITY

Romans 12:9a - Let us have no imitation Christian love.

CHRISTIAN CONDUCT

Romans 12:9b - Let us have a genuine break with evil and a real devotion to good.

CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

Romans 12:10 - Let us have real warm affection for one another as between brothers, and a willingness to let the other man have the credit.

LAZINESS

Romans 12:11 - Let us not allow slackness to spoil our work and let us keep the fires of the spirit burning, as we do our work for God.

the HAPPY

Romans 12:12a - Base your happiness on your hope in Christ.

TRIALS OF LIFE

Romans 12:12b - When trials come endure them patiently ....

PRAYER

Romans 12:12c - .... steadfastly maintain the habit of prayer.

CHARITABLE GIVING, also HOSPITALITY

Romans 12:13 - Give freely to fellow-Christians in want, never grudging a meal or a bed to those who need them.

ENEMIES

Romans 12:14 - ... as for those who try to make your life a misery, bless them. Don't curse, bless.

the HAPPY

Romans 12:15a - Share the happiness of those who are happy,

the SORROWING

Romans 12:15b - Share .... the sorrow of those who are sad.

CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

Romans 12:16a - Live in harmony with each other.

SNOBBERY

Romans 12:16b - Don't become snobbish but take a real interest in ordinary people.

CONCEIT

Romans 12:16c - Don't become set in your own opinions (... don't become conceited).

REVENGE

Romans 12:17a - Don't pay back a bad turn by a bad turn, to anyone. ....

WITNESSES TO CHRIST

Romans 12:17b - Don't say "it doesn't matter what people think", but see that your public behaviour is above criticism.

PEACEABLENESS

Romans 12:18 - As far as your responsibility goes, live at peace with everyone.

REVENGE

Romans 12:19 - Never take vengeance into your own hands, my dear friends: stand back and let God punish if he will. For it is written: 'Vengeance is mine. I will repay'.

ENEMIES

Romans 12:20-21 - ... these are God's words: 'Therefore if your enemy hungers, feed him; if he thirsts, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head'. Don't allow yourself to be overpowered with evil. Take the offensive - overpower evil by good!

RELATIONS WITH AUTHORITY

GOVERNMENT

Romans 13:1-7 - Every Christian ought to obey the civil authorities, for all legitimate authority is derived from God's authority, and the existing authority is appointed under God. To oppose authority then is to oppose God, and such opposition is bound to be punished.

The honest citizen has no need to fear the keepers of law and order, but the dishonest man will always be nervous of them. If you want to avoid this anxiety just lead a law-abiding life, and all that can come your way is a word of approval. The officer is God's servant for your protection. But if you are leading a wicked life you have reason to be alarmed. The "power of the law" which is vested in every legitimate

officer, is no empty phrase. He is, in fact, divinely appointed to inflict God's punishment upon evil-doers.

You should, therefore, obey the authorities, not simply because it is the safest, but because it is the right thing to do. It is right, too, for you to pay taxes for the civil authorities are appointed by God for the good purposes of public order and well-being. Give everyone his legitimate due, whether it be rates, or taxes, or reverence, or respect!

LOVE - ITS PREEMINENCE

Romans 13:8-10 - Keep out of debt altogether, except the perpetual debt of love which we owe to one another. The man who loves his neighbour has obeyed the whole Law in regard to his neighbour. For the commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, You shall not covet' and all other commandments are summed up in this one saying: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself'. Love hurts nobody: therefore love is the answer to the Law's commands.

CHRISTIAN CONDUCT

Romans 13:11-14 - Why all this stress on behaviour? Because, as I think you have realised, the present time is of the highest importance - it is time to wake up to reality. Every day brings God's salvation nearer. The night is nearly over, the day has almost dawned. Let us therefore fling away the things that men do in the dark, let us arm ourselves for the fight of the day! Let us live cleanly, as in the daylight, not in the "delights" of getting drunk or playing with sex, nor yet in quarrelling or jealousies. Let us be Christ's men from head to foot, and give no chances to the flesh to have its fling.

RELATIONS BETWEEN THE STRONG AND THE WEAK

DIFFERENCES OF OPINION

- Genuine differences of opinion exist between Christians on style of worship and buildings, music and liturgy, belief in spiritual gifts, forms of baptism, the importance of Mary the mother of Jesus, the place of saints in the Church, and many other such matters. All pale into

insignificance compared with what Christians do share in common - a belief in the Holy Trinity of God the Father, Jesus Christ the Son, and the Holy Spirit. These differences must not be used as an excuse for condemning each other:

Romans 14:1-23 - Welcome a man whose faith is weak, but not with the idea of arguing over his scruples. One man believes that he may eat anything, another man, without this strong conviction, is a vegetarian. The meat-eater should not despise the vegetarian, nor should the vegetarian condemn the meat-eater - they should reflect that God has accepted them both. After all, who are you to criticise the servant of somebody else, especially when that somebody else is God? It is to his own master that he gives, or fails to give, satisfactory service. And don't doubt that satisfaction, for God is well able to transform men into servants who are satisfactory.

People are different - make allowances

Again, one man thinks some days of more importance than others. Another man considers them all alike. Let every one be definite in his own convictions. If a man specially observes one particular day, he does so "to God". The man who eats, eats "to God", for he thanks God for the food. The man who fasts also does it "to God", for he thanks God for the benefits of fasting. The truth is that we neither live nor die as self-contained units. At every turn life links us to God, and when we die we come face to face with him. In life or death we are in the hands of God. Christ lived and died that he might be the Lord in both life and death.

Why, then, criticise your brother's actions, why try to make him look small? We shall all be judged one day, not by each other's standards or even our own, but by the standard of Christ. It is written: 'As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God'. It is to God alone that we have to answer for our actions.

This should be our attitude

Let us therefore stop turning critical eyes on one another. If we must be critical, let us be critical of our own conduct and see that we do

nothing to make a brother stumble or fall.

I am convinced, and I say this as in the presence of Christ himself, that nothing is intrinsically unholy. But none the less it is unholy to the man who thinks it is. If your habit of unrestricted diet seriously upsets your brother, you are no longer living in love towards him. And surely you wouldn't let food mean ruin to a man for whom Christ died. You mustn’t let something that is all right for you look like an evil practice to somebody else. After all, the kingdom of Heaven is not a matter of whether you get what you like to eat and drink, but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. If you put these things first in serving Christ you will please God and are not likely to offend men. So let us concentrate on the things which make for harmony, and on the growth of one another's character. Surely we shouldn't wish to undo God's work for the sake of a plate of meat!

I freely admit that all food is, in itself. harmless, but it can be harmful to the man who eats it with a guilty conscience. We should be willing to be both vegetarians and teetotallers if by doing otherwise we should impede a brother's progress in faith. Your personal convictions are a matter of faith between yourself and God, and you are happy if you have no qualms about what you allow yourself to eat. Yet if a man eats meat with an uneasy conscience about it, you may be sure he is wrong to do so. For his action does not spring from his faith, and when we act apart from our faith we sin.

CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

Romans 15:1-3 - We who have strong faith ought to shoulder the burden of the doubts and qualms of others and not just to go our own sweet way. Our actions should mean the good of others - should help them to build up their characters. For even Christ did not choose his own pleasure, but as it is written: "The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me."

the HOLY BIBLE

Romans 15:4 - ... all those words which were written long ago (in the Old Testament) are meant to teach us today; that when we read in the scriptures of the endurance of men and of all the help that God

gave them in those days, we may be encouraged to go on hoping in our own time.

CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

Romans 15: 5-7 - May the God who inspires men to endure, and gives them a Father's care, give you a mind united towards one another because of your common loyalty to Jesus Christ. And then, as one man, you will sing from the heart the praises of God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. So open your hearts to one another as Christ has opened his heart to you, and God will be glorified.

CHRIST IS THE UNIVERSAL SAVIOUR OF JEWS AND GENTILES

Romans 15:8-13 - Christ was made a servant of the Jews to prove God's trustworthiness, since he personally implemented the promises made long ago to the fathers, and also that the Gentiles might bring glory to God for his mercy to them. It is written:

'For this reason I will confess to you among the Gentiles, and sing to your name' (2 Samuel 22:50; Psalm 18:49).

And again:

'Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people!' (Deuteronomy 32:43)

And yet again:

'Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles! Laud him, all you peoples!' (Psalm 117:1)

And then Isaiah says:

'There shall be a root of Jesse; and he who shall rise to reign over the Gentiles, in him the Gentiles shall hope' (Isaiah 11:10).

May the God of hope fill you with joy and peace in your faith, that by the power of the Holy Spirit, your whole life and outlook may be radiant with hope.

PAUL'S HOPES AND PLANS

HIS REASON FOR WRITING SO BOLDLY TO THE CHRISTIANS IN ROME

Romans 15:14-16 - For myself I feel certain that you, my brothers, have real Christian character and experience, and that you are capable of keeping each other on the right road. Nevertheless I have written to you with a certain frankness, to refresh your minds with truths that you already know, by virtue of my commission as Christ's minister to the Gentiles in the service of the Gospel. For my constant endeavour is to present the Gentiles to God as an offering which he can accept, because they are sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

HE WANTS TO PREACH THE GOSPEL WHEREVER CHRIST IS UNKNOWN

Romans 15:17-22 - And I think I have something to be proud of (through Christ, of course) in my work for God. I am not competent to speak of the work Christ has done through others, but I do know that through me he has secured the obedience of Gentiles in word and deed, working by sign and miracle and all the power of the Spirit. I have fully preached the Gospel from Jerusalem and the surrounding country as far as Illyricum (or Dalmatia, sometime during his visit to Achaia). My constant ambition has been to preach the Gospel where the name of Christ was previously unknown, and to avoid as far as possible building on another man's foundations, so that:

'To whom he was not announced, they shall see; and those who have not heard shall understand' (Isaiah 52:15).

My future plans

Perhaps this will explain why I have so frequently been prevented from coming to see you (... the Christians of Rome who already know Christ).

PAUL HOPES TO VISIT ROME ON HIS WAY TO SPAIN ...

Romans 15:23-24 - But now, since my work in these places (the eastern part of the Roman Empire - Illyricum, Greece, Asia Minor, Cyprus and Syria) no longer needs my presence, and since for many years I have had a great desire to see you, I hope to visit you on my way to Spain (a visit not made, unless undertaken in c AD64-67 after Paul's release from his first Roman imprisonment). I hope also that

you will speed me in my journey, after I have had the satisfaction of seeing you all.

.... FIRST HE MUST FIRST RETURN TO JERUSALEM WITH GIFTS FOR THE CHURCH

Romans 15:25-29 - At the moment my next call (after leaving Corinth) is to Jerusalem (Acts 21:17, his last visit before his arrest), to look after the welfare of the Christians there. The churches in Macedonia and Achaia, you see, have thought it a good thing to make a contribution towards the poor Christians in Jerusalem ....

- The collection arrangements in Corinth are described in 1 Corinthians 16:1-4; the generosity of the Macedonians in 2 Corinthians 8:1-4; and the approaching departure from Corinth in Acts 20:3-4 -

.... They have thought it a good thing to make this gesture and yet, really, they received "a good thing" from them first! For if the Gentiles have had a share in the Jews' spiritual "good things" it is only fair that they should look after the Jews (in Jerusalem) as far as the good things of this world are concerned.

When I have completed this task, then, and turned their gesture into a good deed done, I shall come to you en route for Spain. I feel sure that in this long-looked-for visit I shall bring with me the full blessing of Christ's Gospel.

PAUL ASKS THEM TO PRAY FOR HIS SAFETY DURING HIS COMING JOURNEYS

Romans 15:30-33 - Now, my brothers, I am going to ask you, for the sake of Christ himself and for the love we bear each other in the Spirit, to stand behind me in earnest prayer to God on my behalf - that I may not fall into the hands of the unbelievers in Judea, and that the Jerusalem Christians may receive the gift I am taking to them in the spirit in which it was made. Then I shall come to you (in Rome), in the purpose of God, with a happy heart, and may even enjoy with you a little holiday.

The God of peace be with you all, amen.

AN INTRODUCTION AND GREETINGS; A WARNING AND A BLESSING

HE INTRODUCES PHOEBE WHO IS PROBABLY CARRYING PAUL'S LETTER TO ROME

Romans 16:1-2 - I want this letter to introduce to you Phoebe, our sister, a deaconess of the Church at Cenchrea (one of the two ports of Corinth where this letter is believed to have been written). Please give her a Christian welcome, and any assistance with her work that she may need. She has herself been of great assistance to many, not excluding myself.

Phoebe - Another important woman in the life of the early Church. A deaconess and contributor to the church, she probably carried this Letter to the Romans, one of the most valuable ever written (according to Martin Luther and many other Christians) the 800 miles by sea to Rome.

PAUL GREETS THE CHRISTIANS OF ROME MANY BY NAME

The Christians of Rome - Apart from Priscilla & Aquila, and possibly Rufus, little is known from the New Testament about any of the others listed in Romans. However:

(1) Many were slaves, and others possibly members of the elite. Narcissus was a man's surname; his household would include his slaves;

(2) Kinsmen Andronicus, Junias (or Junia) and Herodion were Jewish Christians;

(3) Eight or nine are women - Priscilla, Mary, Junia? Tryphena and Tryphosa (sisters?), Persis, the mother of Rufus, Julia, and the sister of Nereus;

(4) Many were probably martyred including Amplias, Urbanus, Stachys, Aristobulus, Herodion, Tryphena and Tryphosa, Rufus, Asyncritus, Phlegon, Patrobas, Hermas, and Philologus:

Romans 16:3-16 - Shake hands for me with Priscilla and Aquila (now back in Rome). They have not only worked with me for Christ, but they have faced death for my sake, Not only I, but all the Gentile churches, owe them a great debt. Give my love to the little church that meets in their house.

Shake the hand of dear Epaenetus (Epenetus), Achaia's first man to be won for Christ, and of course greet Mary who has worked so hard for you. A handshake too for Andronicus and Junias (or Junia, a woman) my kinsmen and fellow-prisoners; they are outstanding men among the messengers and were Christians before I was.

Another warm greeting for Amplias (or Ampliatus), dear Christian that he is, and also for Urbanus, who has worked with me, and dear old Stachys, too.

More greeting from me, please, to:

Apelles, the man who has proved his faith,

The household of Aristobulus,

Herodion, my kinsman,

Narcissus' household, who are Christians.

Remember me to Tryphena and Tryphosa, who work so hard for the Lord, and to my dear Persis who has also done great work for him.

Shake the hand of Rufus for me - that splendid Christian ....

Rufus - He may be the same Rufus as the son of Simon of Cyrene who carried the cross of Jesus to Calvary some 25 years earlier (Mark 15:21) -

.... and greet his mother, who has been a mother to me too. Greetings to Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas and their Christian group: also to Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas and the Christians who are with them.

Give each other a hearty handshake all round for my sake. The greetings of all the churches I am in touch with come to you with this letter.

HE WARNS THEM ABOUT FALSE TEACHERS AND TROUBLE-MAKERS

Romans 16:17-20 - And now I implore you, my brother, to keep a watchful eye on those who cause trouble and make difficulties among you, in plain opposition to the teaching you have been given, and steer clear of them. Such men do not really serve our Lord Jesus Christ at all but are utterly self-centred. Yet with their plausible and attractive arguments they deceive those who are too simple-hearted to see through them.

Your loyalty to the principles of the Gospel is known everywhere, and that gives me great joy. I want to see you experts in good, and not even beginners in evil. It will not be long before the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

GREETINGS FROM SOME OF THE CHRISTIANS IN CORINTH

Romans 16:21-24 - Timothy, who works with me, sends his greetings, and so do Lucius ....

Lucius - A fellow Jewish Christian. This is the second Lucius in the New Testament. Some ten years earlier, in Acts 13:1, Luke lists a Lucius from Cyrene as one of the leaders of the church in Syrian Antioch. These could be the same man:

....and Jason ....

Jason - A second Jewish Christian. Another Jason has already appeared - Paul's host during his troublesome stay in Thessalonica when Jason's house was actually attacked (Acts 17:5). This may be the same man, now in Corinth:

.... and Sosipater my fellow-countrymen. ....

Sosipater - The third Jewish Christian in this list, probably from Corinth. Shortly, in Acts 20:4, a Sopater of Berea is one of Paul's companions on his return journey from Greece (Corinth) to Jerusalem. Sosipater and Sopater may be the same man:

.... (Paul has just told me that I, Tertius, who have been taking down this epistle from his dictation, may send you my Christian greetings too.) ....

Tertius - The scribe or secretary who wrote down Paul's dictation.

Interesting research suggests the original manuscript scroll of Romans was 12 feet (3.6m) long, and took some 12 hours for Paul to dictate. In the unhurried case of the Letter to the Romans, this would have been over a period of days, with frequent interruptions and possibly suggestions and comments from some of those present:

.... Gaius, my host (and the host as a matter of fact of the whole church here), sends you his greetings. Erastus, our town clerk, ...

Erastus - Possibly the same man Paul sent from Ephesus to Macedonia in c AD56/57 (Acts 19:22). Then ten years later as Paul awaits execution in Rome, he tells Matthew that Erastus is staying on at Corinth (2 Timothy 4:20):

.... and Quartus, another Christian brother, send greetings too.

A FINAL BLESSING

Romans 16:25-27 - Now to him who is able to set you on your feet as his own sons - according to my Gospel, according to the preaching of Jesus Christ himself, and in accordance with the disclosing of that secret purpose which, after long ages of silence, has now been made known (in full agreement with the writings of the prophets long ago), by the command of the everlasting God to all the Gentiles, that they might turn to him in the obedience of faith - to him, I say, the only God who is wise, be glory for ever through Jesus Christ!

PAUL

PAUL'S FIRST LETTER TO THE CORINTHIANS

With people, places, definitions, map .....

Writer: The apostle Paul

Date: c AD56-57 during Paul's Third Missionary Journey

Where written: Ephesus in modern western Turkey, during his nearly 3 year stay there

Readers: The largely Gentile church established at Corinth, a major commerce centre and capital of Achaia, when Paul stayed there for 18 months during his Second Missionary Journey (Acts 18:11)

Why: Paul is aware from a number of sources, including letters and visitors from Corinth, that the church has serious problems with false teachers and trying to live the Christian life in a liberal and pagan city. In this letter, and perhaps with limited knowledge of the real situation, he deals guardedly with the issue of false teachers (2 Corinthians is far more direct). However he does not hesitate to tackle problems of sexual immorality, lawsuits, the Lord's Supper, and resurrection, while also answering the Corinthians questions about marriage, eating and socialising between Jews and Gentile Christians, and spiritual gifts and worship. This Letter includes Paul's famous chapter 13 on love.

According to Some Modern Scholarship: The First and Second Letters to the Corinthians could be part of a series of four or more letters sent by Paul to Corinth as the church's problems were first identified and then resolved - all at heavy emotional cost to Paul and no doubt the Christians of Corinth. At an earlier stage in this saga, Paul may have made a short, unrecorded visit from Ephesus across to Corinth.

The four letters could be:

(1) A letter, now lost but referred to in 1 Corinthians 5:9, warning against relationships with sinners and the sexually immoral. Parts of this "lost" letter might have been preserved in 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 and 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1;

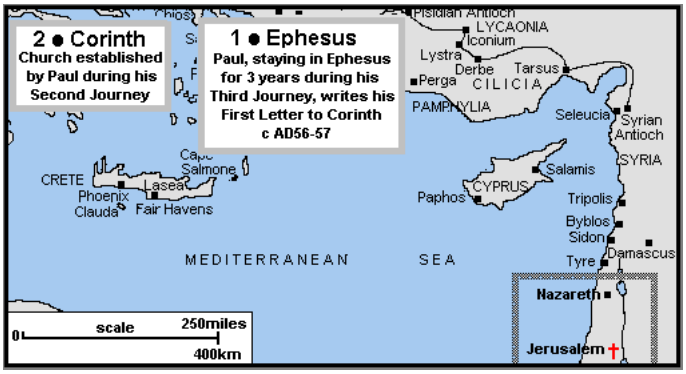
(2) Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians here. This addresses specific questions raised in a letter sent from Corinth, and even more serious issues reported to Paul by visitors from Corinth;

(3) A "stern" letter, referred to in 2 Corinthians 2:3 and 7:12 which deals with the problem of false teachers who are attacking Paul. This is possibly preserved in part as 2 Corinthians 10:1-13:10; and

(4) A "glad" letter that is mainly the first part of the Second Letter to the Corinthians, chapters 1 to 9, plus 13:11-14. In this, Paul appears to be reconciled with the church following the return of Titus from Corinth with a positive report, 2 Corinthians 7:6)

Map - Paul Writes his First Letter to the Corinthians

Map Key: Letter sent from 1 to 2



GREETINGS AND THANKSGIVING

GREETINGS TO THE CHURCH IN CORINTH

1 Corinthians 1:1-3 - Paul, commissioned by the will of God as a messenger of Jesus Christ, and Sosthenes, a Christian brother, ...

Sosthenes - He could be the same Sosthenes as the synagogue leader in Corinth some five years earlier (Acts 18:17). Although that Sosthenes accused Paul of "perverting men's minds", and had been beaten up because of him, he could well have become a Christian and Paul's secretary -

... to the church of God at Corinth - to those whom Christ has made holy, who are called to be God's men and women, to all true believers in Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours - grace and peace be to you from God the Father and the Lord, Jesus Christ!

PAUL GIVES THANKS FOR THEIR CHRISTIAN STRENGTHS

I am thankful for your faith

1 Corinthians 1:4-9 - I am always thankful to God for what the gift of his grace in Jesus Christ has meant to you - how, as the Christian message has become established among you, he has enriched your whole lives, from the words on your lips to the understanding in your hearts. And you have been eager to receive his gifts during this time of waiting for his final appearance. He will keep you steadfast in the faith to the end, so that when his day comes you need fear no condemnation. God is utterly dependable, and it is he who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ, our Lord.

I - MAJOR FAULTS CONDEMNED

SERIOUS DIVISIONS IN THE CHURCH

THE FIRST REFERENCE TO THE DIVISIONS IN THE CHURCH

1 Corinthians 1:10-12 - Now I do beg you, my brothers, by all that Christ means to you, to speak with one voice, and not allow yourselves to be split up into parties. All together you should be achieving a unity in thought and judgment. For I know, from what some of Chloe's people have told me ....

Chloe's people - Presumably members - freemen or slaves - of the household of the unknown Chloe from Corinth. They must have visited Ephesus and told Paul about some of the church's difficulties; difficulties now confirmed verbally and in writing following the arrival of Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus, 1 Corinthians 16:17 -

.... that you (the Christians of Corinth) are each making different claims - "I am one of Paul's men," says one; "I am one of Apollos' (the eloquent Jewish Christian from Alexandria, Acts 18:24-28)," says another; or "I am one of Cephas' (the apostle Peter)"; while someone else says, "I owe my faith to Christ alone."

BE UNITED IN THE GOSPEL OF THE CRUCIFIED CHRIST; PAUL'S ROLE IN FOUNDING THE CHURCH

1 Corinthians 1:13-17 - What are you saying? Is there more than one Christ? Was it Paul who died on the cross for you? Were you baptised in the name of Paul?

It makes me thankful that I didn't actually baptise any of you (except Crispus and Gaius), or perhaps someone would be saying I did it in my own name. (Oh yes, I did baptise Stephanas' family, but I can't remember anyone else.) ....

Crispus - He is identified in Acts 18:8 as the synagogue leader in Corinth;

Gaius - One of up to five men with this name, all of whom have been introduced;

Stephanas - He was a founder-member of the Corinthian church in c AD52, and Fortunatus & Achaicus (introduced later in 1 Corinthians 16:17) may have been part of his household. These three have travelled to Ephesus, possibly carrying with them a letter from the church in Corinth, to which Paul is now replying.

The manner in which Paul suddenly remembers he baptised Stephanas' family 5 years earlier, suggests Stephanas was present during Paul's dictation, and jogged his memory - "don't forget my family!".

.... For Christ did not send me to see how many I could baptise, but to proclaim the Gospel. And I have not done this by the persuasiveness of clever words, for I have no desire to rob the cross of its power.

CHRIST CRUCIFIED IS MADNESS IN THE WORLD'S EYES; TO THOSE WHO ARE SAVED IT IS THE WISDOM OF GOD

1 Corinthians 1:18-25 - The preaching of the cross is, I know, nonsense to those who are involved in this dying world, but to us who are being saved from that death it is nothing less than the power of God.

The cross shows that God's wisdom is not man's wisdom by any means

It is written:

'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent' (Isaiah 29:14).

For consider, what have the philosopher, the writer and the critic of this world to show for all their wisdom? Has not God made the wisdom of this world look foolish? for it was after the world in its wisdom failed to know God, that he in his wisdom chose to save all who would believe by the "simple-mindedness" of the Gospel message. For the Jews ask for miraculous proofs and the Greeks an intellectual panacea, but all we preach is Christ crucified - a stumbling block to the Jews and sheer nonsense to the Gentiles, but for those who are called, whether Jews or Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. And this is really only natural, for God's foolishness" is wiser than men, and his "weakness" is stronger than men.

MANY OF THE CHOSEN ARE THE WEAK AND DESPISED; THE UNIMPORTANCE OF MOST OF THE CORINTHIANS IN WORLDLY TERMS

1 Corinthians 1:26-31 - For look at your own calling as Christians (mostly from humble backgrounds), my brothers. You don't see among you many of the wise (according to this world's judgment) nor many of the ruling class, nor many from the noblest families. But God has chosen what the world calls foolish to shame the wise; he has chosen what the world calls weak to shame the strong. He has chosen things of little strength and small repute, yes and even things which have no real existence to explode the pretensions of the things that are - that no man may boast in the presence of God. Yet from this same God you have received your standing in Jesus Christ, and he has become for us the true wisdom, a matter, in practice, of being made righteous and holy, in fact, of being redeemed. And this makes us see the truth of scripture:

'He who glories, let him glory in the Lord (Jeremiah 9:24).

PAUL'S PREACHING WAS NOT ELOQUENT BUT IN WEAKNESS TO SHOW GOD'S POWER; HE PREACHED NOTHING BUT THE DEATH OF JESUS ON THE CROSS

1 Corinthians 2:1-5 - In the same way, my brothers, when I came to proclaim to you God's secret purpose (in Corinth, Acts 18:1-18), I did not come equipped with any brilliance of speech or intellect. You may as well know now that it was my secret determination to concentrate entirely on Jesus Christ and the fact of his death upon the cross. As a matter of fact, in myself I was feeling far from strong; I was nervous and rather shaky (probably the result of Paul's treatment in Macedonia and his lack of success in Athens before arriving in Corinth, Acts 16 and 17. He might also have been ill). What I said and preached had none of the attractiveness of the clever mind, but it was a demonstration of the power of the Spirit! Plainly God's purpose was that your faith should not rest upon man's cleverness but upon the power of God.

THE GOSPEL IS NOT EARTHLY WISDOM BUT THE HIDDEN WISDOM OF GOD

1 Corinthians 2:6-8 - We do, of course, speak "wisdom" among those who are spiritually mature, but it is not what is called wisdom by this world, nor by the powers-that-be, who soon will be only the powers that have been. The wisdom we speak of is that mysterious secret wisdom of God which he planned before the creation for our glory today. None of the powers of this world have known this wisdom - if they had they would never have crucified the Lord of glory!

ONLY GOD'S CHOSEN PEOPLE CAN UNDERSTAND THIS MYSTERY; THE WORLD CAN NOT

1 Corinthians 2:9-10a - But as it is written:

'Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love him' (Isaiah 64:4).

But God has, through the Spirit, let us share his secret.

GOD'S SPIRIT, GIVING US THE MIND OF CHRIST GRANTS US THIS UNDERSTANDING

1 Corinthians 2:10b-16 - For nothing is hidden from the Spirit, not even the deep wisdom of God. For who could really understand a man's inmost thoughts except the spirit of the man himself? How much less could anyone understand the thoughts of God except the very Spirit of God? And the marvellous thing is this, that we now receive not the spirit of the world but the Spirit of God himself, so that we can actually understand something of God's generosity towards us.

This wisdom is only understood by the spiritual

It is these things that we talk about, not using the expressions of the human intellect but those which the Holy Spirit teaches us, explaining things to those who are spiritual.

But the unspiritual man simply cannot accept the matters which the Spirit deals with - they just don't make sense to him, for, after all, you must be spiritual to see spiritual things. The spiritual man, on the other hand, has an insight into the meaning of everything, though his insight may baffle the man of the world. This is because the former is sharing in God's wisdom, and

'Who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him?' (Isaiah 40:13)

Incredible as it may sound, we who are spiritual have the very thoughts of Christ!

THEY ARE STILL IMMATURE CHRISTIANS; THEIR DIVISIONS COME FROM EARTHLY JEALOUSY AND QUARRELLING

1 Corinthians 3:1-4 - I, my brothers, was unable to talk to you as spiritual men: I had to talk to you as unspiritual, as yet babies in the Christian life, And my practice had been to feed you, as it were, with "milk" and not with "meat". You were unable to digest "meat" in those days, and I don't believe you can do it now. For you are still unspiritual; all the time that there is jealousy and squabbling among you you show that you are - you are living just like men of the world. While one of you says, "I am one of Paul's converts" and another says, "I am one of Apollos'", are you not plainly unspiritual?

THOSE WHO PREACH THE GOSPEL ARE NOT IMPORTANT; THEY ARE MERELY GOD'S SERVANTS

1 Corinthians 3:5-9 - After all, who is Paul? Who is Apollos? No more than servants through whom you came to believe as the Lord gave each man his opportunity. I may have done the planting and Apollos the watering, but it was God who made the seed grow! The planter and the waterer are nothing compared with him who gives life to the seed. Planter and waterer are alike insignificant, though each shall be rewarded according to his particular work.

We work on God's foundation

In this work, we work with God, and that means that you are a field under God's cultivation, or, of you like, a house being built to his plan.

YOU CAN ONLY BE BUILT UP ON THE FOUNDATION THAT IS CHRIST; ANY OTHER WAY WILL FAIL

1 Corinthians 3:10-15 - I, like an architect who knows his job, by the grace God has given me, lay the foundation; someone else builds upon it. I only say this, let the builder be careful how he builds! The foundation is laid already, and no one can lay another, for it is Jesus Christ himself. But any man who builds on the foundation using as his material gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay or stubble, must know that each man's work will one day be shown for what it is. The day will show it plainly enough, for the day will arise in a blaze of fire, and that fire will prove the nature of each man's work. If the work that the man has built upon the foundation will stand this test, he will be rewarded. But if a man's work be

destroyed under the test, he loses it all. He personally will be safe, though rather like a man rescued from a fire.

EVERY CHRISTIAN IS GOD'S HOLY TEMPLE AND HOME TO HIS HOLY SPIRIT

1 Corinthians 3:16-17 - Don't you realise that you yourselves are the temple of God, and God's Spirit lives in you? God will destroy anyone who defiles his temple, for his temple is holy - and that is exactly what you are!

BECOME A GODLY FOOL, NOT WORLDLY WISE; IN GOD THROUGH CHRIST, YOU HAVE EVERYTHING

1 Corinthians 3:18-23 - Let no one be under any illusion over this. If any man among you thinks himself one of the world's clever ones, let him discard his cleverness that he may learn to be truly wise. For this world's cleverness is stupidity to God. It is written:

'He catches the wise in their own craftiness' (Job 5:13).

And again:

'The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile' (Psalm 94:11).

So let no one boast of men. Everything belongs to you! Paul, Apollos or Cephas; the world, life, death, the present or the future, everything is yours! For you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God!

CHRISTIAN TEACHERS ARE SERVANTS OF CHRIST, JUDGED ONLY BY GOD

1 Corinthians 4:1-5 - You should look upon us as ministers of Christ, as trustees of the secrets of God. And it is a prime requisite in a trustee that he should prove worthy of his trust. But, as a matter of fact, it matters very little to me what you, or any man, thinks of me - I don't even value my opinion of myself - but that doesn't justify me before God. My only true judge is God himself.

The moral of this is that we should make no hasty or premature judgments. When the Lord comes he will bring into the light of day all that at present is hidden in darkness, and he will expose the secret motives of men's hearts. Then shall God himself give each man his share of praise.

APPLY THIS CRITERIA TO YOUR OWN TEACHERS

1 Corinthians 4:6-7 - I have used myself and Apollos above as an illustration, so that you might learn from what I have said about us not to assess man above his value in God's sight, and may thus avoid the friction that comes from exalting one teacher against another. For who makes you different from somebody else, and what have you got that was not given to you? And if anything has been given to you, why boast of it as if it were something you had achieved yourself?

PAUL'S HARD-HITTING COMPARISONS - THE APOSTLES ARE NOTHING; SOME OF THE CORINTHIANS THINK THEMSELVES EVERYTHING

1 Corinthians 4:8-13 - Oh, I know you are rich and flourishing! You've been living like kings, haven't you, while we've been away? I would to God you were really kings in God's sight so that we might reign with you!

I sometimes think that God means us, the messengers (or apostles), to appear last in the procession of mankind, like the men who are to die in the arena. For indeed we are made a public spectacle before the angels of Heaven and the eyes of men. We are looked upon as fools, for Christ's sake, but you are wise in the Christian faith. We are considered weak, but you have become strong: you have found honour, we little but contempt. Up to this very hour we are hungry and thirsty, ill-clad, knocked about and practically homeless. We still have to work for our living by manual labour. Men curse us, but we return a blessing: they make our lives miserable but we take it patiently. They ruin our reputations but we go on trying to win them for God. We are the world's rubbish, the scum of the earth, yes, up to this very day.

PAUL CALLS THEM BACK TO THE GOSPEL; TIMOTHY WILL HELP THEM WHEN HE ARRIVES

1 Corinthians 4:14-17 - I don't write these things merely to make you feel uncomfortable, but that you may realise facts, as my dear children. After all, you may have had ten thousand teachers in Christian faith, but you cannot have many fathers! For in Jesus Christ I am your spiritual father through the

Gospel; that is why I implore you to follow the footsteps of me your father. I have sent Timothy(who has already left Ephesus for Macedonia, Acts 19:22, presumably on his way to Corinth) to you to help you in this. For he himself is my much-loved and faithful son in the Lord, and he will remind you of those ways of living in Christ which I teach in every church to which I go.

WHEN PAUL ARRIVES HE WILL TAKE WHATEVER ACTION IS NECESSARY

1 Corinthians 4:18-21 - Some of you have apparently grown conceited enough to think that I should not visit you. But please God it will not be long before I do come in person. Then I shall be able to see what power, apart from their words, these pretentious ones among you really possess. For the kingdom of God is not a matter of a spate of word but of the power of Christian living.

Now it's up to you to choose! Shall I come to you ready to chastise you, or in love and gentleness?

SEXUAL IMMORALITY

THE CURSE OF SEXUAL IMMORALITY IN THEIR MIDST; IT MUST BE DEALT WITH

1 Corinthians 5:1-8 - It is actually reported (probably by the three visitors from Corinth) that there is sexual immorality among you, and immorality of a kind that even pagans condemn - a(n immoral) man has apparently taken his father's wife! Are you still proud of your church? Shouldn't you be overwhelmed with sorrow and shame? The man who has done such a thing should certainly be expelled from your fellowship!

The "immoral man" - In his Second Letter to the Corinthians 2:5, Paul recommends that the repentant man should be received back into the church in love -

I know I am not with you physically but I am with you in spirit, and I assure you as solemnly as if I were actually present before your assembly that I have already pronounced judgment in the name of the Lord Jesus on the man who has done this thing, and I do this with full divine authority. My judgment is this: that the man should be left to the mercy of Satan so that while his body will experience the destructive powers of sin his spirit may yet be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

Your pride in your church is lamentably out of place. Don't you know how a little yeast can permeate the whole lump? Clear out every bit of the old yeast that you may be new unleavened bread! We Christians have had a Passover lamb sacrificed for us - none other than Christ himself! So let us "keep the feast" with no trace of the yeast of the old life, nor the yeast of vice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of unadulterated truth!

PAUL HAS ALREADY TOLD THEM TO AVOID IMMORAL CHRISTIANS; GOD WILL DEAL WITH THE NON-CHRISTIANS

1 Corinthians 5:9-13 - In my previous letter ....

- according to many commentators, this is the "Lost" Letter to the Corinthians warning them about relations with sinners and the sexually immoral. It may be preserved in part in 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 and 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1

... I said, "Don't mix with the immoral." I didn't mean, of course, that you were to have no contact at all with the immoral of this world, nor with any cheats or thieves or idolaters - for that would mean going out of the world altogether! But in this letter I tell you not to associate with any professing Christian who is known to be an impure man or a swindler, an idolater, a man with a foul tongue, a drunkard or a thief. My instruction is: "Don't even eat with such a man." Those outside the church it is not my business to judge. but surely it is your business to judge those who are inside the church - God alone can judge those who are outside. It is your plain duty to

'put away from yourselves that wicked person' (Deuteronomy 17:7; 19:19; 21:21; 22:21,24; 24:7).

TAKING CHRISTIANS TO COURT

CAN'T THEY DEAL WITH THEIR OWN DISPUTES? WHY GO TO PAGAN LAW?

1 Corinthians 6:1-8 - When any of you has a grievance against another, aren't you ashamed to bring the matter to be settled before a pagan court instead of before the church? Don't you know that

Christians will one day judge the world? And if you are to judge the world do you consider yourselves incapable of settling such infinitely smaller matters? Don't you also know that we shall judge the very angels themselves - how much more then matters of this world only! In any case, if you find you have to judge matters of this world, why choose as judges those who count for nothing in the church? I say this deliberately to rouse your sense of shame. Are you really unable to find among your number one man with enough sense to decide a dispute between one and another of you, or must one brother resort to law against another and that before those who have no faith in Christ! It is surely obvious that something must be seriously wrong in your church for you to be having lawsuits at all. Why not let yourself be wronged or cheated? For when you go to law against your brother you yourself do him wrong, for you cheat him of Christian love and forgiveness.

THE PREVIOUS CONDITION OF MANY OF THEM

1 Corinthians 6:9-11 - Have you forgotten that the kingdom of God will never belong to the wicked? Don't be under any illusion - neither the impure, the idolater or the adulterer; neither the effeminate, the pervert or the thief; neither the swindler, the drunkard, the foul-mouthed or the rapacious shall have any share in the kingdom of God. And such men, remember, were some of you! But you have cleansed yourselves from all that, you have been made whole in spirit, you have been justified before God in the name of the Lord Jesus and in his very Spirit.

GENERAL IMMORALITY

CHRISTIAN FREEDOM; SEXUAL IMMORALITY

- Possibly a fragment of the "Lost" Letter referred to in 1 Corinthians 5:9:

1 Corinthians 6:12-20 - As a Christian I may do anything, but that does not mean that everything is good for me. I may do everything, but I must not be a slave of anything. Food was meant for the stomach and the stomach for food; but God has no permanent purpose for either. But you cannot say that our physical body was made for sexual promiscuity; it was made for God, and God is the answer to our deepest longings. The God who raised the Lord (Jesus) from the dead will also raise us mortal men by his power. Have you realised the almost incredible fact that your bodies are integral parts of Christ himself? Am I then to take parts of Christ and join them to a prostitute? Never! Don't you realise that when a man joins himself to a prostitute he makes with her a physical unity? For God says, 'the two shall be one flesh'. On the other hand the man who joins himself to God is one with him in spirit.

Avoid sexual looseness like the plague! Every other sin that a man commits is done outside his own body, but this is an offence against his own body. Have you forgotten that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you, and that you are not the owner of your own body? You have been bought, and at what a price! Therefore bring glory to God both in your body and your spirit, for they both belong to him.

II - ANSWERS TO SPECIFIC QUESTIONS FROM CORINTH

THE MATTER OF MARRIAGE

PAUL REFERS TO THEIR QUESTIONS ABOUT CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

1 Corinthians 7:1-2 - Now let me (Paul) deal with the questions raised in your letter (carried from Corinth to Ephesus by Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus who are listed in 1 Corinthians 16:17 - 21.37 following). It is a good principle for a man to have no physical contact with women. Nevertheless, because casual liaisons are so prevalent, let every man have his own wife and every woman her own husband.

PAUL'S ADVICE ON MARRIAGE

1 Corinthians 7:3-16 - The husband should give his wife what is due to her as his wife, and the wife should be as fair to her husband. The wife has no longer full rights over her own person, but shares them with her husband. In the same way the husband shares his personal rights with his wife. Do not cheat each other of normal sexual intercourse, unless of course you both decide to abstain temporarily to make special opportunity for fasting and prayer. But afterwards you should resume relations as before, or you will expose yourselves to the obvious temptation of the devil.

I give the advice above more as a concession than as a command. I wish that all men were like myself (Paul's unmarried and celibate life dedicated to God and the Gospel), but I realise that everyone has his own particular gift from God, some one thing and some another. Yet to those who are unmarried or widowed, I say definitely that it is a good thing to remain unattached, as I am. But if they find they have not the gift of self-control in such matters, by all means let them get married. I think it is far better for them to be married than to be tortured by unsatisfied desire.

To those who are already married my command, or rather, the Lord's command, is that the wife should not leave her husband. But if she is separated from him she should either remain unattached or else be reconciled to her husband. A husband is not, in similar circumstances, to divorce his wife.

Advice over marriage between Christian and pagan

To other people my advice (though this is not a divine command - it is Paul's own prayerful advice) is this. For a brother who has a non-Christian wife who is willing to live with him he should not divorce her. A wife in a similar position should not divorce her husband. For the unbelieving husband is, in a sense, consecrated by being joined to the person of his wife; the unbelieving wife is similarly "consecrated" by the Christian brother she has married. If this were not so then your children would bear the stains of paganism, whereas they are actually consecrated to God.

But if the unbelieving partner decides to separate, then let there be a separation. The Christian partner need not consider himself bound in such cases. Yet God has called us to live in peace, and after all how can you, who are a wife, know whether you will be able to save your husband or not? And the same applies to you who are a husband. .....

NEW CHRISTIANS

1 Corinthians 7:17-24 - ..... each man should live his life with the gifts that God has given him and in the condition in which God has called him. This is the rule I (Paul) lay down in all the churches.

For example, if a man was circumcised when God called him he should not attempt to remove the sign of his circumcision. If on the other hand he was uncircumcised he should not become circumcised. Being circumcised or not being circumcised, what do they matter? The great thing is to obey the orders of Almighty God. Everyone should stick to the calling in which he heard the call of God. Were you a slave when you heard the call? Don't let that worry you, though if you find an opportunity to become free you had better take it. But a slave who is called to life in Christ is set free in the eyes of God. And a man who was free when God called him becomes a slave - to Christ himself! You have been redeemed, at tremendous cost; don't therefore sell yourselves as slaves to men! My brothers, let every one of us continue to live his life with God in the state in which he was when he was called.

PAUL'S ADVICE ON MARRIAGE (continued)

1 Corinthians 7:25-40 - Now as far as young unmarried women are concerned, I must confess that I have no direct commands from the Lord. Nevertheless, I give you my considered opinion (again) as of one who is, I think, to be trusted after all his experience of God's mercy.

My opinion is this, that amid all the difficulties of the present time you would do best to remain just as you are. Are you married? Well, don't try to be separated. Are you unattached? Then don't try to get married. But if you, a man, should marry, don't think that you have done anything sinful. And the same applies to a young woman. Yet I believe that those who take this step are bound to find the married state an extra burden in these critical days, and I should like you to be as unencumbered as possible, All our futures are so foreshortened, indeed, that those who have wives should live, so to speak, as though they had none! There is no time to indulge in sorrow, no time for enjoying our joys; those who buy have no time to enjoy their possessions, and indeed their every contact with the world must be as light as possible, for the present scheme of things is rapidly passing away. That is why I should like you to be as free from worldly entanglements as possible. The unmarried man is free to concern himself with the Lord's affairs, and how he may please him. But the married man is sure to be concerned with matters of this world, that he may please his wife. You find the same differences in the case of the unmarried and the married woman. The unmarried concerns herself with the Lord's affairs, and her aim in life is to make herself holy, in body and in spirit. But the married woman must concern herself with the things of this world, and her aim will be to please her husband.

I tell you these things to help you; I am not putting difficulties in your path but setting before you an ideal, so that your service of God may be as far as possible free from worldly distractions.

But marriage is not wrong

But if any man feels he is not behaving honourably towards the woman he loves, especially as she is beginning to lose her first youth and the emotional strain is considerable, let him do what his heart tells him to do - let them be married, there is no sin in that. Yet for the man of steadfast purpose who is able to bear the strain and has his own desires well under control, if he decides not to marry the young woman, he too will be doing the right thing. Both of them are right, one in marrying and the other in refraining from marriage, but the latter has chosen the better of two right courses.

A woman is bound to her husband while he is alive, but if he dies she is free to marry whom she likes - but let her be guided by the Lord. In my opinion she would be happier to remain as she is, unmarried. And I think I am here expressing not only my opinion, but the will of the Spirit as well.

THE MATTER OF MEAT SACRIFICED TO IDOLS - RELATIONS WITH PAGANS AND CHRISTIAN FREEDOM

THEIR QUESTION ABOUT EATING MEAT OFFERED TO IDOLS IN PAGAN CEREMONIES

1 Corinthians 8:1a - Now to deal with the matter of meat which has been sacrificed to idols (... also raised in the recently delivered letter from Corinth).

MATURITY

1 Corinthians 8:1b-3 - It is not easy to think that we "know" over problems like this (meat sacrificed to idols), but we should remember that while knowledge may make a man look big, it is only love that can make him grow to his full stature. For whatever a man may know, he still has a lot to learn, but if he loves God, he is opening his whole life to the Spirit of God.

RESPONSIBILITY FOR OTHERS

1 Corinthians 8:4-13 - In this matter, then (Paul in response to a question from the Corinthians ....), of eating meat which has been offered to idols, knowledge tells us that no idol has any real existence, and that there is no God but one. For though there are so-called gods both in heaven and earth, gods and lords galore in fact, to us there is only one God, the Father, from whom everything comes, and for who we live. And there is one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom everything exists, and by whom we ourselves are alive. But this knowledge of ours is not shared by all men. For some (previously pagans), who until now have been used to idols, eat the meat as meat really sacrificed to a god, and their delicate conscience is thereby injured. Now our acceptance of God is not a matter of meat. If we eat it, that does not make us better men, nor are we the worse if we do not eat it. You must be careful that your freedom to eat meat does not in any way hinder anyone whose faith is not as robust as yours. For suppose you with your knowledge of God should be observed eating meat in an idol's temple, are you not encouraging the man with a delicate conscience to do the same? Surely you would not want your superior knowledge to bring spiritual disaster to a weaker brother for whom Christ died? And when you sin like this and damage the weak consciences of your brethren you really sin against Christ. This makes me determined that, if there is any possibility of meat injuring my brother, I will have none of it as long as I live, for fear I might do him harm.

PAUL'S DEFENCE OF HIS RIGHTS AS AN APOSTLE

1 Corinthians 9:1-14 - Is there any doubt that I am a genuine messenger (or apostle), any doubt that I am a free man? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord with my own eyes? Are not you yourselves samples of my work for the Lord? Even if other people should refuse to recognise my divine commission, yet to you at any rate I shall always be a true messenger, for you are a living proof of God's call to me. This is my real ground of defence to those who cross-examine me.

Aren't we allowed to eat and drink? May we not travel with a Christian wife like the other messengers (apostles), like other Christian brothers, and like Cephas (Peter)? Are Barnabas and I the only ones not allowed to leave their ordinary work to give time to the ministry?

Even a preacher of the Gospel has some rights

Just think for a moment. Does any soldier ever go to war at his own expense? Does any man plant a vineyard and have no share in its fruits? Does the shepherd who tends the flock never taste the milk? This is, I know, an argument from everyday life, but it is a principle endorsed by the Law. For is it not written in the Law of Moses:

'You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain' (Deuteronomy 25:4).

Now does this imply merely God's care for oxen, or does it include his care for us too? Surely we are included! You might even say that the words were written for us. For both the ploughman as he ploughs, and the thresher as he threshes should have some hope of an ultimate share in the harvest. If we have sown for you the seed of spiritual things need you be greatly perturbed because we reap some of your material things? And if there are others with the right to have these things from you, have not we an even greater right? Yet we have never exercised this right and have put up with all sorts of things, so that we might not hinder the spread of the Gospel.

I am entitled to a reward, yet I have not taken it

Are you ignorant of the fact that those (the Jewish priests) who minister sacred things take part of the sacred food of the Temple for their own use, and those who attend the altar have their share of what is placed on the altar? On the same principle the Lord has ordered that those who proclaim the Gospel should receive their livelihood from those who accept the Gospel.

YET PAUL RENOUNCED HIS RIGHTS; HIS REWARD IS TO PREACH THE GOSPEL IN ANY WAY HE CAN

1 Corinthians 9:15-23 - But I have never used any of these privileges, nor am I writing now to suggest that I should be given them. Indeed I would rather die than have anyone make this boast of mine an empty one!

My reward is to make the Gospel free to all men

For I take no special pride in the fact that I preach the Gospel. I feel compelled to do so; I should be utterly miserable if I failed to preach it. If I do this work because I choose to do so then I am entitled to a reward. But if it is no choice of mine, but a sacred responsibility put upon me, what can I expect in the way of reward? This, that when I preach the Gospel, I can make it absolutely free of charge, and need not claim what is my rightful due as a preacher. For though I am no man's slave, yet I have made myself everyone's slave, that I might win more men to Christ. To the Jews I was a Jew that I might win the Jews. To those who were under the Law I put myself in the position of being under the Law (although in fact I stand free of it), that I might win those who are under the Law. To those (the Gentiles) who had no Law I myself became like a man without the Law (even though in fact I cannot be a lawless man for I am bound by the law of Christ), so that I might win the men who have no Law. To the weak I became a weak man, that I might win the weak. I have, in short, been all things to all sorts of men that by every possible means I might win some to God. I do all this for the sake of the Gospel; I want to play my part in it properly.

PAUL'S STRICT AND DISCIPLINED LIFE AS AN EXAMPLE TO OTHERS

1 Corinthians 9:24-27 - Do you remember how, on a racing-track, every competitor runs, but only one wins the prize? Well, you ought to run with your minds fixed on winning the prize! Every competitor in athletic events goes into serious training. Athletes will take tremendous pains - for a fading crown of leaves. But our contest is for an eternal crown that will never fade.

I run the race then with determination. I am no shadow-boxer, I really fight! I am my body's sternest master, for fear that when I have preached to others I should myself be disqualified.

RELIGIOUS COMPLACENCY

1 Corinthians 10:1-12 - ... I should like to remind you, my brothers, that our ancestors (during the Exodus from Egypt) all had the experience of being guided by the cloud in the desert and of crossing the sea dry-shod. They were all, so to speak, "baptised" into Moses by these experiences. They all shared the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink (for they drank from the spiritual rock

which followed them, and that rock was Christ). Yet in spite of all these wonderful experiences many of them failed to please God, and left their bones in the desert. Now in these events our ancestors stand as examples to us, warning us not to crave after evil things as they did. Nor are you to worship false gods as they did. The scripture says - 'The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.'

Neither should we give way to sexual immorality as did some of them, for we read that twenty-three thousand fell in a single day! Nor should we dare to exploit the goodness of God as some of them did, and fell victims to poisonous snakes. Nor yet must you curse the lot that God has appointed to you as they did, and met their end at the hand of the angel of death.

Now these things which happened to our ancestors are illustrations of the way in which God works, and they were written down to be a warning to us who are the heirs of the ages which have gone before us.

So let the man who feels sure of his standing today be careful that he does not fall tomorrow.

TEMPTATION

1 Corinthians 10:13 - No temptation has come your way that is too hard for flesh and blood to bear. But God can be trusted not to allow you to suffer any temptation beyond your powers of endurance. He will see to it that every temptation has a way out, so that it will never be impossible for you to bear it.

YOU CANNOT ATTEND BOTH THE LORD'S SUPPER AND PAGAN SACRIFICES

1 Corinthians 10:14-22 - The lesson we must learn, my brothers, is at all costs to avoid worshipping a false god. I am speaking to you as intelligent men: think over what I am saying.

The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a very sharing in the blood of Christ? When we break the bread do we not actually share in the body of Christ? The very fact that we all share one bread makes us all one body. Look at the Jews of our own day. Isn't there a fellowship between all those who eat the altar sacrifices?

Now am I implying that a false god really exists, or that sacrifices made to any god have some value? Not at all! I say emphatically that Gentile sacrifices are made to evil powers and not to God at all. I don't want you to have any fellowship with such powers. You cannot drink both the cup of the Lord and the cup of devils. You cannot be a guest at the Lord's table and at the table of devils. Are we trying to arouse the wrath of God? Have we forgotten how completely we are in his hands?

FREEDOM AS CHRISTIANS

1 Corinthians 10:23-24 - ..... the Christian position is this: I may do anything, but everything is not useful. Yes, I may do anything but everything is not constructive. Let no man, then, set his own advantage as his objective, but rather the good of his neighbour.

FOOD

1 Corinthians 10:25-26 - You should eat whatever is sold in the meat-market without asking any of the questions of an over-scrupulous conscience, for 'The earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness'

RESPONSIBILITY FOR OTHERS

1 Corinthians 10:27-33 - If a pagan asks you to dinner and you want to go, feel free to eat whatever is set before you, without asking any questions through conscientious scruples. But if your host should say straight out, "This meat has been offered to an idol", then don't eat it, for his sake - I mean for the sake of conscience, not yours but his.

Now why should my freedom to eat be at the mercy of someone else's conscience? Or why should any evil be said of me when I have eaten meat with thankfulness, and have thanked God for it? Because, whatever you do, eating or drinking or anything else, everything should be done to bring glory to God.

Do nothing that might make men stumble, whether they are Jews or Greeks or members of the Church of God. I myself try to adapt myself to all men without considering my own advantage but their advantage, that if possible they may be saved.

PAUL ASKS THEM TO FOLLOW HIS EXAMPLE AND REMEMBER HIS TEACHING

1 Corinthians 11:1-2 - Copy me, my brothers, as I copy Christ himself.

I must give you credit for remembering what I taught you and adhering to the traditions I passed on to you.

CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

WOMEN

- Throughout history, and most of the world even now, women have been treated as inferiors to men and even their own male children, and no less so in the time of Jesus. Yet in the Gospels he has a remarkable relationship with all types of women, and although none were named apostles, many played important, even vital roles in his life and ministry, death and resurrection. For example, a few women were all who remained of his followers when he was crucified. It was to two women - both Mary's, to whom Jesus first appeared after his resurrection. And it was these two women who first reported his resurrection to his men disciples.

The other main source of information on the position of women in the early Church is Paul's letters. His position is somewhat confusing, but even at his strictest he was doing no more than follow established Jewish custom. Certainly he was not the woman-hater he is often accused of. Perhaps most remarkable is the importance he gives woman in his Letter to the Romans chapter 16 (see below), together with his obvious affection and respect for some of them.

Most contradictory is his First Letter to the Corinthians. In Chapter 11, although taking a strict stance on women at worship, he accepts, in verse 5, that they pray and preach or teach. Yet by chapter 14, verse 34, he is declaring that women must remain silent in church. There are no satisfactory answers to Paul's apparent contradictions. It is as though after millennia of women's inferiority, a few women gained near or even total equality in their relations with Jesus, and that Paul and perhaps other apostles sincerely practised this teaching:

"Gone is the distinction between .... male and female - you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Paul in his Letter to the Galatians 3:28.,

but under the pressures of existing male-dominated customs, they and the Christian Church soon succumbed to the ancient prejudices men of all races and religions hold even now.

The Church must surely follow Jesus in this matter, so vital to half the human race. The equality with which he treated women, together with Paul's obvious acceptance of their importance, must be taken into account in any debates on the role of women in the Christian Church. Such a stance also suggests that some parts of the Church should reconsider the respect and veneration owed to the Virgin Mary as the mother of Jesus:

1 Corinthians 11:3-16 - (Paul, talking about modesty in worship) .... I want you to know that Christ is the head of every individual man, just as a man is the "head" of the woman and God is the head of Christ. Thus it follows that if a man prays or preaches with his head covered, he is, symbolically, dishonouring him who is his real head. But in the case of a woman, if she prays or preaches (contrast with 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 following) with her head uncovered it is just as much a disgrace as if she had it closely shaved. For if a woman does not cover her head she might just as well have her hair cropped. And if to be cropped or closely shaven is a sign of disgrace to women (as it is with many peoples - for example, a punishment inflicted on French women who associated with Germans during the World War 2 occupation), then that is all the more reason for her to cover the head. A man ought not to cover his head, for he represents the very person and glory of God, while the woman reflects the person and glory of the man. For man does not exist because woman exists, but vice versa. Man was not created originally for the sake of woman, but woman was created for the sake of man. For this reason a woman ought to bear on her head an outward sign of man's authority for all the angels to see.

Of course, in the sight of God neither "man" nor "woman" has any separate existence. For if woman was made originally for man, no man is now born except by a woman, and both man and woman, like everything else, owe their existence to God. But use your own judgment, do you think it right and proper for a woman to pray to God bare-headed? Isn't there a natural principle here, that makes us feel that long hair is disgraceful to a man, but of glorious beauty to a woman? We feel this because the long hair is the cover provided by nature for the woman's head. But if anyone wants to be argumentative about it, I can only say that we and the churches of God generally hold this ruling on the matter.

THE UNACCEPTABLE BEHAVIOUR OF THE CORINTHIANS AT THE TABLE OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

1 Corinthians 11:17-34 - ... in giving you the following rules, I cannot commend your conduct, for it seems that your church meetings do you more harm than good! For first, when you meet for worship I hear that you split up into small groups, and I think there must be truth in what I hear. For there must be cliques among you or your favourite leaders would not be so conspicuous. It follows, then, that when you are assembled in one place you do not eat the Lord's supper. For everyone tries to grab his food before anyone else, with the result that one goes hungry and another has too much to drink! Haven't you houses of your own to have your meals in, or are you making a convenience of the church of God and causing acute embarrassment to those who have no other home?

Am I to commend this sort of conduct? Most certainly not!

To partake of the Lord's supper is a supremely serious thing

The teaching I gave you was given me personally by the Lord himself, and it was this: the Lord Jesus, in the same night in which he was betrayed, took bread and when he had given thanks he broke it and said, "Take, eat, this is my body which is being broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me." Similarly when supper was ended, he took the cup saying, "This cup is the new agreement in my blood: do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.

This can only mean that whenever you eat this bread or drink of this cup, you are proclaiming that the Lord (Jesus) has died for you, and you will do that until he comes again. So that, whoever eats the bread or drinks the wine without due thought is making himself like one of those who allowed the Lord to be put to death without discerning who he was.

No, a man should thoroughly examine himself, and only then should he eat the bread or drink of the cup. He that eats and drinks carelessly is eating and drinking a judgment on himself, for he is blind to the presence of the Lord's body.

Careless communion means spiritual weakness: let us take due care

It is this careless participation which is the reason for many feeble and sickly Christians in your church, and the explanation of the fact that many of you are spiritually asleep.

If we were closely to examine ourselves beforehand, we should avoid the judgment of God. But when God does judge us, he disciplines us as his own sons, that we may not be involved in the general condemnation of the world.

Now, my brothers, when you come together to eat this bread, wait your proper turn. If a man is really hungry let him satisfy his appetite at home. Don't let your communions be God's judgment upon you!

The other matters (... Paul is probably still referring to the Lord's Supper), I will settle in person, when I come.

THE VALUE OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS, BUT THE PREEMINENCE OF LOVE

THEIR QUESTIONS ABOUT SPIRITUAL GIFTS AND WORSHIP

1 Corinthians 12:1 - Now I want to give you some further information in some spiritual matters (... probably also raised in the letter to Paul brought from Corinth).

ONLY THROUGH THE HOLY SPIRIT CAN WE REALLY KNOW WHO JESUS IS

1 Corinthians 12:2-3 - You have not forgotten that you were Gentiles, following dumb idols just as you had been taught. Now I want you to understand, as Christians, that no one speaking by the Spirit of God could call Jesus accursed, and no one could say that he is the Lord, except by the Holy Spirit.

the BODY OF CHRIST - THE CHURCH

- These verses suggest that every Christian, no matter who, have an important part to play in their own local church and in God's plan and purpose for it.

Equally, the verses could be taken as applying to the variety of Christian churches that make up the world-wide Church. Each denomination, composed as it is of individually saved men, women and children, and with its own characteristics, strengths (and weaknesses), and hand-in-hand with every other denomination, has its own part to play in the universal Church of Christ:

1 Corinthians 12:4-13 - Men have different gifts, but it is the same Spirit who gives them. There are different ways of serving God, but it is the same Lord who is served. God works through different men in different ways, but it is the same God who achieves his purposes through them all. Each man is given his gift by the Spirit that he may make the most of it.

One man's gift by the Spirit is to speak with wisdom, another's to speak with knowledge. The same Spirit gives to another man faith, to another the ability to heal, to another the power to do great deeds. The same Spirit gives to another man the gift of preaching the word of God, to another the ability to discriminate in spiritual matters, to another speech in different tongues. Behind all these gifts is the operation of the same Spirit, who distributes to each individual man, as he wills.

The human body is an example of organic unity

As the human body, which has many parts, is a unity, and those parts, despite their multiplicity, constitute one single body, so it is with the body of Christ. For we were all baptised by the Spirit into one body, whether we were Jews, Gentiles, slaves or free men, and we have all had experience of the same Spirit.

EVERY CHRISTIAN HAS A ROLE IN THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

- Paul is clearly saying that every member of the Church, no matter how much they lack education, experience, age or youth, personality, maturity, physical ability, even mental wholeness, liked or unliked - have a part, and often an important part to play. And perhaps only one that God can see:

1 Corinthians 12:14-26 - Now the body is not one member but many. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand I don't belong to the body," does that alter the fact that the foot is a part of the body? Of if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye I don't belong to the body," does that mean that the ear really is no part of the body? After all, if the body were all one eye, for example, where would be the sense of hearing? Or if it were all one ear, where would be the sense of smell? But God has arranged all the parts in the one body according to his design. For if everything were concentrated in one part, how could there be a body at all? The fact is there are many parts, but only one body. So that the eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" nor, again, can the head say to the feet, "I don't need you!" On the contrary, those parts of the body which have no obvious function are the more essential to health: and to those parts of the body which seem to us to be less deserving of notice we have to allow the highest honour of function. The parts which do not look beautiful have a deeper beauty in the work they do, while the parts which look beautiful may not be at all essential to life! But God has harmonised the whole body by giving importance of function to the parts which lack apparent importance, that the body should work together as a whole with all the members in sympathetic relationship with one another. So it happens that if one member suffers all the other members suffer with it, and if one member is honoured all the members share a common joy.

THE BODY OF CHRIST - THE CHURCH (concluded)

1 Corinthians 12:27-30 - Now you are together the body of Christ, and individually you are members of him. And in his Church God has appointed first some to be his messengers, secondly, some to be preachers of power, thirdly teachers. After them he has appointed workers of spiritual power, men with the gift of healing, helpers, organisers and those with the gift of speaking in "tongues".

As we look at the body of Christ do we find all are his messengers, all are preachers, or all teachers? Do we find all wielders of spiritual power, all able to heal, all able to speak with tongues, or all able to interpret the tongues? No, we find God's distribution of gifts is on the same principles of harmony that he has shown in the human body.

LOVE - ITS PREEMINENCE

1 Corinthians 13 - "If I am withour love ....."

- "God is love" (1 John 4:8). The preeminence of love can be seen from how often the word is found in the Holy Bible. In modern versions it appears approximately 500 times, fourth after "Lord" (c6,500 times), "God" (c3,500) and Jesus Christ (c1,400), and even before the Holy Spirit (c300). In the older "King James Version", "love", its derivations, and the similar "mercy" and "charity" can be found some 600 times:

1 Corinthians 12:31-14:1a - You should set your hearts on the highest spiritual gifts, but I will show you what is the highest way of all.

Christian love - the highest and best gift

(Chapter 13 ....) If I speak with the eloquence of men and of angels, but have no love, I become no more than blaring brass or crashing cymbal. If I have the gift of foretelling the future and hold in my mind not only all human knowledge but the very secrets of God, and if I also have that absolute faith which can move mountains, but have no love, I amount to nothing at all. If I dispose of all that I possess, yes, even if I give my own body to be burned, but have no love, I achieve precisely nothing.

This love of which I speak is slow to lose patience - it looks for a way of being constructive. It is not possessive: it is neither anxious to impress nor does it cherish inflated ideas of its own importance.

Love has good manners and does not pursue selfish advantage. It is not touchy. It does not keep account of evil or gloat over the wickedness of other people. On the contrary, it is glad with all good men when truth prevails.

Love knows no limit to its endurance, no end to its trust, no fading of its hope; it can outlast anything. It is, in fact, the one thing that still stands when all else has fallen.

All gifts except love will be superseded one day

For if there are prophecies they will be fulfilled and done with, if there are "tongues" the need for them will disappear, if there is knowledge it will be swallowed up in truth. For our knowledge is always incomplete and our prophecy is always incomplete, and when the complete comes, that is the end of the incomplete.

When I was a little child I talked and felt and thought like a little child. Now that I am a man my childish speech and feeling and thought have no further significance for me.

At present we are men looking at puzzling reflections in a mirror. The time will come when we shall see reality whole and face to face! At present all I know is a little fraction of the truth, but the time will come when I shall know it as fully as God now knows me!

In this life we have three great lasting qualities - faith, hope and love. But the greatest of them is love.

(Chapter 14 ....) Follow, then, the way of love, while you set your heart on the gifts of the Spirit.

"TONGUES"; including PAUL'S ABILITY TO SPEAK IN TONGUES

- A spiritual gift that is generally associated with New Testament times. It meant speaking during worship in "tongues", or languages not previously learnt, which required interpretation if the message was to be understood. Although the practise is accepted in many parts of the modern Church, others consider it questionable, if not unacceptable or even fraudulent:

1 Corinthians 14:1b-28 - The highest gift you can wish for is to be able to speak the messages of God. The man who speaks in a "tongue" addresses not men (for no one understands a word he says) but God: and only in his spirit is he speaking spiritual secrets. But he who preaches the word of God is using his speech for the building up of the faith of one man, the encouragement of another or the consolation of another. The speaker in a "tongue" builds up his own soul, but the preacher builds up the Church of God.

I should indeed like you all to speak with "tongues", but I would much rather that you all preached the word of God. For the preacher of the word does a greater work than the speaker with "tongues", unless of course the latter interprets his word for the benefit of the Church.

Unless "tongues" are interpreted do they help the Church?

For suppose I came to you, my brothers, speaking with "tongues!", what good could I do unless I could give you some revelation of truth, some knowledge in spiritual things, some message from God, or some teaching about the Christian life?

Even in the case of inanimate objects which are capable of making sound, such as a flute or harp, if their notes all sound alike, who can tell what tune is being played? Unless the bugle-note is clear who will be called to arms? So, in your case, unless you make intelligible sounds with your "tongue" how can anyone know what you are talking about? You might just as well be addressing an empty room!

There are in the world a great variety of spoken sounds and each has a distinct meaning. But if the sounds of the speaker's voice mean nothing to me I am a foreigner to him, and he is a foreigner to me.

So, with yourselves, since you are so eager to possess spiritual gifts, concentrate your ambition upon receiving those which make for the real growth of your church. And that means if one of your number speaks with a "tongue", he should pray that he may be able to interpret what he says.

If I pray in a "tongue" my spirit is praying but my mind is inactive. I am therefore determined to pray with my spirit and my mind, and if I sing I will sing with both spirit and mind. Otherwise, if you are blessing God with your spirit, how can those who are ungifted say amen to your thanksgiving, since they do not know what you are talking about? You may be thanking God splendidly, but it doesn't help the other man at all. I (Paul) thank God that I have a greater gift of "tongues" than any of you, yet when I am in Church I would rather speak five words with my mind (which might teach something to other people) than ten thousand words in a "tongue" which nobody understands.

You must use your minds in this matter of tongues

My brothers, don't be like excitable children but use your intelligence! By all means be innocent as babes as far as evil is concerned, but where your minds are concerned be full-grown men! In the Law it is written: 'With men of other tongues and other lips I will speak to this people; and yet, for all that, they will not hear me'.

That means that tongues are a sign of God's power, not for those who are unbelievers, but to those who already believe. Preaching the word of God, on the other hand, is a sign of God's power to those who do not believe rather than to believers. So that, if at a full church meeting you are all speaking with tongues and men come in who are both uninstructed and without faith, will they not say that you are insane? But if you are preaching God's word and such a man should come in to your meeting, he is convicted and challenged by your united speaking of the truth. His secrets are exposed and he will fall on his knees acknowledging God and saying that God is truly among you!

Some practical regulations for the exercise of spiritual gifts

Well then, my brothers, whenever you meet let everyone be ready to contribute a psalm, a piece of teaching, a spiritual truth, or a "tongue" with an interpreter. Everything should be done to make your church strong in the faith.

If the question of speaking with a "tongue" arises, confine the speaking to two or three at the most and have someone to interpret what is said. If you have no interpreter then let the speaker with a "tongue" keep silent in the church and speak only to himself and God.

PREACHING

1 Corinthians 14:29-33 - Don't have more than two or three preachers either, while the others think over what has been said. But should a message of truth come to one who is seated, then the original speaker should stop talking. For in this way you can all have opportunity to give a message, one after the other, and everyone will learn something and everyone will have his faith stimulated. The spirit of a true preacher is under that preacher's control, for God is not a God of disorder but of harmony, as is plain in all the churches.

WOMEN

1 Corinthians 14:34-35 - What Paul writes here has been the normal view throughout most of the history of the Christian Church, and remains the case in most major religions even now. Yet it still grates compared with some of his other more accepting and loving views on women:

Let women be silent in church; they are not to be allowed to speak. They must submit to this regulation, as the Law itself instructs. If they have questions to ask they must ask their husbands at home, for there is something indecorous about a woman's speaking in church. (... But see verse 5 in 1 Corinthians 11:5-16 above).

HIS AUTHORITY AS AN APOSTLE; A FINAL WORD ON WORSHIP

1 Corinthians 14:36-40 - Do I see you questioning my instructions? Are you beginning to imagine that the Word of God originated in your church, or that you have a monopoly of God's truth? If any of your number thinks himself a true preacher and a spiritually-minded man, let him recognise that what I have written is by divine command! As for those who don't know it, well, we may just leave them in ignorance.

In conclusion then, my brothers, set your heart on preaching the word of God, while not forbidding the use of "tongues". Let everything be done decently and in order

III - OTHER MATTERS

DEATH AND RESURRECTION

PAUL SUMMARISES CHRIST'S REASON FOR DYING; HIS SUMMARY OF CHRIST'S RESURRECTION APPEARANCES

- Paul now tackles the last major subject of his letter - resurrection and immortality:

1 Corinthians 15:1-8 - Now, my brothers, I want to speak about the Gospel which I have previously preached to you, which you accepted, in which you are at present standing, and by which, if you remain faithful to the message I gave you, your salvation is being worked out - unless, of course, your faith had no meaning behind it at all.

For I passed on to you Corinthians first of all the message I had myself received - that Christ died for our sins, as the scriptures said he would; that he was buried and rose again on the third day, again as the scriptures foretold. He was seen by

Cephas (the apostle Peter),

then by the twelve (apostles), and

subsequently he was seen simultaneously by over five hundred Christians, of whom the majority are still alive, though some have since died.

He was then seen by James,

then by all the messengers (apostles).

And last of all, as if to one born abnormally late, he appeared to me! (Paul).

PAUL, AN UNDESERVING APOSTLE

1 Corinthians 15:9-11 - I am the least of the messengers, and indeed I do not deserve that title at all, because I persecuted the Church of God (Acts 8:1-3; 9:1-2). But what I am now I am by the grace of God. The grace he gave me has not proved a barren gift. I have worked harder than any of the others - and yet it was not I but this same grace of God within me. In any event, whoever has done the work whether I or they, this has been the message and this has been the foundation of your faith.

IF THERE IS NO RESURRECTION CHRIST CANNOT HAVE RISEN FROM THE DEAD; OUR FAITH IS FUTILE, OUR HOPE PITIFUL

1 Corinthians 15:12-19 - Now if the rising of Christ from the dead is the very heart of our message, how can some of you deny that there is any resurrection? For if there is no such thing as the resurrection of the dead, then Christ was never raised. And if Christ was not raised then neither our preaching nor your faith has any meaning at all. Further it would mean that we are lying in our witness for God, for we have given our solemn testimony that he did raise up Christ - and that is utterly false if it should be true that the dead do not, in fact, rise again! For if the dead do not rise neither did Christ rise, and if Christ did not rise your faith is futile and your sins have never been forgiven. Moreover those who have died believing

in Christ are utterly dead and gone. Truly, if our hope in Christ were limited to this life only we should, of all mankind be the most to be pitied!

AS DEATH CAME THROUGH ADAM SO LIFE COMES THROUGH CHRIST; HE HAS DESTROYED DEATH

1 Corinthians 15:20-28 - But the glorious fact is that Christ did rise from the dead: he has become the very first to rise of all who sleep the sleep of death. As death entered the world through a man(Adam), so has rising from the dead come to us through a man (Jesus)! As members of a sinful race all men die; as members of the Christ of God all men shall be raised to life, each in his proper order, with Christ the very first and after him all who belong to him when he comes.

Then, and not till then, authority and power, hands over the kingdom to God the Father. Christ's reign will and must continue until every enemy has been conquered. The last enemy of all to be destroyed is death itself. The scripture says:

'He has put all things under his feet' (Psalm 8:6).

But in the term "all things" it is quite obvious that God, who brings them all under subjection to Christ, is himself excepted. Nevertheless, when everything created has been made obedient to God, then shall the Son acknowledge himself subject to God the Father, who gave the Son power over all things. Thus, in the end, shall God be wholly and absolutely God.

AGAIN, IF THERE IS NO RESURRECTION, IT IS POINTLESS BEING PERSECUTED FOR PREACHING THE GOSPEL

1 Corinthians 15:29-34 - Further, you should consider this, that if there is to be no resurrection what is the point of some of you being baptised for the dead by proxy? Why should you be baptised for dead bodies? And why should I live a life of such hourly danger? I assure you, by the certainty of Jesus Christ that we possess, that I face death every day of my life! And if, to use the popular expression, I have "fought with wild beasts" here in Ephesus, what is the good of an ordeal like that if there is no life after this one?

'Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!' (Isaiah 22:13)

Don't let yourselves be deceived. Talking about things that are not true is bound to be reflected in practical conduct. Come back to your senses, and don't dabble in sinful doubts. Remember that there are men who have plenty to say but have no knowledge of God. You should be ashamed that I have to write like this at all!

A RESURRECTION ANALOGY - THE SOWN SEED DYING TO GROW INTO NEW LIFE; OTHER PARALLELS IN NATURE

1 Corinthians 15:35-41 - But perhaps someone will ask, "How is the resurrection achieved? With what sort of body do the dead arrive?" Now that is talking without using your minds! In your own experience you know that a seed does not germinate without itself "dying". When you sow a seed you do not sow the "body" that will eventually be produced, but bare grain, of wheat, for example, or one of the other seeds. God gives the seed a "body" according to his laws - a different "body" to each kind of seed.

Then again, even in this world, all flesh is not identical. There is a difference in the flesh of human beings, animals, fish and birds.

There are bodies which exist in this world, and bodies which exist in heaven. These bodies are not, as it were, in competition; the splendour of an earthly body is quite a different thing from the splendour of a heavenly body. The sun, the moon and the stars all have their own particular splendour, while among the stars themselves there are different kinds of splendour.

RESURRECTION TRANSFORMS THE WEAK AND MORTAL BODY INTO A GLORIOUS SPIRITUAL BODY

1 Corinthians 15:42-44a - These are illustrations here of the raising of the dead. The body is "sown" in corruption; it is raised beyond the reach of corruption. It is "sown" in dishonour; it is raised in splendour. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body.

AS WE HAVE SHARED THE NATURAL BODY OF ADAM, SO WE WILL PUT ON THE SPIRITUAL BODY OF CHRIST

1 Corinthians 15:44b-49 - As there is a natural body so will there be a spiritual body.

It is written, moreover, that:

'The first man Adam became a living being' (Genesis 2:7).

So the last Adam (Jesus) is a life-giving Spirit. But we should notice that the order is "natural" first and then "spiritual". The first man came out of the earth, a material creature. The second man came from Heaven and was the Lord himself. For the life of this world men are made like the material man; but for the life that is to come they are made like the one from Heaven. So that just as we have been made like the material pattern, so we shall be made like the Heavenly pattern.

ONLY THE IMPERISHABLE SPIRITUAL BODY WILL ENTER HEAVEN

1 Corinthians 15:50-53 - For I assure you, my brothers, it is utterly impossible for flesh and blood to possess the kingdom of God. The transitory could never possess the everlasting.

The dead and the living will be fitted for immortality

Listen, and I will tell you a secret. We shall not all die, but suddenly, in the twinkling of an eye, every one of us will be changed as the trumpet sounds! The trumpet will sound and the dead shall be raised beyond the reach of corruption, and we who are still alive shall suddenly be utterly changed. For this perishable nature of ours must be wrapped in imperishability, these bodies which are mortal must be wrapped in immortality.

DEATH IS DEFEATED, SIN OVERCOME AND WE HAVE TOTAL VICTORY THROUGH CHRIST; LET NO ONE CHEAT YOU OF THIS TRUTH

1 Corinthians 15:54-58 - So when the perishable is lost in the imperishable, the mortal lost in the immortal, this saying will come true:

'Death is swallowed up in victory' (Isaiah 25:8)

'O death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?' (Hosea 13:14)

It is sin which gives death its power, and it is the Law which gives sin its strength. All thanks to God, then, who gives us the victory over these things through our Lord Jesus Christ!

And so brothers of mine, stand firm! Let nothing move you as you busy yourselves in the Lord's work. Be sure that nothing you do for him is ever lost or ever wasted.

VARIOUS BUSINESS AND PERSONAL MATTERS

PRACTICAL ADVICE ON COLLECTING FOR THE CHURCH IN JERUSALEM

1 Corinthians 16:1-4 - Now as far as the fund for Christians in need is concerned, I should like you to follow the same rule that I gave to the Galatian church.

On the first day of the week let everyone put so much by him, according to his financial ability, so that there will be no need for collections when I come. Then, on my arrival, I will send whomever you approve to take your gift, with my recommendation, to Jerusalem. If it seems right for me to go as well, we will make up a party together (... which Paul in fact does with a number of fellow Christians at the end of his forthcoming visit to Corinth, Acts 20:2b-3a. His journey back to Jerusalem is then described in some detail in Acts 20:3b-21:17).

PAUL'S IMMEDIATE TRAVEL PLANS FROM EPHESUS INCLUDING VISITING CORINTH

1 Corinthians 16:5-9 - I shall come to you after my intended journey through Macedonia (Acts 20:1-2a) and I may stay with you awhile or even spend the winter with you. Then you can see me on my way - wherever it is that I go next. I don't wish to see you now, for it would merely be in passing, and I hope to spend some time with you, if it is God's will. I shall stay here in Ephesus (towards the end of Paul's three years there, c AD54-57) until the feast of Pentecost, for there is a great opportunity of doing useful work, and there are many people against me.

PROPOSED VISITS TO CORINTH BY TIMOTHY AND APOLLOS; A SHORT SERMON

1 Corinthians 16:10-14 - If Timothy comes to you (... Paul, on this, his Third Journey, has by now sent Timothy & Erastus from Ephesus ahead of him to Macedonia - Acts 19:22 and 1 Corinthians 4:17, and also suggests the young Timothy will reach Corinth before him), put him at his ease. He is as genuine a worker for the Lord as I am, and there is therefore no reason to look down on him. Send him on his way in peace, for I am expecting him to come to me here with the other Christian brothers. As for our brother Apollos (already popular with at least some of the Corinthians, and in spite of the divisions associated with his name, still trusted by Paul) I pressed him strongly to go to you with the rest, but it was definitely not God's will for him to do so then. However, he will come to you as soon as an opportunity occurs.

A little sermon in a nutshell!

Be on your guard, stand firm in the faith, live like men, be strong! Let everything that you do be done in love.

THE WELCOME VISITORS FROM CORINTH

1 Corinthians 16:15-18 - You remember the household of Stephanas (introduced in 1 Corinthians 1:16), the first men of Achaia to be won for Christ? Well, they have made up their minds to devote their lives to looking after Christian brothers. I do beg you to recognise them as Christ's ministers, and to extend your recognition to all their helpers and workers.

I am very glad that Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus have arrived (with their letter asking various questions about Christian life and worship, but also reporting verbally on the far more serious problem of false prophets and false teaching). They have made up for my not seeing you. They are a tonic to me and to you. You should appreciate having men like that!

GREETINGS FROM ASIA; A CURSE; A FINAL BLESSING

1 Corinthians 16:19-24 - Greetings from the churches of Asia. Aquila and Prisca (or Priscilla) send you their warmest Christian greetings and so does the church that meets in their house. All the Christians here send greetings. I should like you to shake hands all round as a sign of Christian love.

- Prominent men often used scribes and then as here, as in other letters of Paul, added their own final words and name:

Here is my own greeting, written by me, Paul. If any man does not love the Lord, let him be accursed; may the Lord soon come!

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you and my love be with you all in Jesus Christ.

PAUL

PAUL'S SECOND LETTER TO THE CORINTHIANS

With people, places, definitions, map .....

Writer: The apostle Paul

Date: c AD57, a few months after his First Letter

Where written: Macedonia in northern Greece, after the return (2 Corinthians 7:5-7) of Titus from Corinth

Reader: The church in Corinth

Why: Paul continues to be attacked by false teachers in Corinth who question his authority as an apostle and the truth of the Gospel he preaches. In the first part of the letter he defends himself and Christ's Gospel against these charges. By chapters 8 and 9, by which time he is discussing the collection for the Jerusalem Church and Titus has returned from Corinth, he appears to be reconciled with the majority of the church.

With chapter 10, there is an abrupt change in tone. Chapters 10-13 are either a final warning to a small number of unrepentant church members who are still attacking Paul, or part of an earlier "stern" letter (the "third" letter described in the introduction to 1 Corinthians)

According to Some Modern Scholarship: See introduction to the First Letter to the Corinthians

Map - Paul Writes his Second Letter to the Corinthians

Map Key: Letter sent from 1 to 2

I - PAUL'S "GLAD" LETTER

SOME OF THE CHALLENGES PAUL HAS FACED

GREETINGS TO THE CHURCH IN CORINTH

2 Corinthians 1:1-2 - This letter comes to you from Paul, God's messenger for Jesus Christ by the will of God, and from brother Timothy, and is addressed to the church of God in Corinth and all Christians throughout Achaia.

May grace and peace come to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

AS GOD COMFORTS US THROUGH CHRIST SO WE CAN COMFORT OTHERS

God's encouragements are adequate for all life's troubles

2 Corinthians 1:3-7 - Thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, that he is our Father and the source of all mercy and comfort. For he gives us comfort in our trials so that we in turn may be able to give the same sort of strong sympathy to others in theirs. Indeed, experience shows that the more we share Christ's suffering the more we are able to give of his encouragement. This means that if we experience trouble we can pass on to you comfort and spiritual help; for if we ourselves have been comforted we know how to encourage you to endure patiently the same sort of troubles that we have ourselves endured. We are quite confident that if you have to suffer troubles as we have done, then, like us, you will find the comfort and encouragement of God.

PAUL'S EXPERIENCES IN ASIA; A LESSON IN TRUSTING GOD

2 Corinthians 1:8-11 - We should like you, our brothers, to know something of what we went through in Asia (including the near riot in Ephesus, Acts 19:23). At that time we were completely overwhelmed, the burden was more than we could bear, in fact we told ourselves that this was the end. Yet we believe now that we had this experience of coming to the end of our tether that we might learn to trust, not in ourselves, but in God who can raise the dead. It was God who preserved us from imminent death, and it is he who still preserves us. Further, we trust him to keep us safe in the future, and here you can join in and help by praying for us, so that the good that is done to us in answer to many prayers will mean eventually that many will thank God for our preservation.

SOME OF HIS MISUNDERSTANDINGS WITH THE CHURCH AT CORINTH

HIS RELATIONS WITH THE CORINTHIANS ARE NOT BASED ON WORLDLY WISDOM & STANDARDS

2 Corinthians 1:12-14 - Now it is a matter of pride to us - endorsed by our conscience - that our activities in this world, particularly our dealings with you, have been absolutely above-board and sincere before God. They have not been marked by any worldly wisdom, but by the grace of God. Our letters to you have no double meaning - they mean just what you understand them to mean when you read them. We hope you will always understand these letters (as we believe you have already understood the purpose of our lives), and realise that you can be as honestly proud of us as we shall be of you on the day when Christ reveals all secrets.

PAUL'S ORIGINAL TRAVEL PLANS

- Paul planned to travel from Ephesus in Asia Minor across the Aegean Sea direct to Corinth in southern Greece; then north to northern Greece - Macedonia, before returning via Corinth. Instead he has gone first to Macedonia, Acts 20:1-3a. It is because of these changes, his opponents in Corinth accuse him of fickleness:

2 Corinthians 1:15-18 - Trusting you, and believing that you trusted us, our original plan was to pay you a visit first, and give you a double "treat". We meant to come here to Macedonia (where 2 Corinthians was probably written) after first visiting you, and then to visit you again on leaving here. You could thus have helped us on our way towards Judea (with the collection for the Jerusalem church). Because we had to change this plan, does it mean that we are fickle? Do you think I plan with my tongue in my cheek, saying "yes" and meaning "no"? We solemnly assure you that as certainly as God is faithful so we have never given you a message meaning "yes" and "no".

THE GOSPEL FIRST PREACHED IN CORINTH BY PAUL, SILAS & TIMOTHY

2 Corinthians 1:19-22 - Jesus Christ, the Son of God, whom Silvanus (Silas), Timothy and I have preached to you (Acts 18:5), is himself no doubtful quantity, he is the divine "yes". Every promise of God finds its affirmative in him, and through him can be said the final amen, to the glory of God. We owe our position in Christ to this God of positive promise: it is he who has consecrated us to this special work, he who has given us the living guarantee of the Spirit in our hearts. Are we then the men to say one thing and mean another?

PAUL'S REASON FOR NOT MAKING AN EARLY RETURN TO CORINTH; HIS HOPE THAT A LETTER WOULD HAVE MORE EFFECT THAN A VISIT

2 Corinthians 1:23-2:4 - No, I declare before God that it was to avoid hurting you that I did not come to Corinth. For though I am not responsible for your faith - your standing in God is your own affair - yet I can add to your happiness.

(Chapter 2 ....) And I made up my mind that I would not pay you another painful visit (possibly referring to the short, unrecorded visit Paul may have made from Ephesus when the problems at Corinth first came to his attention). For what point is there in my depressing the very people who can give me such joy? The real purpose of my previous letter (Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians sent from Ephesus)was in fact to save myself from being saddened by those whom I might reasonably expect to bring me joy. I have such confidence in you that my joy depends on all of you! I wrote to you in deep distress and out of a most unhappy heart (I don't mind telling you I shed tears over that letter), not, believe me, to cause you pain but to show you how deep is my care for your welfare.

HE RECOMMENDS FORGIVENESS OF THE "IMMORAL MAN" IN THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH

2 Corinthians 2:5-11 - There was a reason for my stern words; this is my advice now. If the behaviour of a certain person has caused distress, it does not mean so much that he has injured me, but that to some extent (I do not wish to exaggerate), he has injured all of you. But now I think that the punishment you have inflicted on him has been sufficient (probably the immoral man of 1 Corinthians 5:1-5). Now is the time to offer him forgiveness and comfort, for it is possible for a man in his position to be completely overwhelmed by remorse. I ask you to show him plainly now that you love him. My previous letter was something of a test - I wanted to make sure that you would follow my orders implicitly. If you will forgive a certain person, rest assured that I forgive him too. Insofar as I had anything personally to forgive, I do forgive him, as before Christ. We don't want Satan to win any victory here, and well we know his methods!

PAUL'S URGENT NEED TO RECEIVE TITUS'S REPORT FROM CORINTH

2 Corinthians 2:12-13 - Well, when I came to Troas (on the journey from Ephesus) to preach the Gospel of Christ, although there was an obvious God-given opportunity, I must confess I was on edge the whole time because there was no sign of brother Titus ....

Titus - For some unknown reason, Titus is not mentioned by Luke in the Acts of the Apostles. By contrast, Paul refers to him in three letters, and sends him the Letter of Titus, covering in total a period of more than twenty years.

In Galatians, possibly written from Macedonia, c AD56 or 57, Paul describes how 14 years earlier (c AD43 or 44), Titus joined him and Barnabas on a visit to Jerusalem (2:1). And how, as a Greek and early Gentile convert, he was not forced to be circumcised (2:3).

Now, in 2 Corinthians (c AD57), as Paul reports making his way from Ephesus across to Macedonia, he finds Titus is not waiting at Troas as he had hoped (2:13). By 2 Corinthians 7:6, Titus has arrived in Macedonia with joyful news about the positive turn of events in Corinth. Verses 7:13,14, 8:6,16, and 12:18 refer to Titus's two visits to Corinth (this and an earlier one), his love for the church there, his part in collecting gifts for the Jerusalem church, and how he will apparently be carrying this, Paul's Second Letter, to Corinth (8:17). Paul also uses the letter as an opportunity to describe Titus' value as a companion and fellow-worker (8:23).

Ten years later, the Letter to Titus (c AD66) is sent to Titus (1:4) in Crete (1:5) where he is now serving as a minister.

Finally, in c AD67, Paul, writing from prison to Timothy reports that Titus has now gone to Dalmatia (2 Timothy 4:10).

.... So I (Paul) said good-bye and went from there to Macedonia (Acts 20:1).

THE WAY OF THE TRUE APOSTLE OF CHRIST

THE POWER OF GOD AS SEEN IN THE APOSTLE'S OF CHRIST

2 Corinthians 2:14-17 - Thanks be to God who leads us, wherever we are, on his own triumphant way and makes our knowledge of him spread throughout the world like a lovely perfume! We Christians have the unmistakeable "scent" of Christ, discernible alike to those who are being saved and to those who are heading for death. To the latter it seems like the very smell of doom, to the former it has the fresh fragrance of life itself.

Who could think himself adequate for a responsibility like this? Only the man who refuses to join that large class (of deceivers and false teachers) which trafficks in the Word of God - the man who speaks, as we do, in the name of God, under the eyes of God, as Christ's chosen minister.

THE APOSTLES NEED NO RECOMMENDATIONS; THE LIVES OF THE CORINTHIAN CHRISTIANS ARE THEIR CREDENTIALS

2 Corinthians 3:1-6 - Is this going to be more self-advertisement in your eyes? Do we need, as some apparently do, to exchange testimonials before we can be friends? You yourselves (the Christians of Corinth) are our testimonial, written in our hearts and yet open for anyone to inspect and read. You are an open letter about Christ which we ourselves have written, not with pen and ink but with the Spirit of the living God. Our message has been engraved not in stone, but in living men and women.

We dare to say such things because of the confidence we have in God through Christ, and not because we are confident of our own powers. It is God who makes us competent administrators of the new agreement, and we deal not in the letter but in the Spirit. The letter of the Law leads to the death of the soul; the spirit of God alone can give life to the soul.

THE WAY OF THE TRUE APOSTLE OF CHRIST

AS CHRIST'S POWER IS GREATER THAN THE LAW OF MOSES SO IS THE POWER OF THE APOSTLES

2 Corinthians 3:7-18 - The administration of the Law which was engraved in stone (and which led in fact to spiritual death) was so magnificent that the Israelites were unable to look unflinchingly at Moses' face, for it was alight with heavenly splendour (after his meeting with God on Mount Sinai, Exodus 34:29). Now if the old administration held such heavenly, even though transitory, splendour, can we not see what a much more glorious thing is the new administration of the Spirit of life? If to administer a system which is to end in condemning men was a splendid task, how infinitely more splendid is it to administer a system which ends in making men good! And while it is true that the former temporary glory has been completely eclipsed by the latter, we do well to remember that it is eclipsed simply because the present permanent plan is such a very much more glorious thing than the old.

Our ministry is an open and splendid thing

With this hope in our hearts we are quite frank and open in our ministry. We are not like Moses, who veiled his face to prevent the Israelites from seeing its fading glory (Exodus 34:32-35). But it was their minds really which were blinded, for even today when the old agreement (or covenant, the Law of Moses or first five books of the Old Testament) is read to them there is still a veil over their minds - though the veil has actually been lifted by Christ. Yes, alas, even to this day there is still a veil over their hearts when the writings of Moses are read. Yet if they "turned to the Lord" the veil would disappear. For the Lord to whom they could turn is the spirit of the new agreement, and wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, men's souls are set free.

But all of us who are Christians have no veils on our faces, but reflect like mirrors the glory of the Lord. We are transfigured by the Spirit of the Lord in ever-increasing splendour into his own image.

THE APOSTLES PREACH CHRIST'S GOSPEL PLAINLY, BUT MANY, INCLUDING THE FALSE TEACHERS, CANNOT SEE IT

2 Corinthians 4:1-6 - This is the ministry of the new agreement (... the Gospel of Christ) which God in his mercy has given us and nothing can daunt us. We use no hocus-pocus, no clever tricks, no dishonest manipulation of the Word of God. We speak the plain truth and so commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. If our Gospel is "veiled", the veil must be in the minds of those who are spiritually dying. The spirit of this world (Satan) has blinded the minds of those who do

not believe, and prevents the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, the image of God, from shining on them. For it is Christ Jesus the Lord whom we preach, not ourselves; we are your servants for his sake. God, who first ordered

'light to shine in darkness' (Genesis 1:3),

has flooded our hearts with his light. We now can enlighten men only because we can give them knowledge of the glory of God, as we see it in the face of Jesus Christ.

THE APOSTLE'S SUCCESS IN SPITE OF THEIR APPARENT WEAKNESS IS TO DEMONSTRATE THE POWER OF GOD

2 Corinthians 4:7-14 - This priceless treasure we hold, so to speak, in a common earthenware jar - to show that the splendid power of it belongs to God and not to us (apostles). We are handicapped on all sides, but we are never frustrated; we are puzzled, but never in despair. We are persecuted, but we never have to stand it alone: we may be knocked down but we are never knocked out! Every day we experience something of the death of the Lord Jesus, so that we may also know the power of the life of Jesus in these bodies of ours. Yes, we who are living are always being exposed to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be plainly seen in our mortal lives. We are always facing death, but this means that you know more and more of life. Our faith is like that mentioned in the scripture:

'I believed and therefore I spoke' (Psalm 116:10).

For we too speak because we believe, and we know for certain that he who raised the Lord Jesus from death shall also by him raise us. We shall all stand together before him.

THE APOSTLES MAY SEEM DEFEATED BUT THEY KNOW THEY HAVE ETERNAL GLORY WITH GOD

2 Corinthians 4:15-18 - We wish you could see how all this is working out for your benefit, and how the more grace God gives, the more thanksgiving will redound to his glory. This is the reason why we never collapse. The outward man does indeed suffer wear and tear, but every day the inward man receives fresh strength. These little troubles (which are really so transitory) are winning for us a permanent, glorious and solid reward out of all proportion to our pain. For we are looking all the time not at the visible things but at the invisible. The visible things are transitory: it is the invisible things that are really permanent.

THE APOSTLE'S CONFIDENCE IN IMMORTALITY AND THEIR READINESS FOR DEATH

2 Corinthians 5:1-10 - We know, for instance, that if our earthly dwelling were taken down, like a tent, we have a permanent house in Heaven, made, not by man, but by God. In this present frame we sigh with deep longing for the heavenly house, for we do not want to face utter nakedness when death destroys our present dwelling - these bodies of ours. So long as we are clothed in this temporary dwelling we have a painful longing, not because we want just to get rid of these "clothes" but because we want to know the full cover of the permanent house that will be ours. We want our transitory life to be absorbed into the life that is eternal.

Death can have no terrors, for it means being with God

Now the power that has planned this experience for us is God, and he has given us his Spirit as a guarantee of its truth. This makes us confident, whatever happens. We realise that being "at home" (... alive) in the body means that to some extent we are "away" from the Lord, for we have to live by trusting him without seeing him. We are so sure of this that we would really rather be "away" from the body (in death) and be "at home" with the Lord.

It is our aim, therefore, to please him, whether we are "at home" or "away". For every one of us will have to stand without pretence before Christ our judge, and we shall be rewarded for what we did when we lived in our bodies, whether it was good or bad.

CHRIST'S LOVE FOR THE APOSTLES COMPELS THEM TO SERVE THE CHRISTIANS OF CORINTH

2 Corinthians 5:11-15 - All our persuading of men, then, is with this solemn fear of God in our minds. What we are is utterly plain to God - and I hope to your consciences as well. (No, we are not

recommending ourselves to you again, but we can give you grounds for legitimate pride in us - if that is what you need to meet those who are so proud of the outward rather than the inward qualification). If we have been "mad" it was for God's glory; if we are perfectly sane it is for your benefit. At any rate there has been no selfish motive. The very spring of our actions is the love of Christ. We look at it like this: if one died for all men then, in a sense, they all died, and his purpose in dying for them is that their lives should now be no longer lived for themselves but for him who died and rose again for them.

THE APOSTLE'S SPIRITUAL MINISTRY IS TO RECONCILE MAN TO GOD; SUCH MEN ARE NEW CREATIONS

2 Corinthians 5:16-21 - This means that our knowledge of men can no longer be based on their outward lives (indeed, even though we knew Christ as a man we do not know him like that any longer). For if a man is in Christ he becomes a new person altogether - the past is finished and gone, everything has become fresh and new. All this is God's doing, for he has reconciled us to himself through Jesus Christ; and he has made us agents of the reconciliation. God was in Christ personally reconciling the world to himself - not counting their sins against them - and has commissioned us with the message of reconciliation. We are now Christ's ambassadors, as though God were appealing direct to you through us. As his personal representatives we say, "Make your peace with God." For God caused Christ, who himself knew nothing of sin, actually to be sin for our sakes, so that in Christ we might be made good with the goodness of God.

NOW IS THE TIME TO RECEIVE GOD'S GIFTS

2 Corinthians 6:1-2 - As co-operators with God himself we beg, you then, not to fail to use the grace of God. For God's word is-

'In an acceptable time I have heard you, and in the day of salvation I have helped you' (Isaiah 49:8)

Now is the "acceptable time", and this very day is the "day of salvation".

THE HARDSHIPS AND THE PARADOX OF BEING AN APOSTLE; THE TRANSPARENT HONESTY REQUIRED

2 Corinthians 6:3-13 - As far as we are concerned we do not wish to stand in anyone's way, nor do we wish to bring discredit on the ministry God has given us. Indeed we want to prove ourselves genuine ministers of God whatever we have to go through - patient endurance of troubles or even disasters, being flogged or imprisoned; being mobbed, having to work like slaves, having to go without food or sleep. All this we want to meet with sincerity, with insight and patience; by sheer kindness and the Holy Spirit; with genuine love, speaking the plain truth, and living by the power of God. Our sole defence, our only weapon, is a life of integrity, whether we meet honour or dishonour, praise or blame. Called "impostors" we must be true, called "nobodies" we must be in the public eye. Never far from death, yet here we are alive, always "going through it" yet never "going under". We know sorrow, yet our joy is inextinguishable. We have "nothing to bless ourselves with" yet we bless many others with true riches. We are penniless, and yet in reality we have everything worth having.

We have used utter frankness, won't you do the same?

Oh, our dear friends in Corinth, we are hiding nothing from you and our hearts are absolutely open to you. Any stiffness between us must be on your side, for we assure you there is none on ours. Do reward me (I talk to you as though you were my own children) with the same complete candour!

PAUL'S APPEAL FOR RECONCILIATION; HIS JOY AT TITUS'S REPORT

YOU CANNOT COMBINE CHRISTIAN AND PAGAN WAYS OF LIVING

2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1 - According to many commentators, 1 Corinthians 5:9 refers to a "Lost" Letter, part of which is preserved in 1 Corinthians 6:12-20, and another part, here, in 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1:

Don't link up with unbelievers and try to work with them. What common interest can there be between goodness and evil? How can light and darkness share life together? How can there be harmony between Christ and the devil? What business can a believer have with an unbeliever? What common

ground can idols hold with the temple of God? For we, remember, are ourselves living temples of the living God, as God has said:

'I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be my people' (Leviticus 26:12; Jeremiah 32:38; Ezekiel 37:27).

Wherefore:

'Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you' (Isaiah 52:11; Ezekiel 20:34,41).

'I will be a father to you, and you shall be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty' (2 Samuel 7:14).

(Chapter 7 ....) With these promises ringing in our ears, dear friends, let us keep clear of anything that smirches body or soul. Let us prove reverence for God by consecrating ourselves to him completely.

PAUL'S HONESTY AND LOVE

2 Corinthians 7:2-4 - Do make room in your hearts again for us (Paul and his fellow-workers)! Not one of you has ever been wronged or ruined or cheated by us. I don't say this to condemn your attitude, but simply because, as I said before, whether we live or die you live in our hearts. To your face I talk to you with utter frankness; behind your back I talk about you with deepest pride. Whatever troubles I have gone through, the thought of you has filled me with comfort and deep happiness.

PAUL JOYFULLY RECEIVES TITUS' REPORT ON THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH

2 Corinthians 7:5-16 - For even when we arrived in Macedonia (Acts 20:1) we had a wretched time with trouble all round us - wrangling outside and anxiety within. Not but what God, who cheers the depressed, gave us the comfort of the arrival of Titus (in Macedonia with his good news from Corinth). And it wasn't merely his coming that cheered us, but the comfort you had given him, for he could tell us of your eagerness to help, your deep sympathy and keen interest on my behalf. All that made me doubly glad to see him. For although my letter (Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians) had hurt you I don't regret it now (as I did, I must confess, at one time). I can see that the letter did upset you, though only for a time, and now I am glad I sent it, not because I want to hurt you but because it made you grieve for things that were wrong. In other words, the result was to make you sorry as God would have had you sorry, and not merely to make you offended by what we said. The sorrow which God uses means a change of heart and leads to salvation - it is the world's sorrow that is such a deadly thing. You can look back now and see how the hand of God was in that sorrow. Look how seriously it made you think, how eager it made you to prove your innocence, how indignant it made you, and in some cases, how afraid! Look how it made you long for my presence, how it stirred up your keenness for the faith, how ready it made you to punish the offender! Yes, that letter cleared the air for you as nothing else would have done (perhaps suggesting Paul decided to defer his planned visit so the letter would have time to do its work).

Now I did not write that letter really for the sake of the man who sinned (probably not just the man guilty of incest, but others, including false teachers, who had attacked Paul), or even for the sake of the one (Paul?) who was sinned against, but to let you see for yourselves, in the sight of God, how deeply you really do care for us. That is why we now feel so deeply comforted, and our sense of joy was greatly enhanced by the satisfaction that your attitude had obviously given Titus. You see, I had told him of my pride in you, and you have not let me down. I have always spoken the truth to you, and this proves that my proud words about you were true as well. Titus himself has a much greater love for you, now that he has seen for himself the obedience you gave him, and the respect and reverence with which you treated him. I am profoundly glad to have my confidence in you so fully proved.

COLLECTING FOR THE CHURCH AT JERUSALEM

PAUL REFERS TO THE COLLECTION FOR THE CHURCH IN JERUSALEM AND THE GENEROSITY OF THE MACEDONIANS

2 Corinthians 8:1-5 - Now, my brothers, we must tell you about the grace that God had given to the Macedonian churches. Somehow, in most difficult circumstances, their joy and the fact of being down to

their last penny themselves, produced a magnificent concern for other people. I can guarantee that they were willing to give to the limit of their means, yes and beyond their means, without the slightest urging from me or anyone else. In fact they simply begged us to accept their gifts and so let them share the honours of supporting their brothers in Christ. Nor was their gift, as I must confess I had expected, a mere cash payment. Instead they made a complete dedication of themselves first to the Lord and then to us, as God's appointed ministers.

HE URGES THE CORINTHIANS TO EXCEED THE GENEROSITY OF THE MACEDONIANS

2 Corinthians 8:6-15 - Now this had made us ask Titus, who has already done so much among you, to complete his task by arranging for you too to share in this work of generosity. Already you are well to the fore in every good quality - you have faith, you can express that faith in words; you have knowledge, enthusiasm and your love for us. Could you not add generosity to your virtues? I don't want you to read this as an order. It is only my suggestion, prompted by what I have seen in others of eagerness to help, and here is a way to prove the reality of your love. Do you remember the generosity of Jesus Christ, the Lord of us all? He was rich beyond our telling, yet he became poor for your sakes so that his poverty might make you rich.

I merely suggest that you finish your original generous gesture

Here is my opinion in the matter. I think it would be a good thing for you, who were the first a year ago (.. this might refer to Paul's original request for help in the "lost" letter to Corinth - 1 Corinthians 5:9) to think of helping, as well as the first to give, to carry through what you then intended to do. Finish it, then, as well as you can, and show that you can complete what you set out to do with as much efficiency as you showed readiness to begin. After all, the important thing is to be willing to give as much as we can - that is what God accepts, and no one is asked to give what he has not got. Of course, I don't mean that others should be relieved to an extent that leaves you in distress. It is a matter of share and share alike. At present your plenty should supply their need, and then at some future date their plenty may supply your need. In that way we share with each other, as the scripture says,

'He who gathered much had nothing left over, and he who gathered little had no lack' (Exodus 16:18 - referring to the daily collection of manna "from heaven").

PAUL COMMENDS TITUS AND THOSE WHO WILL BE COLLECTING THE GIFTS FOR JERUSALEM

2 Corinthians 8:16-24 - Thank God Titus feels the same deep concern for you as we do! He accepts the suggestion outlined above, and in his enthusiasm comes to you personally at his own request. We are sending with him that brother (number 1) whose services to the Gospel are universally praised in the churches. He has been unanimously chosen to travel with us in this work of administering the gifts of others. It is a task that brings glory to God and demonstrates also the willingness of us Christians to help each other. Naturally we want to avoid the slightest breath of criticism in the distribution of their gifts, and to be absolutely above-board not only in the sight of God but in the eyes of men.

With these two we are also sending our brother (number 2), of whose keenness we have ample proof and whose interest is especially aroused on this occasion as he has such confidence in you. As for Titus, he is our colleague and partner in your affairs, and both the brothers are official messengers of the Church and shining examples of their faith. So do let them, and all the churches see how genuine is your love, and justify all the nice things we have said about you!

The two brothers - Surprisingly Paul does not name these obviously important members of the church. Some sources suggest they were subsequently expelled from the church; others, they may have been Luke, or Apollos, or Timothy, who were not identified for some unknown reason.

PAUL'S EMBARRASSMENT IF THE CORINTHIANS DO NOT RESPOND GENEROUSLY

2 Corinthians 9:1-6 - Of course I know it is really quite superfluous for me to be writing to you about this matter of giving to fellow Christians, for I know how willing you are. Indeed I have told the Macedonians with some pride that "Achaia (including Corinth) was ready to undertake this service twelve months ago" (again reflecting the "lost" letter of 1 Corinthians 5:9). Your enthusiasm has consequently been a stimulus to many of them. I am, however, sending the brothers (Titus and the two unidentified Christians) just to make sure that our pride in you is not unjustified. For, between ourselves, it would never do if some of the Macedonians (possibly including Sopater from the city of Berea, and Aristarchus

and Secundus from Thessalonica, Acts 20:4) were to accompany me on my visit to you and find you unprepared for this act of generosity! We (not to speak of you) should be horribly ashamed, just because we had been so proud and confident of you. This is my reason, then, for urging the brothers to visit you before I come myself, so that they can get your promised gift ready in good time. But, having let you into my confidence, I should like it to be a spontaneous gift, and not money squeezed out of you by what I have said. All I will say is that poor sowing means a poor harvest, and generous sowing means a generous harvest.

HOW GOD REWARDS THE TRULY GENEROUS

2 Corinthians 9:7-15 - Let everyone give as his heart tells him, neither grudgingly nor under compulsion, for God loves the man who gives cheerfully. After all, God can give you everything that you need, so that you may always have sufficient both for yourselves and for giving away to other people. As the scripture says: "He has dispersed abroad, he has given to the poor; his righteousness remains forever."

He (God) who gives the seed to the sower and turns that seed into bread to eat, will give you the seed of generosity to sow, and, for harvest, the satisfying bread of good deeds well done. The more you are enriched by God the more scope there will be for generous giving, and your gifts, administered through us (in this case, Paul and his companions collecting for the church in Jerusalem), will mean that many will thank God. For your giving (by the church in Corinth to the church in Jerusalem) does not end in meeting the wants of your fellow-Christians. It also results in an overflowing tide of thanksgiving to God. Moreover, your very giving proves the reality of your faith, and that means that men thank God that you practise the Gospel that you profess to believe in, as well as for the actual gifts you make to them and to others. And yet further, men will pray for you and feel drawn to you because you have obviously received a generous measure of the grace of God.

Thank God, then, for his indescribable generosity to you!

II - PAUL'S "STERN" LETTER

- Following Paul's reconciliation with the majority of the Corinthian church, chapters 10:1-13:10 may be a final warning to those unrepentant members who still discredit Paul and the Gospel he preaches. Otherwise it is part of the earlier "stern" letter - the third in a possible series of four listed in the introduction to 1 Corinthians 10). Various Bible commentaries give complex pros and cons for these alternatives:

PAUL DEFENDS HIS MINISTRY AGAINST THE CLAIMS OF THE FALSE APOSTLES

IN EARTHLY TERMS PAUL APPEARS WEAK BUT IN GOD'S HE IS SPIRITUALLY INVINCIBLE

2 Corinthians 10:1-6 - Now I am going to appeal to you personally, by the gentleness and sympathy of Christ himself. Yes, I, Paul, the one who is "humble enough in our presence but outspoken when away from us", and begging you to make it unnecessary for me to be outspoken and stern in your presence. For I am afraid otherwise that I shall have to do some plain speaking to those of you who will persist in reckoning that our activities are on the purely human level. The truth is that, although of course we lead normal human lives, the battle we are fighting is on the spiritual level. The very weapons we use are not those of human warfare but powerful in God's warfare for the destruction of the enemy's strongholds. Our battle is to bring down every deceptive fantasy and every imposing defence that men erect against the true knowledge of God. We even fight to capture every thought until it acknowledges the authority of Christ. Once we are sure of your obedience we shall not shrink from dealing with those who refuse to obey.

PAUL ANSWERS THOSE WHO SAY HE MIGHT WRITE WITH POWER BUT IS NOTHING IN PERSON

2 Corinthians 10:7-11 - Do look at things which stare you in the face! So-and-so considers himself to belong to Christ. All right; but let him reflect that we belong to Christ every bit as much as he. You may think that I have boasted unduly of my authority (which the Lord gave me, remember, to build you up not to break you down), but I don't think I have done anything to be ashamed of. Yet I don't want you to think

of me merely as the man who writes you terrifying letters. I know my critics say, "His letters are impressive and moving but his actual presence is feeble and his speaking beneath contempt." Let them realise that we can be just as "impressive and moving" in person as they say we are in our letters.

HE ALSO RESPONDS TO THE FALSE TEACHERS WHO HAVE ALL THE ANSWERS; HE KNOWS HIS HUMAN LIMITATIONS

2 Corinthians 10:12-18 - Of course we shouldn't dare include ourselves in the same class as those (the boastful false teachers) who write their own testimonials, or even to compare ourselves with them! All they are doing, of course, is to measure themselves by their own standards or by comparisons within their own circle, and that doesn't make for accurate estimation, you may be sure. No, we shall not make any wild claims, but simply judge ourselves by that line of duty which God has marked out for us, and that line includes our work on your behalf. We do not exceed our duty when we embrace your interests, for it was our preaching of the Gospel which brought us into contact with you. Our pride is not in matters beyond our proper sphere nor in the labours of other men. No, our hope is that your growing faith will mean the expansion of our sphere of action, so that before long we shall be preaching the Gospel in districts beyond you, instead of being proud of work that has already been done in someone else's province.

But,

'He who glories, let him glory in the Lord' (Jeremiah 9:24).

It is not self-commendation that matters, it is winning the approval of God.

PAUL'S GODLY JEALOUSY THAT THE CHURCH SHOULD FOLLOW THE TRUE GOSPEL

2 Corinthians 11:1-6 - I wish you could put up with a little of my foolishness - please try! My jealousy over you is the right sort of jealousy, for in my eyes you are like a fresh unspoiled girl who I am presenting as fiancée to your true husband, Christ himself. I am afraid that your minds may be seduced from a single-hearted devotion to him by the same subtle means that the serpent used towards Eve. For apparently you cheerfully accept a man (either a specific false teacher, or a number of them) who comes to you preaching a different Jesus from the one we told you about, and you readily receive a spirit and a Gospel quite different from the ones you originally accepted. Yet I cannot believe I am in the least inferior to these extra-special messengers of yours. Perhaps I am not a polished speaker, but I do know what I am talking about, and both what I am and what I say is pretty familiar to you.

PAUL'S WILLINGNESS TO PREACH THE GOSPEL WITHOUT BEING A BURDEN ON THE CORINTHIANS; HIS CONSEQUENT CONDEMNATION OF THE FALSE TEACHERS

2 Corinthians 11:7-15 - Perhaps I made a mistake in cheapening myself (though I did it to help you) by preaching the Gospel without a fee? As a matter of fact I was only able to do this by "robbing" other churches, for it was what they paid me that made it possible to minister to you free of charge. Even when I was with you and very hard up, I did not bother any of you. It was the brothers who came from Macedonia who brought me all that I needed. ...

- Probably Silas and Timothy bringing gifts from Thessalonica and Philippi to Paul during his first stay in Corinth -

... Yes, I kept myself from being a burden to you then, and so I intend to do in the future. By the truth of Christ within me, no one shall stop my being proud of this independence through all Achaia!

Does this mean that I do not love you? God knows it doesn't, but I am determined to maintain this boast, so as to cut the ground from under the feet of those who profess to be God's messengers on the same terms as I am. God's messengers? They are counterfeits of the real thing, dishonest practitioners, "God's messengers" only by their own appointment. Nor do their tactics surprise me when I consider how Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is only to be expected that his agents shall have the appearance of ministers of righteousness - but they will get their deserts one day.

HE EVEN "BOASTS" OF HIS QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCES AS A CHRISTIAN

PAUL "BOASTS LIKE A FOOL" TO JUSTIFY HIS ROLE AS AN APOSTLE

2 Corinthians 11:16-33 - Once more, let me advise you not to look upon me as a fool. Yet if you do, then listen to what this "fool" has to boast about.

I am not now speaking as the Lord commands me but as a fool who must be "in on" this business of boasting (like the false teachers are doing). Since all the others are so proud of themselves, let me do a little boasting as well. From your heights of superior wisdom I am sure you can smile tolerantly on a fool. Oh, you're tolerant all right! You don't mind, do you, if a man takes away your liberty, spends your money, makes a fool of you or even smacks your face? I am almost ashamed to say that I never did brave strong things like that to you. Yet in whatever particular they enjoy such confidence I (speaking as a fool, remember) have just as much confidence.

Are they Hebrews? So am I.

Are they Israelites? So am I.

Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I.

Are they ministers of Christ? I have more claim to this title than they. This is a silly game but look at this list:

Only some of the following incidents are reported in the Acts of the Apostles. Most of them must have happened during Paul's earlier years as a Christian:

I have worked harder than any of them.

I have served more prison sentences!

I have been beaten times without number.

I have faced (the dangers of) death again and again.

I have been beaten the regulation thirty-nine stripes by the Jews five times (a punishment described in Deuteronomy 25:1-3 - one less than the maximum 40 in case there is a miscount and the victim is unintentionally degraded in the eyes of the punishers).

I have been beaten with rods three times

- Of this total of eight beatings, only the one in Philippi is recorded, Acts 16:22:

I have been stoned once (at Lystra, Acts 14:19).

I have been shipwrecked three times (none of which are recorded in Acts. The shipwreck on Malta, Acts 27:27-44, was some years in the future).

I have been twenty-four hours in the open sea (presumably adrift in a small boat after his ship sank).

In my travels I have been in constant danger from rivers and floods, from bandits, from my own countrymen, and from pagans. I have faced danger in city streets, danger in the desert, danger on the high seas, danger among false Christians. I have known exhaustion, pain, long vigils, hunger and thirst, going without meals, cold and lack of clothing.

Apart from all external trials I have the daily burden of responsibility for all the churches. Do you think anyone is weak without my feeling his weakness? Does anyone have his faith upset without my longing to restore him?

Oh, if I am going to boast, let me boast of the things which have shown up my weakness! The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, he who is blessed for ever, knows that I speak the simple truth.

In Damascus, the town governor, acting by King Aretas' order had men out to arrest me (c AD37, Acts 9:23-25). I escaped by climbing through a window and being let down the wall in a basket. That's the sort of dignified exit I can boast about.

Aretas - King of Nabatea (9BC-AD40), capital Petra, apparently ruled Damascus even though it was a city of the Decapolis. His daughter was the first wife of Herod Antipas. Antipas divorced her for his niece Herodias, the mother of Salome who was responsible for the death of John the Baptist. King Aretas avenged his daughter's treatment by going to war against Antipas, who only survived with Roman help.

HIS "BOASTING" CONTINUES - HIS VISION OF HEAVEN, HIS "THORN IN THE FLESH"

2 Corinthians 12:1-10 - No, I don't think it's really a good thing for me to boast at all, but I will just mention visions and revelations of the Lord himself. I know a man in Christ (Paul himself) who, fourteen years ago (c AD41-44), had the experience of being caught up into the third Heaven (or Paradise). I don't know whether it was an actual physical experience, only God knows that. All I know is that this man was caught up into paradise. (I repeat, I do not know whether this was a physical happening or not, God alone knows.) This man (Paul) heard words that cannot, and indeed must not, be translated into human speech. I am honestly proud of an experience like that, but I have made up my mind not to boast of anything personal, except of what may be called my weaknesses. If I should want to boast I should certainly be no fool to be proud of my experiences, and I should be speaking nothing but the sober truth. Yet I am not going to do so, for I don't want anyone to think more highly of me than his experience of me and what he hears of me should warrant. So tremendous, however, were the revelations that God gave me that, in order to prevent my becoming absurdly conceited, I was given a physical handicap (also referred to in Galatians 4:13-14, and possibly a painful eye disease, epilepsy, or malaria) - one of Satan's angels - to harass me and effectually stop any conceit. Three times I begged the Lord for it to leave me, but his reply has been, "My grace is enough for you: for where there is weakness, my power is shown the more completely." Therefore, I have cheerfully made up my mind to be proud of my weaknesses, because they mean a deeper experience of the power of Christ. I can even enjoy weaknesses, suffering, privations, persecutions and difficulties for Christ's sake. For my very weakness makes me strong in him.

PAUL JUSTIFIES HIS BOASTING; HIS LOVE FOR THE CORINTHIANS; HIS APPROACHING VISIT

2 Corinthians 12:11-18 - I have made a fool of myself in this "boasting" business, but you forced me to do it. If only you had had a better opinion of me it would have been quite unnecessary. For I am not really in the least inferior, nobody as I am, to these extra-special messengers. You have had an exhaustive demonstration of the power God gives to a genuine messenger of his in the miracles, signs and works of spiritual power that you saw with your own eyes. What makes you feel so inferior to other churches? Is it because I have not allowed you to support me financially? My humblest apologies for this great wrong!

What can be your grounds for suspicion of me?

Now I am all ready to visit you for the third time (suggesting that Paul did make an intermediate short visit from Ephesus to Corinth), and I am still not going to be a burden to you. It is you I want - not your money. Children don't have to put by their savings for their parents; parents do that for their children. Consequently I will most gladly spend and be spent for your good, even though it means that the more I love you the less you love me.

"All right then," I hear you say, "we agree that he himself had none of our money." But are you thinking that I nevertheless was rogue enough to catch you by some trick? Just think. Did I make any profit out of the messengers I sent you? I asked Titus to go, and sent a brother with him. You don't think Titus made anything out of you, do you? Yet didn't I act in the same spirit as he, and take the same line as he did?

PAUL'S FINAL WARNINGS

PAUL'S AIM IS NOT TO DEFEND HIMSELF BUT TO WARN THEM TO TURN AWAY FROM SIN BEFORE HIS ARRIVAL

2 Corinthians 12:19-21 - Are you thinking that I am trying to justify myself in your eyes? Actually I am speaking in Christ before God himself, and my only reason for so doing is to help you in your spiritual life.

For I must confess that I am afraid that when I come I shall not perhaps find you as I should like to find you, and that you will not find me coming quite as you would like me to come. I am afraid of finding arguments, jealousy, ill-feeling, divided loyalties, slander, whispering, pride and disharmony. When I come, will God make me feel ashamed of you as I stand among you? Shall I have to grieve over many who have sinned already and are not yet sorry for the impurity, the immorality and the lustfulness of which they are guilty?

PAUL'S WARNING THAT SIN MUST BE DEALT WITH; HE MAY BE WEAK BUT GOD IS STRONG

2 Corinthians 13:1-10 - This third time (presumably after his first missionary visit, and second short trip across from Ephesus at the start of the church's difficulties) I am really coming to you in person. Remember the ancient law:

'By the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall be established' (Deuteronomy 19:15).

My previous warning, given on my second visit (again appearing to confirm the second intermediate visit), still stands and, though absent, I repeat it now as though I were present - my coming will not mean leniency for those who had sinned before that visit and those who have sinned since. It will in fact be a proof that I speak by the power of Christ. The Christ you have to deal with is not a weak person outside you, but a tremendous power inside you. He was "weak" enough to be crucified, yes, but he lives now by the power of God. I am weak as he was weak, but I am strong enough to deal with you for I share his life by the power of God.

Why not test yourselves instead of me?

You should be looking at yourselves to make sure that you are really Christ's. It is yourselves that you should be testing, not me. You ought to know by this time that Christ is in you, unless you are not real Christians at all. And when you have applied your test, I am confident that you will soon find that I myself am a genuine Christian. I pray God that you may find the right answer to your test, not because I have any need of your approval, but because I earnestly want you to find the right answer, even if that should make me no real Christian. For, after all, we can make no progress against the truth; we can only work for the truth.

We are glad to be weak if it means that you are strong. Our ambition for you is true Christian maturity. Hence the tone of this letter, so that when I do come I shall not be obliged to use that power of severity which God has given me - though even that is not meant to break you down but to build you up.

III - PAUL'S "GLAD" LETTER (concluded)

A FINAL APPEAL; FINAL GREETINGS; A BLESSING

2 Corinthians 13:11-14 - Last of all then, my brothers, good-bye! Set your hearts on this maturity I have spoken of, consider my advice, live in harmony, be at peace with one another. So shall the God of love and peace be ever with you.

A handshake all round, please! All the Christians here (in the Macedonian city which Paul has reached on his way to Corinth) send greeting.

- Paul closes his letter with a short passage implicitly summarising the doctrine of the Holy Trinity:

The grace that comes through our Lord Jesus Christ, the love that is of God the Father, and the fellowship that is ours in the Holy Spirit be with you all!

PAUL

PAUL'S LETTER TO THE GALATIANS

With people, places, definitions, maps .....

Writer: The apostle Paul, writing either (1) to the churches of South Galatia such as Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe established during his First Missionary Journey; or (2) to North Galatia, possibly resulting from his Second Journey. Galatia is in present-day Turkey

Date: (1) If South Galatia, c AD48 or 49 before the Council at Jerusalem; or (2) if North Galatia, c AD56 or 57 some time before Paul's Letter to the Romans

Where written: Where written: (1) On the way to the Council at Jerusalem; or (2) possibly from Macedonia or Corinth on Paul's Third Journey

Readers: The churches established (1) during Paul's First or (2) possibly Second Journey's

Why: The church is moving away from Paul's teaching of "justification by faith" in Jesus Christ towards meeting the needs of the Law. Paul condemns those who are teaching in this false way, and in contrast, declares that he has the authority of a true apostle. If the Galatians want to practice Jewish traditions such as circumcision, they have a stark choice - either slavery to the Law or freedom in Jesus. But they must understand that the liberty they enjoy as Christians is not a licence to behave as they want, but an obligation to serve others according to God's will.

Map - Paul Writes to the Galatians

Map Key: Letter sent from 1 to 2 or 3 to 4

PAUL'S AUTHORITY AS AN APOSTLE TO THE GENTILES

GREETINGS TO THE CHRISTIANS OF GALATIA; JESUS' SACRIFICE TO RESCUE US FROM OUR SINS

Galatians 1:1-5 - I, Paul, who am appointed and commissioned a messenger not by man but by Jesus Christ and God the Father (who raised him from the dead), I and all the brothers with me send the churches in Galatia greeting. Grace and peace to you from God the Father and from our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to the Father's plan gave himself for our sins and thereby rescued us from the present evil world-order. To him be glory for ever and ever!

THEY ARE BEING LED AWAY FROM THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST

Galatians 1:6-7 - I am amazed that you have so quickly transferred your allegiance from him (God) who called you in the grace of Christ to another "Gospel"! Not, of course, that it is or ever could be another

Gospel, but there are obviously men who are upsetting your faith with a travesty of the Gospel of Christ.

PAUL TOTALLY CONDEMNS THOSE RESPONSIBLE FOR FALSE TEACHING

Galatians 1:8-10 - Yet I say that if I, or an angel from Heaven, were to preach to you any other Gospel than the one you have heard, may he be damned! You have heard me say it before and now I put it down in black and white - may anybody who preaches any other Gospel than the one you have already heard be a damned soul! (Does that make you think now that I am serving man's interests or God's? If I were trying to win human approval I should never be Christ's servant.)

HIS GOSPEL IN CONTRAST WAS REVEALED TO HIM DIRECTLY BY JESUS

Galatians 1:11-12 - The Gospel I preach to you is no human invention. No man gave it to me, no man taught it to me; it came to me as a direct revelation from Jesus Christ.

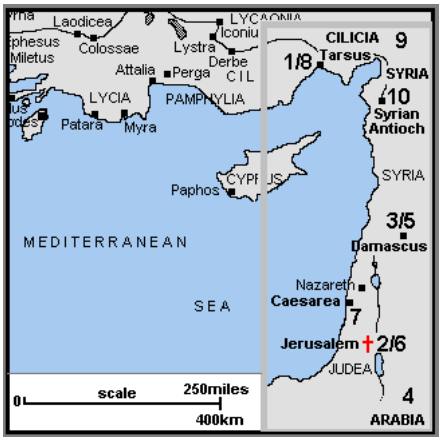
PAUL'S ZEAL AS A JEW; HIS EARLY LIFE AS A CHRISTIAN

Galatians 1:13-24 - For you have heard of my past career in the Jewish religion, how I persecuted the Church of God with fanatical zeal and, in fact, did my best to destroy it (Acts 9:1-2). I was ahead of most of my contemporaries in the Jewish religion, and had a greater enthusiasm for the old traditions. But when the time came for God (who had chosen me from the moment of my birth, and then called me by his grace) to reveal his Son (Jesus) within me (on the road to Damascus [3] - Map following) so that I might proclaim him to the non-Jewish world, I did not, as might have been expected, talk over the matter with any human being. I did not even go to Jerusalem to meet those who were God's messengers (apostles) before me - no, I went away to Arabia [4] and later came back to Damascus [5]. It was not until three years later that I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter (Acts 9:26-30), and I only stayed with him just over a fortnight. I did not meet any of the other messengers (apostles), except James, the Lord's brother.

All this that I am telling you is, I assure you before God, the plain truth. Later, I visited districts [9] in Syria (probably from Syrian Antioch, Acts 11:25) and Cilicia (perhaps from his home town of Tarsus, Acts 9:30), but I was still personally unknown to the churches of Judea. All they knew of me, in fact, was the saying: "The man who used to persecute us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy." And they thanked God for what had happened to me.

Map - The Conversion and Earliest Journeys of Saul (Paul) c AD34-45

Map Key: 1. The early journeys of Paul as recorded in his Letter to the Galatians and the Acts of the Apostles. Also in text in [red square brackets]
Part of Paul's pre-conversion and early Christian life (locations 1-2 & 6-8) is covered in Acts 9:1-30



HOW HE DEFENDED HIS MINISTRY TO THE GENTILES

Galatians 2:1-10 - Fourteen years later, I went up to Jerusalem again (either for the famine relief visit of Acts 11:27-30, or the later journey for the Council at Jerusalem, Acts 15:1-24), this time with Barnabas,

and we took Titus with us. My visit on this occasion was by divine command, and I gave a full exposition of the Gospel which I preach among the Gentiles. I did this first in private conference with the church leaders, to make sure that what I had done and proposed doing was acceptable to them. Not one of them intimated that Titus, because he was a Greek, ought to be circumcised. In fact, the suggestion would never have arisen but for the presence of some pseudo-Christians (perhaps the "Judaisers" of Acts 15:1-2), who wormed their way into our meeting to spy on the liberty we enjoy in Jesus Christ, and then attempted to tie us up with rules and regulations. We did not give those men an inch, for the truth of the Gospel for you and all Gentiles was at stake. And as far as the leaders of the conference were concerned (I neither know nor care what their exact position was: God is not impressed with a man's office), they had nothing to add to my Gospel. In fact they recognised that the Gospel for the uncircumcised (the Gentiles) was as much my commission as the Gospel for the circumcised (the Jews) was Peter's. For the God who had done such great work in Peter's ministry for the Jews was plainly doing the same in my ministry for the Gentiles. ...

- Paul either does not know about or is failing to recognise Peter's work amongst such Gentiles as the centurion Cornelius, Acts 10:24-48 -

... When, therefore, James, Peter and John (who were the recognised "pillars" of the church there - the brother of Jesus, and the two apostles) saw how God had given me his grace, they held out to Barnabas and me the right hand of fellowship, in full agreement that our mission was to the Gentiles and theirs to the Jews. The only suggestion they made was that we should not forget the poor - and with this I was, of course, only too ready to agree.

HIS CONFRONTATION WITH PETER OVER FORCING GENTILES TO FOLLOW JEWISH CUSTOMS

Galatians 2:11-14 - Later, however, when (the apostle) Peter came to (Syrian) Antioch I had to oppose him publicly, for he was then plainly in the wrong. It happened like this. Until the arrival of some of James' companions, he, Peter, was in the habit of eating his meals with the Gentiles. After they came, he withdrew and ate separately from the Gentiles - out of sheer fear of what the Jews might think. The other Jewish Christians carried out a similar piece of deception, and the force of their bad example was so great that even Barnabas was affected by it. But when I saw that this behaviour was a contradiction of the truth of the Gospel, I said to Peter so that everyone could hear, "If you, who are a Jew, do not live like a Jew but like a Gentile, why on earth do you try to make Gentiles live like Jews?"

WE LIVE BY BELIEVING IN CHRIST, NOT BY OBEYING THE LAW; OTHERWISE HE DIED FOR NOTHING

Galatians 2:15-21 - And then I went on to explain (to the apostle Peter, who during a visit to Syrian Antioch ate with Gentiles until the arrival of Jewish Christians from Jerusalem caused him to stop) that we, who are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners, know that a man is justified not by performing what the (Jewish) Law commands but by faith in Jesus Christ. We ourselves are justified by our faith and not by our obedience to the Law, for we have recognised that no one can achieve justification by doing the "works of the Law". Now if, as we seek the real truth about justification, we find we are as much sinners as the Gentiles, does that mean that Christ makes us sinners? Of course not! But if I attempt to build again the whole structure of justification by the Law then I do, in earnest, make myself a sinner. For under the Law I "died", and now I am dead to the Law's demands so that I may live for God. As far as the Law is concerned I may consider that I died on the cross with Christ. And my present life is not that of the old "I", but the living Christ within me. The bodily life I now live, I live believing in the Son of God, who loved me and sacrificed himself for me. Consequently I refuse to stultify the grace of God by reverting to the Law. For if righteousness were possible under the Law then Christ died for nothing!

THE CHOICE IS SLAVERY UNDER THE LAW OR FREEDOM IN CHRIST

THE GALATIANS MUST NOW CHOOSE BETWEEN BELIEVING THE NEW GOSPEL AND OBEYING THE OLD LAW; IT IS ONLY BY BELIEVING IN THE CRUCIFIED CHRIST THAT GOD GIVES YOU HIS HOLY SPIRIT

Galatians 3:1-5 - O you dear idiots of Galatia, who saw Jesus Christ the crucified so plainly, who has been casting a spell over you? I will ask you one simple question: did you receive the Spirit of God by trying to keep the Law or by believing the message of the Gospel? Surely you can't be so idiotic as to think that a man begins his spiritual life in the Spirit and then completes it by reverting to outward observances? Has all your painful experience brought you nowhere? I simply cannot believe it of you! Does God, who gives you his Spirit and works miracles among you, do these things because you have obeyed the Law or because you have believed the Gospel? Ask yourselves that.

ABRAHAM AS AN EXAMPLE OF LIVING IN FAITH, A FAITH FREELY AVAILABLE TO ALL

Galatians 3:6-9 - You can go right back to Abraham to see the principle of faith in God. He, we are told,

'believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.' (Genesis 15:6)

Can you not see, then, that all those (Jew or Gentile) who "believe God" are the real "sons of Abraham"? The scripture foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles "by faith", really proclaimed the Gospel centuries ago in the words spoken to Abraham,

'In you all the nations shall be blessed.' (Genesis 12:3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14)

All men of faith share the blessing of Abraham who "believed God".

NO ONE CAN MEET ALL THE DEMANDS OF THE LAW; FAITH IN JESUS SAVES US FROM THAT IMPOSSIBILITY

Galatians 3:10-14 - Everyone, however, who is involved in trying to keep the Law's demands falls under a curse, for it is written:

'Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the Law, to do them.' (Deuteronomy 27:26)

It is made still plainer that no one is justified in God's sight by obeying the Law, for:

'The just shall live by faith.' (Habakkuk 2:4)

And the Law is not a matter of faith at all but of doing, as, for example, in the scripture:

'The man who does them shall live by them.' (Leviticus 18:5)

Now Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the Law's condemnation, by himself becoming a curse for us when he was crucified. For the scripture is plain:

'Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.' (Deuteronomy 21:23)

God's purpose is therefore plain: that the blessing promised to Abraham might reach the Gentiles through Jesus Christ, and the Spirit might become available to us all by faith.

GOD TOLD ABRAHAM ABOUT THE COMING OF JESUS LONG BEFORE HE GAVE MOSES THE LAW

Galatians 3:15-18 - Let me give you an everyday illustration (of God's promise), my brothers. Once a contract has been properly drawn up and signed, it is honoured by both parties, and can neither be disregarded nor modified by a third party.

Now a promise was made to Abraham and to his seed. (Note in passing that the scripture says not "and to seeds" but uses the singular

'and to your seed' (Genesis 12:7; 13:15; 24:7),

meaning Christ.) I say then that the Law, which came into existence four hundred and thirty years later (Exodus 12:40; this 430 years is onlypart of the time between God's promise to Abraham, Genesis 12:1-3, and Moses receiving the Law, Exodus 19-31), cannot render null and void the original "contract" which God had made, and thus rob the promise of its value. For if the receiving of the promised blessing were now made to depend on the Law, that would amount to a cancellation of the original "contract" which God made with Abraham as a promise.

THE LAW WAS GIVEN TO SINFUL MAN TO PREPARE THE WAY FOR CHRIST'S COMING

Galatians 3:19-25 - Where then lies the point of the Law? It was an addition made to underline the existence and extent of sin until the arrival of the "seed" (Jesus) to whom the promise referred. The Law was inaugurated in the presence of angels and by the hand of a human intermediary (Moses). The very fact that there was an intermediary is enough to show that this was not the fulfilling of the promise. For the promise of God needs neither angelic witness nor human intermediary but depends on him alone.

Is the Law then to be looked upon as a contradiction of the promise (of the coming of Jesus Christ)? Certainly not, for if there could have been a law which gave men spiritual life then law would have produced righteousness (which would have been, of course, in full harmony with the purpose of the promise). But, as things are, the scripture has all men "imprisoned", because they are found guilty by the Law, that to men in such condition might come to release all who believe in Jesus Christ.

By faith we are rescued from the Law and become sons of God

Before the coming of faith we were all imprisoned under the power of the Law, with our only hope of deliverance the faith that was to be shown to us. Or, to change the metaphor, the Law was like a strict governess in charge of us until we went to the school of Christ and learned to be justified by faith in him. Once we had that faith we were completely free from the governess's authority.

EVERYONE WHO BELONGS TO CHRIST RECEIVES EVERYTHING THAT GOD PROMISED ABRAHAM

Galatians 3:26-29 - For now that you have faith in Christ you are all sons of God. All of you who were baptised "into" Christ have put on the family likeness of Christ. Gone is the distinction between Jew and Greek, slave and free man, male and female - you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, you are true descendants of Abraham, you are true heirs of his promise.

UNDER THE LAW WE ARE SLAVES TO THE WORLD; IN CHRIST WE BECOME SONS OF GOD

Galatians 4:1-7 - But you must realise that so long as an heir is a child, though he is destined to be master of everything, he is, in practice, no different from a servant. He has to obey a guardian or trustee until the time which his father has chosen for him to receive his inheritance. So is it with us: while we were "children" we lived under the authority of basic moral principles. But when the proper time came God sent his son, born of a human mother and born under the jurisdiction of the Law, that he might redeem those who were under the authority of the Law and lead us into becoming, by adoption, true sons of God. It is because you really are his sons that God has sent the Spirit of his Son into your hearts to cry "Father ("Abba" in Aramaic), dear Father". You, my brother, are not a servant any longer; you are a son. And, if you are a son, then you are certainly an heir of God through Christ.

HAVING TURNED FROM PAGAN RITUALS WHY NOW FOLLOW JEWISH FORMS OF WORSHIP

Galatians 4:8-11 - At one time when you (as Gentiles) had no knowledge of God, you were under the authority of gods who had no real existence. But now that you have come to know God, or rather are known by him, how can you revert to dead and sterile principles and consent to be under their power all over again? Your religion is beginning to be a matter of observing certain (Jewish) days or months or seasons or years. Frankly, you stagger me, you make me wonder if all my efforts over you have been wasted!

PAUL PLEADS WITH THEM TO RETURN TO THE WAYS HE TAUGHT THEM

Galatians 4:12-16 - I do beg you to follow me here, my brothers. I am a man like yourselves, and I have nothing against you personally. You know how handicapped I was by illness when I first preached the Gospel to you. You didn't shrink from me or let yourselves be revolted at the disease which was such a trial to me (possibly a painful eye disease, epilepsy, or malaria, already referred to in 2 Corinthians 12:7 as a "physical handicap" or "thorn in my flesh"). No, you welcomed me as though I were an angel of God, or even as though I were Jesus Christ himself! What has happened to that fine spirit of yours? I guarantee that in those days you would, if you could, have plucked out your eyes and given them to me (perhaps implying that he does have an eye disease). Have I now become your enemy because I continue to tell you the same truth?

HE WARNS THEM NOT TO BE LED ASTRAY BY THE FALSE TEACHERS

Galatians 4:17-20 - Oh, I know how keen these men (the "Judaisers") are to win you over, but can't you see that it is for their own ends? They would like to see you and me separated altogether, and have you all to themselves. Don't think I'm jealous - it is a grand thing that men should be keen to win you, whether I'm there or not, provided it is for the truth. Oh, my dear children, I feel the pangs of childbirth all over again till Christ be formed within you, and how I long to be with you now! Perhaps I could then alter my tone to suit your mood. As it is, I honestly don't know how to deal with you.

ABRAHAM'S TWO SONS ILLUSTRATE THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SLAVERY TO THE LAW AND FREEDOM THROUGH FAITH IN CHRIST

Galatians 4:21-31 - Now tell me, you who want to be under the Law, have you heard what the Law says?

It is written that Abraham had two sons (starting at Genesis 16), one by the slave and the other by the free woman. The child (Ishmael) of the slave (Hagar) was born in the ordinary course of nature, but the child (Isaac) of the free woman (Sarah) was born in accordance with God's promise. This can be regarded as an allegory. Here are the two agreements represented by the two women: the one from Mount Sinai bearing children into slavery, typified by Hagar (Mount Sinai being in Arabia, the land of the descendants of Ishmael, Hagar's son), and corresponding to present-day Jerusalem - for the Jews are still, spiritually speaking, "slaves". But the free woman typifies the heavenly Jerusalem, which is the mother of us all, and is spiritually "free". It is written:

'Rejoice, O barren (woman), you who do not bear! Break forth and shout, you who do not travail! For the desolate (woman) has many more children than she who has a husband.' (Isaiah 54:1)

Now we, my brothers, are like Isaac, for we are children born "by promise". But just as in those far-off days the natural son persecuted the "spiritual" son, so it is today. Yet what is the scriptural instruction?

'Cast out the bondwoman (slavewoman) and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman.' (Genesis 21:10)

So then, my brothers, we are not to look upon ourselves as the sons of the slave woman but of the free, not sons of slavery under the Law but sons of freedom under grace.

THEY NOW HAVE FREEDOM IN CHRIST; THEY MUST NOT BECOME SLAVES TO JEWISH LEGALISM

Galatians 5:1 - Plant your feet firmly therefore within the freedom that Christ has won for us, and do not let yourselves be caught again in the shackles of slavery.

CIRCUMCISION IS VALUELESS; ALL THAT MATTERS IS FAITH IN CHRIST LEADING TO ACTION IN LOVE

Galatians 5:2-6 - Listen! I, Paul, say this to you as solemnly as I can: if you consent to be circumcised then Christ will be of no use to you at all. I will say it again: every man who consents to be circumcised is bound to obey all the rest of the Law! If you try to be justified by the Law you automatically cut yourself off from the power of Christ, you put yourself outside the range of his grace. For it is by faith that we await in his Spirit the righteousness we hope to see. In Jesus Christ there is no validity in either circumcision or uncircumcision; it is a matter of faith, faith which expresses itself in love.

THOSE WHO HINDER THE GALATIANS PROGRESS AS CHRISTIANS WILL PAY A PRICE

Galatians 5:7-10 - You were making splendid progress; who put you off the course you had set for the truth? That sort of "persuasion" does not come from the the one who is calling you. Alas, it takes only a little leaven to affect the whole lump! I feel confident in the Lord that you will not take any fatal step. But whoever it is who is worrying you will have a serious charge to answer one day.

PAUL'S TOTAL CONDEMNATION OF THOSE WHO PREACH CIRCUMCISION

Galatians 5:11-12 - And as for me, my brothers, if I were still advocating circumcision (as some apparently allege!), why am I still suffering persecution? I suppose if only I would recommend this little rite(of circumcision) all the hostility which the preaching of the cross (of Jesus) provokes would

disappear! I wish those who are so eager to cut your bodies would cut themselves off from you altogether!

CHRISTIAN LIBERTY IS NOT A LICENCE FOR SELFISHNESS

CHRISTIAN CONDUCT

Galatians 5:13a - It is to freedom that you have been called, my brothers. Only be careful that freedom does not become mere opportunity for your lower nature.

LOVE - ITS PREEMINENCE

Galatians 5:13b-14 - You should be free to serve each other in love. For after all, the whole Law toward others is summed up by this one command, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself'.

FREEDOM AS CHRISTIANS

Galatians 5:15 - But if freedom means merely that you are free to attack and tear each other to pieces, be careful that it doesn't mean that between you, you destroy your fellowship altogether!

THE HOLY SPIRIT

Galatians 5:16-18 - Here is my (Paul's) advice. Live your whole life in the Spirit and you will not satisfy the desires of your lower nature. For the whole energy of the lower nature is set against the Spirit, while the whole power of the Spirit is contrary to the lower nature. Here is the conflict, and that is why you are not free to do what you want to do. But if you follow the leading of the Spirit, you stand clear of the Law.

NON-CHRISTIAN BEHAVIOUR

Galatians 5:19-21 - The activities of the lower nature are obvious. Here is a list: sexual immorality, impurity of mind, sensuality, worship of false gods, witchcraft, hatred, quarrelling, jealousy, bad temper, rivalry, factions, party-spirit, envy, drunkenness, orgies and things like that. I (Paul) solemnly assure you, as I did before, that those who indulge in such things will never inherit God's kingdom.

CHRISTIAN CONDUCT, also the HOLY SPIRIT

Galatians 5:22-25 - The (Holy) Spirit however (compared with our lower nature), produces in human life fruits such as these: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, fidelity, tolerance and self-control - and no law exists against any of them. Those who belong to Christ have crucified their old nature with all that it loved and lusted for. If our lives are centred in the Spirit, let us be guided by the Spirit.

SELF-IMPORTANCE

Galatians 5:26 - Let us not be ambitious for our own reputations, for that only means making each other jealous.

RESPONSIBILITY FOR OTHERS

Galatians 6:1 - Even if a man should be detected in some sin, my brothers, the spiritual ones among you should quietly set him back on the right path, not with any feeling of superiority but being yourselves on guard against temptation.

SERVING OTHERS

Galatians 6:2 - Carry each other's burdens and so live out the law of Christ. ....

FOOLING OURSELVES

Galatians 6:3-4 - If a man thinks he is "somebody", he is deceiving himself, for that very thought proves that he is nobody. Let every man learn to assess properly the value of his own work and he can then be glad when he has done something worth doing without dependence on the approval of others.

PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

Galatians 6:5 - ... every man must "shoulder his own pack" (carry his own load).

CHRISTIAN LEADERS

Galatians 6:6 - The man under Christian instruction should be willing to contribute towards the livelihood of his teacher.

REAPING WHAT WE SOW

Galatians 6:7-10 - Don't be under any illusion: you cannot make a fool of God! A man's harvest in life will depend entirely on what he sows. If he sows for his own lower nature his harvest will be the decay and death of his own nature. But if he sows for the Spirit he will reap the harvest of everlasting life by that Spirit. Let us not grow tired of doing good, for, unless we throw in our hand, the ultimate harvest is assured. Let us then do good to all men as opportunity offers, especially to those who belong to the Christian household.

PAUL'S EPILOGUE IN HIS OWN HAND

- The Letter has been dictated thus far to a secretary. Then:

PAUL'S WAY OF SHOWING HIS DISTRESS

Galatians 6:11 - Look at these huge letters I am making in writing these words to you with my own hand!

THE SELF-SEEKING AIMS OF THE "JUDAISERS" AND WHAT THE GALATIANS WILL LOSE

Galatians 6:12-13 - These men who are always urging you to be circumcised - what are they after? They want to present a pleasing front to the world and they want to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ. For even those who have been circumcised do not themselves keep the Law. But they want you circumcised so that they may be able to boast about your submission to their ruling.

IN CONTRAST, THE PREEMINENCE OF CHRIST'S CRUCIFIXION

Galatians 6:14-16 - Yet God forbid that I should boast about anything or anybody except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, which means that the world is a dead thing to me and I am a dead man to the world. But in Christ it is not circumcision or uncircumcision that counts but the power of new birth. To all who live by this principle, to the true Israel of God, may there be peace and mercy!

PAUL EMPHASISES HIS TOTAL COMMITMENT TO JESUS; A FINAL BLESSING

Galatians 6:17-18 - Let no one interfere with me after this. I carry on my scarred body (from the persecution suffered during his missionary journeys) the marks of my owner, the Lord Jesus.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, my brothers, be with your spirit.

PAUL

PAUL'S LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS

With people, places, definitions, map .....

Writer: The apostle Paul

Date: c AD62; sent with the letters to the Colossians, and to Philemon

Where written: Under house arrest in Rome

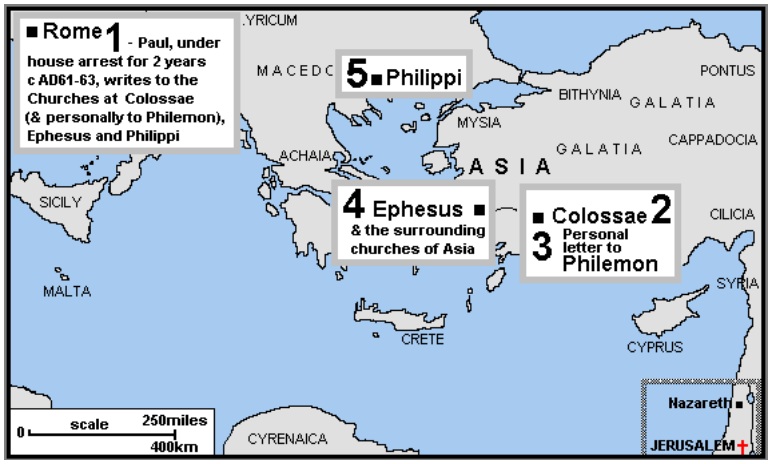
Readers: The church in Ephesus, but also a circular letter to other churches in the province of Asia;

Why: The Christian Jews of Asia may have been keeping themselves somewhat aloof from Gentile converts. In this general letter, Paul shows that God sent Christ to break down the ancient barriers between Jew and Gentile; through a shared faith, all are one as the Church of Christ. The second part of the letter has advice on the Christian life including the well-known verses on the "armour of God" (6:10-18).

According to some modern scholarship: Composed and written c AD62 by a secretary and signed by Paul; OR towards the end of the 1st century by an unknown Christian using Paul's name to give the letter authority

Map - Paul Writes from Prison in Rome

Map Key: Letter for Ephesus sent from 1 to 4



GOD'S PLAN TO SAVE ALL MANKIND

GREETINGS; GOD CHOSE US BEFORE TIME BEGAN TO BE HIS SONS THROUGH JESUS CHRIST

Ephesians 1:1-6 - Paul, messenger of Jesus Christ by God's choice, to all faithful Christians at Ephesus (and other places where this letter is read): grace and peace be to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Praise God for what he has done for us Christians!

Praise be to God for giving us through Christ every possible spiritual benefit as citizens of Heaven! For consider what he has done - before the foundation of the world he chose us to become, in Christ, his holy and blameless children living within his constant care. He planned, in his purpose of love, that we should be adopted as his own children through Jesus Christ - that we might learn to praise that glorious generosity of his which has made us welcome in the everlasting love he bears towards the Son.

GOD ENABLES US TO UNDERSTAND WE ARE SAVED AND FORGIVEN THROUGH HIS SON'S SACRIFICE

Ephesians 1:7-10 - It is through the Son, at the cost of his own blood, that we are redeemed, freely forgiven through that full and generous grace which has overflowed into our lives and opened our eyes to the truth. For God had allowed us to know the secret of his plan, and it is this: he purposes in his sovereign will that all human history shall be consummated in Christ, that everything that exists in Heaven or earth shall find its perfection and fulfilment in him.

ALL OF US ARE INCLUDED IN THIS PROMISE WHICH IS CONFIRMED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

Ephesians 1:11-14 - And here is the staggering thing - that in all which will one day belong to him we have been promised a share (since we were long ago destined for this by the one who achieves his purposes by his sovereign will), so that we, as the first to put our confidence in Christ, may bring praise to his glory! And you too trusted him, when you heard the message of truth, the Gospel of your salvation. And after you gave your confidence to him you were, so to speak, stamped with the promised Holy Spirit as a guarantee of purchase, until the day when God completes the redemption of what he has paid for as his own; and that will again be to the praise of his glory.

PAUL'S PRAYER THAT ALL MAY RECEIVE WISDOM, AND UNDERSTAND THE POWER GOD CAN MAKE AVAILABLE TO US

Ephesians 1:15-19 - Since, then, I heard of this faith of yours in the Lord Jesus and the practical way in which you are expressing it towards fellow-Christians, I thank God continually for you and I never give up praying for you; and this is my prayer. That God, the God of our Lord Jesus Christ and the all-glorious Father, will give you spiritual wisdom and the insight to know more of him: that you may receive that inner illumination of the spirit which will make you realise how great is the hope to which he is calling you - the magnificence and splendour of the inheritance promised to Christians - and how tremendous is the power available to us who believe in God.

THIS IS THE SAME POWER THAT RAISED JESUS FROM THE DEAD, AND CONFIRMS HIM AS KING OF ALL CREATION

Ephesians 1:20-23 - That power is the same divine power which was demonstrated in Christ when he raised him from the dead and gave him the place of supreme honour in Heaven - a place that is infinitely superior to any conceivable command, authority, power or control, and which carries with it a name far beyond any name that could ever be used in this world or the world to come.

God has placed everything under the power of Christ and has set him up as head of everything for the Church. for the Church is his body, and in that body lives fully the one who fills the whole wide universe.

BOTH JEWS AND GENTILES ARE UNITED THROUGH CHRIST

ONCE WE WERE ALL DEAD TO WORLDLY SIN, NOW CHRIST HAS MADE US ALIVE SPIRITUALLY

Ephesians 2:1-3 - To you, who were spiritually dead all the time that you drifted along on the stream of this world's ideas of living, and obeyed its unseen ruler (who is still operating in those who do not respond to the truth of God), to you Christ has given life! We all lived like that in the past, and followed the impulses and imaginations of our evil nature, being in fact under the wrath of God by nature, like everyone else.

NOW WE ARE SAVED THROUGH FAITH IN CHRIST, AND N0T BY ANY AMOUNT OF GOOD WORKS WE MAY DO

Ephesians 2:4-10 - But even though we were dead in our sins God, who is rich in mercy, because of the great love he had for us, gave us life together with Christ - it is, remember, by grace and not by achievement that you are saved - and has lifted us right out of the old life to take our place with him in Christ in the Heavens. Thus he shows for all time the tremendous generosity of the grace and kindness he has expressed towards us in Christ Jesus. It was nothing you could or did achieve - it was God's gift to you. No one can pride himself upon earning the love of God. The fact is that what we are we owe to the hand of God upon us. We are born afresh in Christ, and born to do those good deeds which God planned for us to do.

BEFORE CHRIST CAME, GENTILES WERE EXCLUDED FROM GOD'S PROMISES TO THE JEWS, BUT NO LONGER

Ephesians 2:11-13 - Do not lose sight of the fact that you were born "Gentiles", known by those whose bodies were circumcised (the Jews) as "the uncircumcised". You were without Christ, you were utter strangers to God's chosen community, the Jews, and you had no knowledge of, or right to, the promised agreements. You had nothing to look forward to and no God to whom you could turn. But now, through the blood of Christ, you who were once outside the pale are with us inside the circle of God's love and purpose.

CHRIST HAS BROUGHT JEW AND GENTILE TOGETHER THROUGH HIS DEATH ON THE CROSS

Ephesians 2:14-18 - For Christ is our living peace. He has made a unity of the conflicting elements of Jew and Gentile by breaking down the barrier which lay between us. By his sacrifice he removed the hostility of the Law, with all its commandments and rules, and made in himself out of the two, Jew and Gentile, one new man, thus producing peace. For he reconciled both to God by the sacrifice of one body on the cross, and by this act made utterly irrelevant the antagonism between them. Then he came and told both you who were far from God (the Gentiles) and us who were near (the Jews) that the war was over. And it is through him that both of us now can approach the Father in the one Spirit.

NOW WE ARE ALL BUILDING BLOCKS IN CHRIST'S CHURCH

Ephesians 2:19-22 - So you are no longer outsiders or aliens, but fellow-citizens with every other Christian - you belong now to the household of God. Firmly beneath you in the foundation, God's messengers (apostles) and prophets, the actual foundation-stone being Jesus Christ himself. In him each separate piece of building, properly fitting into its neighbour, grows together into a temple consecrated to God. You are all part of this building in which God himself lives by his spirit.

PAUL IN PRISON

Ephesians 3:1 - It is in this great cause (of Jesus Christ) that I, Paul, have become Christ's prisoner for you Gentiles.

IT WAS REVEALED TO PAUL THAT GOD INTENDED CHRIST TO BE FOR ALL MEN

Ephesians 3:2-6 - For you must have heard how God gave me grace to become your minister, and how he allowed me to understand his secret by giving me a direct Revelation. (What I have written briefly of this above will explain to you my knowledge of the mystery of Christ.) This secret was hidden to past generations of mankind, but it has now, by the spirit, been made plain to God's consecrated messengers and prophets. It is simply this: that the Gentiles, who were previously excluded from God's agreements, are to be equal heirs with his chosen people, equal members and equal partners in God's promise given by Christ through the Gospel.

HIS DUTY IS TO REVEAL THIS MYSTERY TO THE GENTILES, SO ALL MAY APPROACH GOD DIRECTLY THROUGH CHRIST

Ephesians 3:7-13 - And I was made a minister of that Gospel by the grace he gave me, and by the power with which he equipped me. Yes, to me, less than the least of all Christians, has God given this grace, to enable me to proclaim to the Gentiles the incalculable riches of Christ, and to make plain to all men the meaning of that secret which he who created everything in Christ has kept hidden from the creation until now. The purpose is that all the angelic powers should now see the complex wisdom of God's plan being worked out through the Church, in conformity to that timeless purpose which he centred in Jesus, our Lord. It is in this same Jesus, because we have faith in him, that we dare, even with confidence, to approach God. In view of these tremendous issues, I beg you not to lose heart because I am now suffering (in prison) for my part in bringing you the Gospel. Indeed, you should be honoured.

PAUL'S PRAYER THAT THEY MAY KNOW THE IMMENSITY OF CHRIST'S LOVE, AND SO LOVE ACCORDINGLY

Ephesians 3:14-19 - When I think of the greatness of this great plan I fall on my knees before God the Father (from whom all fatherhood, earthly or heavenly, derives its name), and I pray that out of the glorious richness of his resources he will enable you to know the strength of the spirit's inner re-inforcement - that Christ may actually live in your hearts by your faith. And I pray that you, firmly fixed in

love yourselves, may be able to grasp (with all Christians) how wide and deep and long and high is the love of Christ - and to know for yourselves that love so far beyond our comprehension. May you be filled though all your being with God himself!

A BLESSING; WE HAVE ACCESS TO GOD'S IMMEASURABLE POWER THROUGH CHRIST

Ephesians 3:20-21 - Now to him who by his power within us is able to do far more than we ever dare to ask or imagine - to him be glory in the Church through Jesus Christ for ever and ever, amen!

CHRISTIAN UNITY AND CHRISTIAN LIVING

BEHAVE IN A CHRISTIAN MANNER; BE UNITED IN THE BODY OF CHRIST

Ephesians 4:1-6 - As God's prisoner (in Rome), then, I beg you to live lives worthy of your high calling. Accept life with humility and patience, making allowances for each other because you love each other. Make it your aim to be at one in the (Holy) Spirit, and you will inevitably be at peace with one another. You all belong to one body, of which there is one Spirit, just as you all experienced one calling to one hope. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God, one Father of us all, who is the one over all, the one working through all and the one living in all.

OUR DIFFERENT SPIRITUAL GIFTS ARE NEEDED TO BUILD THE CHURCH, THE BODY OF CHRIST

Ephesians 4:7-13 - Naturally there are different gifts and functions; individually grace is given to us in different ways out of the rich diversity of Christ's giving. As the scripture says:

'When he ascended on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men' (Psalm 68:18).

(Note the implication here - to say that Christ "ascended" means that he must previously have "descended", that is from the height of Heaven to the depth of this world. The one who made this descent is identically the same person as he who has now ascended high above the very Heavens - that the whole universe from lowest to highest might know his presence.)

His "gifts to men" were varied. Some he made his messengers (apostles), some prophets, some preachers of the Gospel; to some he gave the power to guide and teach his people. His gifts were made that Christians might be properly equipped for their service, that the whole body might be built up until the time comes when, in the unity of the common faith and common knowledge of the Son of God, we arrive at real maturity - that measure of development which is meant by the "fullness of Christ".

AS MATURE AND LOVING CHRISTIANS, WE ARE MEANT TO PLAY OUR PART IN BUILDING THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

Ephesians 4:14-16 - We are not meant to remain as children at the mercy of every chance wind of teaching and the jockeying of men who are expert in the crafty presentation of lies. But we are meant to hold firmly to the truth in love, and to grow up in every way into Christ, the head. For it is from the head that the whole body. as a harmonious structure knit together by the joints with which it is provided, grows by the proper functioning of individual parts to its full maturity in love.

THEREFORE DO NOT LIVE LIKE THE GENTILES - RULED BY YOUR PASSIONS

Ephesians 4:17-19 - This is my instruction, then, which I give you from God. Do not live any longer as the Gentiles live. For they live blindfold in a world of illusion, and cut off from the life of God through ignorance and insensitiveness. They have stifled their consciences and then surrendered themselves to sensuality, practising any form of impurity which lust can suggest.

YOU HAVE BEEN TAUGHT TO REJECT YOUR OLD EARTHLY WAYS; YOU ARE A NEW CREATION

Ephesians 4:20-24 - But you have learned nothing like that from Christ, if you have really heard his voice and understood the truth that he has taught you. No, what you learned was to fling off the dirty clothes of the old way of living, which were rotted through and through with lust's illusions, and, with yourselves mentally and spiritually re-made, to put on the clean fresh clothes of the new life which was made by God's design for righteousness and the holiness which is no illusion.

LYING

Ephesians 4:25 - Finish .... with lying and tell your neighbour the truth. For we are not separate units but intimately related to each other in Christ.

ANGER, also the DEVIL

Ephesians 4:26-27 - If you are angry, be sure that it is not out of wounded pride or bad temper. Never go to bed angry - don't give the devil that sort of foothold.

THIEVES

Ephesians 4:28 - If you used to be a thief you must not only give up stealing, but you must learn to make an honest living, so that you may be able to give to those in need.

CHRISTIAN CONDUCT; also the "TONGUE"

Ephesians 4:29 - Let there be no more foul language, but good words instead - words suitable for the occasion, which God can use to help other people.

the HOLY SPIRIT

Ephesians 4:30 - Never hurt the Holy Spirit. He is, remember, the personal pledge of your eventual full redemption.

CHRISTIAN CONDUCT

Ephesians 4:31-32 - Let there be no more resentment, no more anger or temper, no more violent self-assertiveness, no more slander and no more malicious remarks, Be kind to each other, be understanding. Be as ready to forgive others as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you.

LOVE - ITS PREEMINENCE, also SELFLESSNESS

Ephesians 5:1-2 - As children copy their fathers you, as God's children, are to copy him. Live your lives in love - the same sort of love which Christ gives us and which he perfectly expressed when he gave himself up for us in sacrifice to God.

CHRISTIAN RELATIONSHIPS

CHRISTIAN CONDUCT

Ephesians 5:3-21 - .... as for sexual immorality in all its forms, and the itch to get your hands on what belongs to other people - don't even talk about such things; they are not fit subjects for Christians to talk about. The key-note of your conversation should not be nastiness or silliness or flippancy, but a sense of all that we owe to God.

Evil is as utterly different from good as light from darkness

For of this much you can be certain: that neither the immoral nor the dirty-minded nor the covetous man (which latter is, in effect, worshipping a false god) has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Don't let anyone fool you on this point, however plausible his argument. It is these very things which bring down the wrath of God upon the disobedient. Have nothing to do with men like that - once you were "darkness" but now you are "light". Live then as children of the light. The light produces in men quite the opposite of sins like these - everything that is wholesome and good and true. Let your lives be living proofs of the things which please God. Steer clear of the activities of darkness; let your lives show by contrast how dreary and futile these things are. (You know the sort of things I mean - to detail their secret doings is really too shameful). For light is capable of "showing up" everything for what it really is. It is even possible (after all, it happened to you!) for light to turn the thing it shines upon into light also. Thus God speaks through the scriptures: "Awake, you who sleep, arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light."

You know the truth - let your life show it!

Live life, then, with a due sense of responsibility, not as men who do not know the meaning and purpose of life but as those who do. Make the best use of your time, despite all the difficulties of these days. Don't be vague but firmly grasp what you know to be the will of God. Don't get your stimulus from wine (for there is always the danger of excessive drinking), but let the Spirit stimulate your souls. Express your joy in singing among yourselves psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, making music in your

hearts for the ears of God! Thank God at all times for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. And "fit in with" each other, because of your common reverence for Christ.

WIVES

Ephesians 5:22-24 - ... wives must learn to adapt yourselves to your husbands, as you submit yourselves to the Lord, for the husband is the "head" of the wife in the same way that Christ is head of the Church and saviour of the body. The willing subjection of the Church to Christ should be reproduced in the submission of wives to their husbands. ....

HUSBANDS

Ephesians 5:25-33a - ..... the husband must give his wife the same sort of love that Christ gave to the Church, when he sacrificed himself for her. Christ gave himself to make her holy, having cleansed her through the baptism of his Word - to make her an altogether glorious Church in his eyes. She is to be free from spots, wrinkles or any other disfigurement - a Church holy and perfect.

Men ought to give their wives the love they naturally have for their own bodies. The love a man gives his wife is the extending of his love for himself to enfold her. Nobody ever hates or neglects his own body; he feeds and looks after it. And that is what Christ does for his body, the Church. And we are all members of that body, we are his flesh and blood! 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'. The marriage relationship is doubtless a great mystery, but I am speaking of something deeper still - the marriage of Christ and his Church. In practice what I have said amounts to this: let every one of you who is a husband love his wife as he loves himself ....

WIVES

Ephesians 5:33b - .... let the wife reverence her husband.

CHILDREN'S BEHAVIOUR

Ephesians 6:1-3 - Children, the right thing for you to do is to obey your parents as those whom God has set over you. The first commandment to contain a promise was: 'Honour your father and your mother, that it may be well with you and that you may live long on the earth'.

PARENTS

Ephesians 6:4 - Fathers, don't over-correct your children or make it difficult for them to obey the commandment (to "honour your father and your mother"). Bring them up with Christian teaching in Christian discipline.

EMPLOYEES

Ephesians 6:5-8 - Slaves (employees), obey your human masters (employers) sincerely with a proper sense of respect and responsibility, as service rendered to Christ himself; not with the idea of currying favour with men, but as the servants of Christ conscientiously doing what you believe to be the will of God for you. You may be sure that God will reward a man for good work, irrespectively of whether the man be slave or free.

EMPLOYERS

Ephesians 6:9 - ..... employers, be as conscientious and responsible towards those who serve you as you expect them to be towards you, neither misusing the power over others that has been put in your hands, nor forgetting that you are responsible yourselves to a heavenly employer who makes no distinction between master and man.

CHRISTIAN DEFENCE AGAINST THE FORCES OF EVIL

YOU ARE A CHRISTIAN SOLDIER: PUT ON THE FULL ARMOUR OF GOD, AND USE IT

Ephesians 6:10-18 - In conclusion be strong - not in yourselves but in the Lord, in the power of his boundless resource. Put on God's complete armour so that you can successfully resist all the devil's methods of attack. For our fight is not against any physical enemy: it is against organisations and powers that are spiritual. We are up against the unseen power that controls this dark world, and spiritual

agents from the very headquarters of evil. Therefore you must wear the whole armour of God that you may be able to resist evil in its day of power, and that even when you have fought to a standstill you may still stand your ground. Take your stand then with truth as your belt, righteousness your breastplate, the Gospel of peace firmly on your feet, salvation as your helmet and in your hand the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God. Above all be sure you take faith as your shield, for it can quench every burning missile the enemy hurls at you. Pray at all times with every kind of spiritual prayer, keeping alert and persistent as you pray for all Christ's men and women.

PAUL ASKS FOR PRAYER

Ephesians 6:19-20 - And pray for me, too, that I may be able to speak freely here (in prison in Rome) to make known the secret of that Gospel for which I am, so to speak, an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may speak out about it as my plain and obvious duty.

TYCHICUS WILL BE PAUL'S MESSENGER; A FINAL BLESSING

Ephesians 6:21-24 - Tychicus, beloved brother and faithful minister, will tell you personally what I am doing and how I am getting on. I am sending him to you bringing this letter (and the Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon) for that purpose, so that you will know exactly how we are and may take fresh heart:

Peace be to all Christian brothers, and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ!

Grace be with all those who sincerely love our Lord Jesus Christ.

PAUL

PAUL'S LETTER TO THE PHILIPPIANS

With people, places, definitions, map .....

Writer: The apostle Paul

Date: c AD 61 or 63, either before, or after the Letters to the Philippians, Colossians, and to Philemon

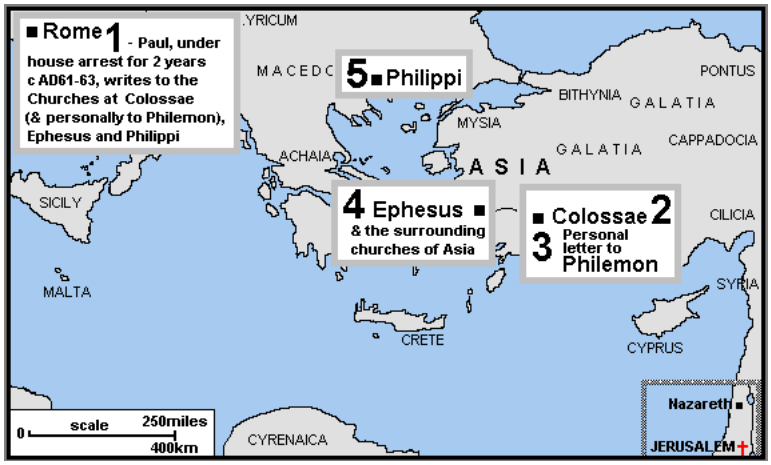
Where written: Under house arrest in Rome

Readers: The church at Philippi founded by Paul during his Second Missionary Journey (Acts 16:12-40);

Why: Philippi is a caring and generous church (2 Corinthians 8:1-5), for whom Paul has a special affection. Its members probably included Lydia, the dealer in purple cloth, the Phillipian jailer and his family, and perhaps Luke. In this Letter, Paul shows his joy in spite of his imprisonment, his love for the church, his overwhelming devotion to Christ and all he means, and his concern that the Phillipians will drift away from all they have been taught.

Map - Paul Writes from Prison in Rome

Map Key: Letter for Philippi sent from 1 to 5



GREETINGS AND THANKSGIVING

GREETINGS TO BISHOPS, DEACONS AND ALL CHRISTIANS

Philippians 1:1-2 - Paul and Timothy, true servants of Jesus Christ, to the bishops ....

Bishop (or overseer) - "Bishop" from overseer, "episkopos" in Greek. In the New Testament, the word "overseer" - traditionally "bishop" - is only used a few times, often in association with deacon and with no clear definition of its function. The present role of bishop only developed later in the life of the Church. In the J B Phillips version, "guardian" or "having oversight" is sometimes found -

...., deacons ....

Deacons - This the first time this term is used in the New Testament, although some of their duties were outlined earlier in Acts 6:1-4 -

.... and all true Christians at Philippi, grace and peace from God our Father and Jesus Christ the Lord!

PAUL GIVES THANKS FOR THE PHILIPPIANS; HIS AFFECTION AND PRAYERS FOR THEM

Philippians 1:3-11 - I thank God for you Christians at Philippi whenever I think of you. My constant prayers for you are a real joy, for they bring back to my mind how we have worked together for the

Gospel from the earliest days until now. I feel sure that the one (God) who has begun his good work in you will go on developing it until the day of Jesus Christ.

It is only natural that I should feel like this about you all - you are very dear to me. For during the time I was in prison as well as when I was out defending and demonstrating the power of the Gospel we shared together the grace of God. God knows how much I long, with the deepest Christian love and affection, for your companionship. My prayer for you is that you may have still more love - a love that is full of knowledge and wise insight. I want you to be able always to recognise the highest and the best, and to live sincere and blameless lives until the day of Jesus Christ. I want to see your lives full of true goodness, produced by the power that Jesus Christ gives you to the praise and glory of God.

PAUL'S IMPRISONMENT AND CONTINUING MINISTRY

PAUL'S IMPRISONMENT FURTHERS THE GOSPEL

Philippians 1:12-18a - Now, concerning myself, I want you to know, my brothers, that what has happened to me has, in effect, turned out to the advantage of the Gospel. For, first of all, my imprisonment means a personal witness for Christ before the palace guards ...

- Drawn from the 10,000 strong Imperial Praetorian guard in Rome. Philippians 4:22 following, refers to members of Caesar's household who have also become Christians -

... not to mention others who come and go. Then, it means that most of our brothers, somehow taking fresh heart in the Lord from the very fact that I am a prisoner for Christ's sake, have shown far more courage in boldly proclaiming the Word of God. I know that some are preaching Christ out of jealousy, in order to annoy me, but some are preaching him in good faith. These latter are preaching out of their love for me. For they know that God has set me here in prison to defend our right to preach the Gospel. The motive of the former (.. perhaps the "Judaisers") is questionable - they preach in a partisan spirit, hoping to make my chains even more galling than they would otherwise be. But what does it matter? However they may look at it, the fact remains that Christ is being preached, whether sincerely or not, and that fact makes me very happy.

WHETHER PAUL LIVES OR DIES, HE LONGS TO SERVE CHRIST

Philippians 1:18b-26 - Yes, and I shall go on being very happy, for I know that what is happening will be for the good of my own soul, thanks to your prayers and the resources of the spirit of Jesus Christ. It all accords with my own earnest wishes and hopes, which are that I should never be in any way ashamed, but that now, as always, I should honour Christ with the utmost boldness by the way I live, whether that means I am to face death or to go on living. For living to me means simply "Christ", and if I die I should merely gain more of him. I realise, of course, that the work which I have started may make it necessary for me to go on living in this world, I should find it very hard to make a choice. I am torn in two directions - on the one hand I long to leave this world and live with Christ, and that is obviously the best thing for me. Yet, on the other hand, it is probably more necessary for you that I should stay here on earth. That is why I feel pretty well convinced that I shall not leave this world yet, but shall be able to stand by you, to help you forward in Christian living and to find increasing joy in your faith. So you can look forward to making much of me as your minister in Christ when I come to see you again!

A CALL TO LIVE IN UNITY, LOVE AND HUMILITY

HE ENCOURAGES THE PHILIPPIANS TO STAND FIRM IN THEIR FAITH

Philippians 1:27-30 - But whatever happens, make sure that your everyday life is worthy of the Gospel of Christ. So that whether I do come and see you, or merely hear about you from a distance, I may know that you are standing fast in a united spirit, battling with a single mind for the faith of the Gospel and not caring two straws for your enemies (whether Gentiles or Jews). The very fact that they are your enemies is plain proof that they are lost to God, while the fact that you have such men as enemies is plain proof that you yourselves are being saved by God. You are given, in this battle, the privilege not merely of believing in Christ but also of suffering for his sake. It is now your turn to take part in that battle you once saw me engaged in, and which, in point of fact, I am still fighting.

A CALL TO LIVE IN UNITY, LOVE AND HUMILITY

BE LIKE CHRIST; LIVE TOGETHER IN LOVE, HUMILITY AND SELFLESSNESS

Philippians 2:1-11 - Now if your experience of Christ's encouragement and love means anything to you, if you have known something of the fellowship of his Spirit, and all that it means in kindness and deep sympathy, do make my best hope for you come true! Live together in harmony, live together in love, as though you had only one mind and one spirit between you. Never act from motives of rivalry or personal vanity, but in humility think more of each other than you do of yourselves. None of you should think only of his own affairs, but should learn to see things from other people's point of view.

Let Christ be your example of humility

Let Christ himself be your example as to what your attitude should be. For he, who had always been God by nature, did not cling to his prerogatives as God's equal, but stripped himself of all privilege by consenting to be a slave by nature and being born as mortal man. And, having become man, he humbled himself by living a life of utter obedience, even to the extent of dying, and the death he died was the death of a common criminal. That is why God has now lifted him so high, and has given him the name beyond all names, so that at the name of Jesus "every knee shall bow", whether in Heaven or earth or under the earth. And that is why, in the end, "every tongue shall confess" that Jesus Christ" is the Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

CONTINUE YOUR CHRISTIAN JOURNEY; SHINE LIKE LIGHTS IN A DARK, FALLEN WORLD

Philippians 2:12-18 - So then, my dearest friends, as you have always followed my advice - and that not only when I was present to give it - so now that I am far away (in a Roman prison) be keener than ever to work out the salvation that God has given you with a proper sense of awe and responsibility. For it is God who is at work within you, giving you the will and the power to achieve his purpose.

Do all you have to do without grumbling or arguing, so that you may be God's children, blameless, sincere and wholesome, living in a warped and diseased world, and shining there like lights in a dark place. For you hold in your hands the very word of life. Thus can you give me something to be proud of in the day of Christ, for I shall know then that I did not spend my energy in vain. Yes, and if it should happen that (I am executed in Rome, and ....) my life-blood is, so to speak, poured out upon the sacrifice and offering which your faith means to God, then I can still be very happy, and I can share my happiness with you all. I should like to feel that you could be glad about this too, and could share with me the happiness I speak of.

PAUL'S MESSENGERS

TIMOTHY WILL VISIT PHILIPPI SOON

Philippians 2:19-24 - ... I hope in Jesus Christ that it will not be long before I can send Timothy to you (... if Timothy's visit to Philippi took place, it is not referred to in the New Testament), and then I shall be cheered by a first-hand account of you and your doings. I have nobody else with a genuine interest in your well-being. All the others seem to be wrapped up in their own affairs and do not really care for the business of Jesus Christ. But you know how Timothy has proved his worth, working with me for the Gospel like a son with his father. I hope to send him to you as soon as I can tell how things will work out for me, but God gives me some hope that it will not be long before I am (released and) able to come myself as well.

EPAPHRODITUS IS RETURNING TO PHILIPPI

Philippians 2:25-30 - I have considered it desirable, however, to send you Epaphroditus. He has been to me brother, fellow-worker and comrade-in-arms, as well as being the messenger you sent to see to my wants. He has been home-sick for you, and was worried because he knew that you had heard that he was ill. Indeed he was ill, very dangerously ill, but God had mercy on him - and incidentally on me as well, so that I did not have the sorrow of losing him to add to my sufferings. I am particularly anxious, therefore, to send him to you so that when you see him again you may be glad, and to know of your joy will lighten my own sorrows. Welcome him in the Lord with great joy! You should hold men like him in highest honour, for his loyalty to Christ brought him very near death - he risked his life to do for me in person what distance prevented you all from doing.

Epaphroditus - Not to be confused with Epaphras in the Letter to the Colossians in Asia Minor Colossians 1:7). This Epaphroditus has been sent by the Philippian church in Macedonia with gifts for Paul in Rome (Philippians 4:18). After recovering from his illness, he is now returning to Philippi with Paul's Letter.

FOR PAUL NOTHING MATTERS IN LIFE BUT CHRIST

PAUL WARNS THEM ABOUT THE "JUDAISERS"; HE IS AS MUCH A JEW AS THEY YET ALL THAT MATTERS IS KNOWING JESUS

Philippians 3:1-6 - In conclusion, my brothers, delight yourselves in the Lord! It doesn't bore me to repeat a piece of advice like this, and if you follow it you will find it a great safeguard to your souls.

The "circumcision" party are the enemies of your faith and freedom

Be on your guard against these curs, these wicked workmen, these would-be mutilators of your bodies (through physical circumcision)! We are, remember, truly circumcised when we worship God by the Spirit, when we find our joy in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in what we are in the flesh.

I was even more of a Jew than these Jews, yet knowing Christ has changed my whole life

If it were right to have such confidence, I could certainly have it, and if any of these men thinks he has grounds for such confidence I can assure him I have more. I was born a true Jew, I was circumcised on the eighth day, I was a member of the tribe of Benjamin, I was in fact a full-blooded Jew. As far as keeping the Law is concerned I was a Pharisee, and you can judge my enthusiasm for the Jewish faith by my active persecution of the Church. As far as the Law's righteousness is concerned, I don't think anyone could have found fault with me.

PAUL'S INFINITE COMMENDATION OF ALL THAT JESUS CHRIST MEANS

Philippians 3:7-11 - Yet every advantage that I had gained (as a true Jew) I considered lost for Christ's sake. Yes, and I look upon everything as loss compared with the overwhelming gain of knowing Jesus Christ my Lord. For his sake I did in actual fact suffer the loss of everything, but I considered it useless rubbish compared with being able to win Christ. For now my place is in him, and I am not dependent upon any of the self-achieved righteousness of the Law. God has given me that genuine righteousness which comes from faith in Christ. How changed are my ambitions! Now I long to know Christ and the power shown by his resurrection: now I long to share his sufferings, even to die as he died, so that I may perhaps attain as he did, the resurrection from the dead.

ALTHOUGH STILL WELL SHORT OF PERFECTION, PAUL PRESSES ON TOWARDS CHRIST

Philippians 3:12-16 - Yet, my brothers, I do not consider myself to have "arrived", spiritually, nor do I consider myself already perfect. But I keep going on, grasping ever more firmly that purpose for which Christ grasped me. My brothers, I do not consider myself to have fully grasped it even now. But I do concentrate on this: I leave the past behind and with hands outstretched to whatever lies ahead I go straight for the goal - my reward the honour of being called by God in Christ.

My ambition is the true goal of the spiritually adult: make it yours

All of us who are spiritually adult should set ourselves this sort of ambition, and if at present you cannot see this, yet you will find that this is the attitude which God is leading you to adopt. It is important that we go forward in the light of such truth as we have ourselves attained to.

HIS WARNINGS AGAINST EARTHLY LIVING; HIS CALL TO STAND FIRM AND LIVE AS CHRISTIANS

Phillipians 3:17-4:1 - Let me be your example here, my brothers: let my example be the standard by which you can tell who are the genuine Christians among those about you. For there are many, of whom I have told you before and tell you again now, even with tears, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ. These men are heading for utter destruction - their god is their own appetite, their pride is in what they should be ashamed of, and this world is the limit of their horizon. But we are citizens of Heaven; our outlook goes beyond this world to the hopeful expectation of the saviour who will come from Heaven,

the Lord Jesus Christ. He will re-make these wretched bodies of ours to resemble his own glorious body, by that power of his which makes him the master of everything that is.

(Chapter 4 ....) So, my brothers whom I love and long for, my joy and my crown, do stand firmly in the Lord, and remember how much I love you.

ADVICE, THANKS AND FAREWELLS

A PLEA FOR PERSONAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN TWO WOMEN TO BE SETTLED

Phillipians 4:2-3 - Euodius and Syntyche ....

Euodias (Euodia) & Syntyche - Both women probably held office, perhaps as deaconesses, in this the first church established by Paul in Europe. The first member was also a woman - Lydia -

... I beg you by name to make up your differences as Christians should! And, my true fellow-worker (or possibly Syzygus, the name of an actual person) help these women. They both worked hard with me for the Gospel, as did Clement ....

Clement - Some sources link him with Clement, bishop of Rome at the turn of the 1st century and writer of the Epistle to the Corinthian church (c AD96). However, Clement was a common name at that time -

.... and all my other fellow-workers whose names are in the book of life.

CHRISTIAN CONDUCT

Philippians 4:4-5 - Delight yourselves in God, yes, find your joy in him at all times. Have a reputation for gentleness, and never forget the nearness of your Lord.

PEACE, also PRAYER, WORRY

Philippians 4:6-7 - Don't worry over anything whatever; tell God every detail of your needs in earnest and thankful prayer, and the peace of God which transcends human understanding, will keep constant guard over your hearts and minds as they rest in Christ Jesus.

CHRISTIAN CONDUCT

Philippians 4:8-9 - Here is a last piece of advice (from Paul). If you believe in goodness and if you value the approval of God, fix your minds on the things which are holy and right and pure and beautiful and good. Model your conduct on what you have learned from me (Paul), on what I have told you and shown you, and you will find the God of peace will be with you.

PAUL THANKS THEM FOR THEIR CONCERN; HE REVEALS THE SECRET OF HIS CONTENTMENT

Phillipians 4:10-13 - It has been a great joy to me that after all this time you have shown such interest in my welfare. I don't mean that you had forgotten me, but up till now you had no opportunity of expressing your concern. Nor do I mean that I have been in actual need, for I have learned to be content, whatever the circumstances may be. I know now how to live when things are difficult and I know how to live when things are prosperous. In general and in particular I have learned the secret of facing either poverty or plenty. I am ready for anything through the strength of the one (Jesus Christ) who lives within me.

THE CONTINUING GENEROSITY OF THE PHILIPPIANS

Phillipians 4:14-20 - Nevertheless I am not disparaging the way in which you were willing to share my troubles. You Philippians will remember that in the early days of the Gospel when I left Macedonia (... after visiting Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea, c AD50 during his Second Journey, Paul was forced to leave the province, and went south to Athens, Acts 17:15), you were the only church who shared with me the fellowship of giving and receiving. Even in Thessalonica (Acts 17:1) you twice sent me help when I was in need. It isn't the value of the gift that I am keen on, it is the reward that will come to you because of these gifts that you have made.

Now I have everything I want - in fact I am rich. Yes, I am quite content, thanks to your gifts received through Epaphroditus (... another example of the care and concern shown by the Christians of Philippi). Your generosity is like a lovely fragrance, a sacrifice that pleases the very heart of God. My God will

supply all that you need from his glorious resources in Christ Jesus. And may glory be to our God and our Father for ever and ever, amen!

FINAL GREETINGS AND BLESSINGS

Phillipians 4:21-23 - Greetings to every true Christian, from me and all the brothers here with me (in Rome). All the Christians here would like to send their best wishes, particularly those who belong to the emperor's household (... another measure of the impact of the Gospel).

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

PAUL

PAUL'S LETTER TO THE COLOSSIANS

With people, places, definitions, map .....

Writer: The apostle Paul

Date: c AD62; sent with the Letters to the Ephesians, and to Philemon

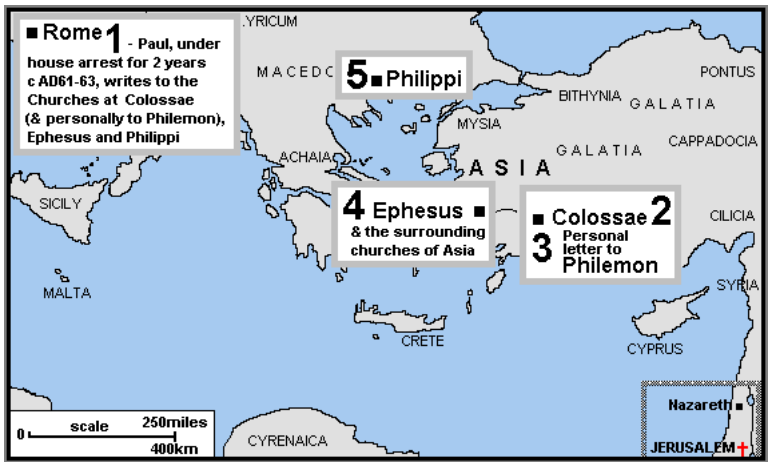
Where written: Under house arrest in Rome

Reader: The church at Colossae in Asia Minor, probably established by Christian workers from Ephesus. Colossae does not appear to have been visited by Paul

Why: Colossians is a general message of love and friendship to a church Paul has not visited. In it, he warns them against false prophets who teach a mixture of Jewish tradition and Greek philosophy and mysticism which belittles Christ's coming. In doing so he makes clear exactly who Jesus is, and his part (Paul's) in teaching the true Gospel as an apostle to the Gentiles.

Map - Paul Writes from Prison in Rome

Map Key: Letter for Colossae sent from 1 to 2



GREETINGS, THANKSGIVING AND PRAYER

GREETINGS TO THE CHRISTIANS OF COLOSSAE

Colossians 1:1-2 - Paul, messenger of Jesus Christ by God's will, and brother Timothy send this greeting to all faithful Christians at Colossae: grace and peace be to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ!

PAUL GIVES THANKS FOR THEIR FAITH AND LOVE

Colossians 1:3-8 - I want you to know by this letter that we here (in Rome) are constantly praying for you, and whenever we do we thank God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ because you believe in Christ Jesus and because you are showing true Christian love towards other Christians. We know that you are showing these qualities because you have grasped the hope reserved for you in Heaven - that hope which first became yours when the truth was brought to you. It is, of course, part of the Gospel itself, which has reached you as it spreads all over the world. Wherever that Gospel goes, it produces Christian character, and develops it, as it had done in your own case from the time you first heard and realised the amazing fact of God's grace.

You learned these things, we understand, from Epaphras ....

Epaphras - He established the churches in Colossae, Laodicea and Hieropolis (Colossians 4:12-13), and is now visiting Paul in prison to report on the progress of the churches in the Colossian area. In Philemon, verse 23, Paul confirms that Epaphras is staying in Rome as his fellow-prisoner or companion -

....who is in the same service as we are. He is a most well-loved minister of Christ, and has your well-being very much at heart. As a matter of fact, it was from him that we heard about your growth in Christian love ....

PAUL'S PRAYER THAT THEY WILL KNOW GOD'S WILL AND STRENGTH, AND LIVE ACCORDINGLY EVEN IN HARD TIMES

Colossians 1:9-14 - ..... so you will understand that since we heard about you we have never missed you in our prayers. We are asking God that you may see things, as it were, from his point of view by being given spiritual insight and understanding. We also pray that your outward lives, which men see, may bring credit to your master's name, and that you may bring joy to his heart by bearing genuine Christian fruit, and that your knowledge of God may grow yet deeper.

We pray for you to have real Christian experience

As you live this new life, we pray that you will be strengthened from God's boundless resources, so that you will find yourselves able to pass through any experience and endure it with courage. You will even be able to thank God in the midst of pain and distress because you are privileged to share the lot of those who are living in the light. For we must never forget that he rescued us from the power of darkness, and re-established us in the kingdom of his beloved Son, that is, in the kingdom of light. For it is by his Son alone that we have been redeemed and have had our sins forgiven.

WHAT GOD HAS DONE THROUGH CHRIST

CHRIST IS THE IMAGE OF GOD, CREATOR OF ALL THINGS, HEAD OF THE CHURCH AND RECONCILES MAN TO GOD

Colossians 1:15-20 - Now Christ is the visible expression of the invisible God. He existed before creation began, for it was through him that every thing was made, whether spiritual or material, seen or unseen. Through him, and for him, also, were created power and dominion, ownership and authority. In fact, every single thing was created through, and for him. He is both the first principle and the upholding principle of the whole scheme of creation. And now he is the head of the body (the Church) which is composed of all Christian people. Life from nothing began through him, and life from the dead began through him, and he is, therefore, justly called the Lord of all. It was in him that the full nature of God chose to live, and through him God planned to reconcile in his own person, as it were, everything on earth and everything in Heaven by virtue of the sacrifice of the cross.

HOW THEY PREVIOUSLY LIVED, THEIR CHANGED RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD, AND THE GOSPEL THEY HEARD

Colossians 1:21-23 - And you yourselves, who were strangers to God, and, in fact, through the evil things you had done, his spiritual enemies, he has now reconciled through the death of his body on the cross, so that he might welcome you to his presence clean and pure, without blame or reproach. This reconciliation assumes, of course, that you maintain a firm position in the faith, and do not allow yourselves to be shifted away from the hope of the Gospel, which you have heard, and which, indeed, the whole world is now having an opportunity of hearing.

PAUL'S MINISTRY AS AN APOSTLE

EVEN IN PRISON PAUL'S MINISTRY IS TO PROCLAIM THE GLORY OF CHRIST TO ALL PEOPLE

Colossians 1:24-29 - I myself have been made a minister of this same Gospel, and though it is true at this moment that I am suffering (in prison) on behalf of you who have heard the Gospel, yet I am far from sorry about it. Indeed, I am glad, because it gives me a chance to complete in my own sufferings something of the untold pains for which Christ suffers on behalf of his body, the Church. For I am a minister of the Church by divine commission, a commission granted to me for your benefit and for a special purpose: that I might fully declare God's word - that sacred mystery which up to now has been

hidden in every age and every generation, but which is now as clear as daylight to those who love God. They are those to whom God has planned to give a vision of the full wonder and splendour of his secret plan for the sons of men. And the secret is simply this: Christ in you! Yes, Christ in you bringing with him the hope of all glorious things to come.

To preach and teach Christ is everything to us

So, naturally, we proclaim Christ! We warn everyone we meet, and we teach everyone we can, all that we know about him, so that, if possible, we may bring every man up to his full maturity in Christ. This is what I am working at all the time, with all the strength that God gives me.

HIS LONGING THAT THE COLOSSIANS & LAODICEANS WILL CONTINUE TO LEARN MORE ABOUT LOVE AND CHRIST

Colossians 2:1-3 - I wish you could understand how deep is my anxiety for you, and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have never met me. How I long that you may be encouraged, and find out more and more how strong are the bonds of Christian love. How I long for you to grow more certain in your knowledge and more sure in your grasp of God himself. May your spiritual experience become richer as you see more and more fully God's great secret, Christ himself! For it is in him, and in him alone, that men will find all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

PAUL DENOUNCES FALSE TEACHING; HE PROCLAIMS GOSPEL TRUTHS

AVOID ANY ATTEMPTS TO DECEIVE YOU; LIVE ACCORDING TO THE GOSPEL OF JESUS YOU WERE TAUGHT

Colossians 2:4-8 - I write this to prevent you from being led astray by someone or other's attractive arguments. For though I am a long way away from you in body, in spirit I am by your side, watching like a proud father the solid steadfastness of your faith in Christ. Just as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so go on living in him - in simple faith. Grow out of him as a plant grows out of the soil it is planted in, becoming more and more sure of the faith as you were taught it, and your lives will overflow with joy and thankfulness.

Be careful that nobody spoils your faith through intellectualism or high-sounding nonsense. Such stuff is at best founded on men's ideas of the nature of the world and disregards Christ!

YOUR SINS ARE FORGIVEN; BECAUSE CHRIST DIED AND ROSE AGAIN GOD HAS GIVEN YOU TOTAL FREEDOM

Colossians 2:9-15 - Yet it is in him (Jesus) that God gives a full and complete expression of himself (within the physical limits that he set himself in Christ). Moreover, your own completeness is only realised in him, who is the authority over all authorities, and the supreme power over all powers.

The old Law can't condemn you now

In Christ, you were circumcised, not by any physical act, but by being set free from the sins of the flesh by virtue of Christ's circumcision. You, so to speak, shared in that, just as in baptism you shared in his death, and in him are sharing the miracle of rising again to new life - and all this because you have faith in the tremendous power of God, who raised Christ from the dead. You, who were spiritually dead because of your sins and your uncircumcision (i.e. the fact that you were outside the Law), God has now made to share in the very life of Christ! He has forgiven you all your sins: Christ has utterly wiped out the damning evidence of broken laws and commandments which always hung over our heads, and has completely annulled it by nailing it over his own head on the cross. And then having drawn the sting of all the powers ranged against us, he exposed them, shattered, empty and defeated, in his final glorious triumphant act!

SO HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH MAN-MADE RELIGIOUS RITUALS AND SPIRITUAL IDEAS; YOU HAVE CHRIST

Colossians 2:16-23 - In view of these tremendous facts, don't let anyone worry you by criticising what you eat or drink, or what holy days you ought to observe, or bothering you over new moons or sabbaths.

All these things have at most only a symbolical value: the solid fact is Christ. Nor let any man cheat you of your joy in Christ by persuading you to make yourselves "humble" and fall down and worship angels. Such a man, inflated by an unspiritual imagination, is pushing his way into matters he knows nothing about, and in his cleverness forgetting his head. It is from the head alone that the body, by natural channels, is nourished and built up and grows according to God's laws of growth.

So if, through your faith in Christ, you are dead to the principles of this world's life, why, as if you were still part and parcel of this world-wide system, do you take the slightest notice of these purely human prohibitions - "Don't touch this," "Don't taste that" and "Don't handle the other"? "This", "that" and "the other" will all pass away after use! I know that these regulations look wise with their self-inspired efforts at worship, their policy of self-humbling, and their studied neglect of the body. But in actual practice they do honour, not to God, but to man's own pride.

CONCENTRATE ON HEAVENLY NOT EARTHLY THINGS

Colossians 3:1-4 - If you are then "risen" with Christ, reach out for the highest gifts of Heaven, where your master reigns in power. Give your heart to the heavenly things, not to the passing things of earth. For, as far as this world is concerned, you are already dead, and your true life is a hidden one in Christ. One day, Christ, the secret centre of our lives, will show himself openly, and you will all share in that magnificent dénouement.

STOP BEHAVING IN THE WICKED WAYS THAT ARE SO NATURAL ON EARTH

Colossians 3:5-11 - In so far, then, as you have to live upon this earth, consider yourselves dead to worldly contacts: have nothing to do with sexual immorality, dirty-mindedness, uncontrolled passion, evil desire, and the lust for other people's goods, which last, remember, is as serious a sin as idolatry. It is because of these very things that the holy anger of God falls upon those who refuse to obey him. And never forget that you had your part in those dreadful things when you lived that old life.

But now, put all these things behind you. No more evil temper or furious rage: no more evil thoughts or words about others, no more evil thoughts or words about God, and no more filthy conversation. Don't tell each other lies any more, for you have finished with the old man and all he did and have begun life as the new man, who is out to learn what he ought to be, according to the plan of God. In this new man of God's design there is no distinction between Greek and Hebrew, Jew or Gentile, foreigner or savage, slave or free man. Christ is all that matters for Christ lives in them all.

LIVING THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

AS GOD'S CHOSEN PEOPLE, LEARN TO FORGIVE AND ABOVE ALL TO LOVE

Colossians 3:12-14 - As, therefore, God's picked representatives of the new humanity, purified and beloved of God himself, be merciful in action, kindly in heart, humble in mind. Accept life, and be most patient and tolerant with one another, always ready to forgive if you have a difference with anyone. Forgive as freely as the Lord has forgiven you. And, above everything else, be truly loving, for love is the golden chain of all the virtues.

ENJOY CHRIST'S PEACE, WORSHIP TOGETHER, DO EVERYTHING IN THE NAME OF JESUS

Colossians 3:15-17 - Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, remembering that as members of the same body you are called to live in harmony, and never forget to be thankful for what God has done for you.

Let Christ's teaching live in your hearts, making you rich in the true wisdom. Teach and help one another along the right road with your psalms and hymns and Christian songs, singing God's praises with joyful hearts. And whatever you may have to do, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, thanking God the Father through him.

WIVES

Colossians 3:18 - Wives, adapt yourselves to your husbands, that your marriage may be a Christian unity.

HUSBANDS

Colossians 3:19 - Husbands, be sure you give your wives much love and sympathy; don't let bitterness or resentment spoil your marriage.

CHILDREN'S BEHAVIOUR

Colossians 3:20 - .... children, your duty is to obey your parents, for at your age this is one of the best things you can do to show your love for God.

PARENTS

Colossians 3:21 - Fathers, don't over-correct your children, or they will grow up feeling inferior and frustrated.

EMPLOYEES

Colossians 3:22-25 - Slaves (employees), your job is to obey your masters, not with the idea of currying favour, but as a sincere expression of your devotion to God. Whatever you do, put your whole heart and soul into it, as into work done for God, and not merely for men - knowing that your real reward, a heavenly one, will come from God, since you are actually employed by Christ, and not just by your earthly master. But the wicked man will be punished for his misdeeds, and naturally no distinction will be made between master and man (employee).

EMPLOYERS

Colossians 4:1 - Remember .... you employers, that your responsibility is to be fair and just towards those whom you employ, never forgetting that you yourselves have a heavenly employer.

PAUL ENCOURAGES THEM TO PRAY, ASKS FOR PRAYER AND REMINDS THEM HE IS IN PRISON; HE ALSO ADVISES THEM ABOUT RELATIONS WITH NON-CHRISTIANS

Colossians 4:2-6 - Always maintain the habit of prayer: be both alert and thankful as you pray. Include us in your prayers, please, that God may open for us a door for the entrance of the Gospel. Pray that we may talk freely of the mystery of Christ (for which I am at present in chains), and that I may make that mystery plain to men, which I know is my duty.

Be wise in your behaviour towards non-Christians, and make the best possible use of your time. Speak pleasantly to them, but never sentimentally, and learn to give a proper answer to every questioner.

PERSONAL MESSAGES

TYCHICUS WILL BE PAUL'S MESSENGER AND ACCOMPANY THE RETURNING ONESIMUS TO COLOSSAE

Colossians 4:7-9 - Tychicus (a well-loved brother, a faithful minister and a fellow-servant of the Lord) will tell you all about my present circumstances. This is partly why I am sending him to you. The other reasons are that you may find out how we are all getting on, and that he may put new heart into you. With him is Onesimus one of your own congregation (well-loved and faithful, too). Between them they will tell you of conditions and activities here.

Onesimus - A slave who had run away from his master Philemon in Colossae, reached Rome and become a Christian through Paul's teaching. He is now returning to the city of Colossae with Tychicus, a brave decision for a likely thief and escaped slave. The short Letter from Paul to Philemon which follows, is in effect a "covering letter", asking him to take back and forgive Onesimus.

PAUL INCLUDES GREETINGS FROM FELLOW CHRISTIANS IN ROME

Colossians 4:10-14 - Aristarchus, who is also in prison here, sends greetings, and so does Barnabas' cousin, Mark. I believe I told you before about him; if he does come to you, make him welcome. Jesus Justus, another Hebrew (Jewish) Christian, is here too. Only these few are working with me for the kingdom, but what a help they have been!

Epaphras, another member of your Church, and a real servant of Christ, sends his greeting. He works hard for you even here, for he prays constantly and earnestly for you, that you may become mature Christians, and may fulfil God's will for you. From my own observation I can tell you that he has a real passion for your welfare, and for that of the churches of Laodicea and Hierapolis.

Luke, our beloved doctor....

Luke - The first of only three times Luke's name is mentioned in the New Testament. Yet according to tradition, he wrote the Gospel of Luke, the Acts of the Apostles, and is the eyewitness in the four "we" and "us" sections of Acts summarised below:

(1) Acts 16:10-17 - In c AD50 during the Second Missionary Journey, Luke met Paul at Troas, and after Paul's vision of the man in Macedonia, sailed with him, Silas and Timothy across to Europe - to Neapolis and on to Philippi. He was then present at the conversion of Lydia, and certainly saw the girl with the clairvoyant spirit. However, Luke was not there in person when Paul drove out the spirit from the girl, and therefore escaped Paul and Silas' fate of a beating and imprisonment;

(2) Acts 20:5-15 - In c AD58, towards the end of Paul's Third Journey, Luke sailed from Philippi (where he might have stayed on with Lydia), to meet Paul's party at Troas. He was present when the sleepy young Eutychus fell from the window. Sailing to Assos, they met Paul, and reached Miletus where Paul addressed the elders of Ephesus;

(3) Acts 21:1-18 - From Miletus, Paul, Luke and the other companions journeyed on to Jerusalem and a warm welcome;

(4) Acts 27:1-28:16 - Luke was probably in Jerusalem when Paul was arrested, and followed him to Caesarea, possibly even writing his Gospel and drafting much of Acts there. Certainly two years later, Luke sailed with Paul on the voyage, via shipwreck in Malta, to Rome, arriving c AD61. Luke then remained with the imprisoned Paul for at least some of the time. Hence Luke's greetings from Rome to the Christians of Colossae (here in Colossians 4:14) and to Philemon (verse 24), in c AD 61-63.

Finally, Luke is again with Paul in Rome in c AD67, apparently the only person left by his side (2 Timothy 4:11) -

.... and Demas send their best wishes.

Demas - As one of Paul's prison companions, he is also included in the greetings to Philemon in Colossae (Philemon 24). However, by the time Paul is back in prison in Rome awaiting execution in c AD67, Demas has left him "for the world" and gone to Thessalonica (2 Timothy 4:10).

PAUL SENDS HIS OWN GREETINGS TO THE COLOSSIANS; AND INSTRUCTS THEM TO CIRCULATE HIS LETTERS

Colossians 4:15-17 - My own greetings to the Christians in Laodicea, and to Nymphas and the congregation who meet in her house.

When you have had this letter read in your church, see that the Laodiceans have it read in their church too; and see that you read the letter (now sadly lost) I have written to them.

A brief message to Archippus: God ordained you to your work - see that you don't fail him!

Archippus - From the Letter to Philemon written at this time, Archippus is usually identified as the son of Philemon.

A PERSONAL FAREWELL; A FINAL REMINDER HE IS IN PRISON

Colossians 4:18 - My personal greeting to you written by myself.

Don't forget I'm in prison. Grace be with you.

PAUL

PAUL'S FIRST LETTER TO THE THESSALONIANS

With people, places, definitions, map .....

Writer: The apostle Paul, probably his earliest surviving letter. Both 1 & 2 Thessalonians are known as "eschatological" books from the Greek for the "last things", as they include teaching about the end-times and the second coming of Jesus

Date: c AD52 during his Second Missionary Journey

Where written: Corinth (Acts 18:11) during his 18 month stay

Readers: The church of mainly Greek converts established in Thessalonica by Paul earlier during this, his Second Missionary Journey (Acts 17:1-9)

Why: Paul, concerned that the Thessalonians are rejecting the Gospel, sends Timothy to encourage and strengthen them. Timothy returns to Corinth from Macedonia (Acts 18:5) with a favourable report, and Paul writes his First Letter.

Map - Paul Writes his Two Letters to the Thessalonians

Map Key: Letters sent from 1 to 2

THANKSGIVING

PAUL GIVE THANKS FOR THE LIFE AND WITNESS OF THE THESSALONIAN CHRISTIANS

1 Thessalonians 1:1-10 - To the church of the Thessalonians, founded on God the Father and Jesus Christ the Lord, grace and peace from Paul, Silvanus (Silas) and Timothy.

Your faith cheers us and encourages many others

We are always thankful as we pray for you all, for we never forget that your faith has meant solid achievement, your love has meant hard work, and the hope that you have in our Lord Jesus Christ means sheer dogged endurance in the life that you live before God, the Father of us all.

We know that God not only loves you but has selected you for a special purpose. For we remember how our Gospel came to you not as mere words, but as a message with power behind it - the effectual power, in fact, of the Holy Spirit. You know how we lived among you. You remember how you set yourselves to copy us, and through us, Christ himself. You remember how, although accepting the message meant bitter persecution, yet you experienced the joy of the Holy Spirit. You thus became examples to all who believe in Macedonia and Achaia (north and south Greece respectively). You have

become a sort of sounding-board from which the Word of the Lord has rung out, not only in Macedonia and Achaia but everywhere where the story of your faith in God has become known. We find we don't have to tell people about it. They tell us the story of our coming to you: how you turned from idols to serve the true living God, and how your whole lives now look forward to the coming of his Son from heaven - the Son Jesus, whom God raised from the dead, and who personally delivered us from the judgment which hung over our heads.

PAUL AS AN APOSTLE

PAUL DEFENDS HIS MOTIVES AND CONDUCT AS AN APOSTLE

1 Thessalonians 2:1-12 - My brothers, you know from your own experience that our visit to you (earlier in this Second Journey) was no failure (Acts 17:2-4). We had, as you also know, been treated abominably at Philippi (beaten and illegally imprisoned for driving a clairvoyant spirit from a young girl, Acts 16:16-24), and we came on to you (in Thessalonica, before moving on to Berea, Acts 17:1-10)only because God gave us courage. We came to tell you the Gospel, whatever the opposition might be.

Our message to you is true, our motives are pure, our conduct is absolutely above board. We speak under the solemn sense of being trusted by God with the Gospel. We do not aim to please men, but to please God who knows us through and through. No one could ever say, as again you know, that we used flattery to conceal greedy motives, and God himself is witness to our honesty. We made no attempt to win honour from men, either from you or from anybody else, though I suppose as Christ's own messengers we might have done so. Our attitude among you was one of tenderness, rather like that of a devoted nurse among her babies. Because we loved you, it was a joy to us to give you not only the Gospel of God but our very hearts - so dear did you become to us. Our struggles and hard work, my brothers, must still be fresh in your minds. Day and night we worked so that our preaching of the Gospel to you might not cost you a penny. You are witnesses, as is God himself, that our life among you believers was honest, straightforward and above criticism. You will remember how we dealt with each one of you personally, like a father with his own children, stimulating your faith and courage and giving you instruction. Our only object was to help you to live lives worthy of the God who has called you to share the splendour of his kingdom.

PAUL'S LOVE AND ANXIETY FOR THEM

PAUL PRAISES THEIR BEHAVIOUR AS THEY ARE PERSECUTED BECAUSE OF THE GOSPEL

1 Thessalonians 2:13-16 - And so we are continually thankful that when you heard us preach the word of God you accepted it, not as a mere human message, but as it really is, God's Word, a power in the lives of you who believe.

You have experienced persecution like your Jewish brothers

When you suffered at the hands of your fellow-countrymen you were sharing the experience of the Judean Christian churches, who suffered persecution by the Jews. It was the Jews who killed their own prophets, the Jews who killed the Lord Jesus, and the Jews who drove out us, his messengers. Their present attitude is in opposition to both God and man. They refused to let us speak to those (the Gentiles) who were not Jews, to tell them the news of salvation. Alas, I fear they are completing the full tale of their sins and the wrath of God is over their heads.

PAUL MISSES THEM AND IS OVERJOYED WITH TIMOTHY'S REPORT ON THEIR CHRISTIAN PROGRESS

1 Thessalonians 2:17-20 - Since we have been physically separated from you, my brothers (though never for a moment separated in heart), we have longed all the more to see you. Yes, I, Paul, have longed to come and see you more than once (from Athens, and later Corinth) - but somehow Satan prevented our coming.

Yet who could take your place as our hope and joy and pride when Jesus comes? Who but you, as you will stand before him at his coming? Yes, you are indeed our pride and joy!

1 Thessalonians 3:1-10 And so at length, when the separation became intolerable, we thought the best plan was for me to stay in Athens alone (... Paul had arrived there from Macedonia, after being forced to

leave Berea, Acts 17:13-15), while Timothy, our brother and fellow-worker in the Gospel of Christ, was sent to strengthen and encourage you in your faith. ....

- Timothy and Silas had stayed at Berea before joining Paul, probably in Athens. They then returned to Thessalonica on their mission of encouragement -

.... We did not want any of you to lose heart at the troubles you were going through, but to realise that we Christians must expect such things. Actually we did warn you what to expect (as Christians), when we were with you, and our words have come true, as you know. You will understand that, when the suspense became unbearable, I sent someone (Timothy) to find out how your faith was standing the strain, and to make sure that the tempter's activities (Satan's) had not destroyed our work.

The good news about you is a tonic to us

But now that Timothy has just come straight from you to us (Thessalonica back south to Corinth) - with a glowing account of your faith and love, and definite news that you cherish happy memories of us and long to see us as much as we to see you - how these things have cheered us in all the miseries and troubles we ourselves are going through. To know that you are standing fast in the Lord is indeed a breath of life to us. How can we thank our God enough for all the joy you give us as we serve him, praying earnestly day and night to see you again, and to complete whatever is imperfect in your faith?

PAUL'S LOVE AND ANXIETY FOR THEM

A PRAYER FOR THE THESSALONIANS

This is our prayer for you

1 Thessalonians 3:11-13 - So may God our Father himself and our Lord Jesus Christ guide our steps to you. May the Lord give you the same increasing and overflowing love for each other and towards all men as we have towards you. May he establish you, holy and blameless in heart and soul, before himself, the Father of us all, when our Lord Jesus Christ comes with all who belong to him.

CALLS TO SEXUAL MORALITY, LOVE, AND EXAMPLE

PAUL INTRODUCES A SUMMARY OF PRACTICAL TEACHING

1 Thessalonians 4:1-2 - To sum up, my brothers, we beg and pray you by the Lord Jesus, that you continue to learn more and more of the life that pleases God, the sort of life we told you about before. You will remember the instructions (some of which follow) we gave you then in the name of the Lord Jesus.

SEXUAL IMMORALITY

1 Thessalonians 4:3-8 - God's plan is to make you holy, and that entails first of all a clean cut with sexual immorality. Every one of you should learn to control his body, keeping it pure and treating it with respect, and never regarding it as an instrument for self-gratification, as do pagans with no knowledge of God. You cannot break this rule without in some way cheating your fellow-men. And you must remember that God will punish all who do offend in this matter, and we have warned you how we have seen this work out in our experience of life. The calling of God is not to impurity but to the most thorough purity, and anyone who makes light of the matter is not making light of man's ruling but of God's command. It is not for nothing that the Spirit God gives us is called the Holy Spirit.

LOVE - ITS PREEMINENCE

1 Thessalonians 4:9-10 - .... as regards brotherly love, you don't need any written instructions. God himself is teaching you to love each other, and you are already extending your love to all the Macedonians. Yet we urge you to have more and more of this love, and to make ot your ambition to have no ambition!

WITNESSES TO CHRIST

1 Thessalonians 4:11-12 - Be busy with your own affairs and do your work yourselves. The result will be a reputation for honesty in the world outside and an honourable independence.

THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST

THE FATE OF THOSE WHO DIE BEFORE THE RETURN OF JESUS

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 - Now we don't want you, my brothers, to be in any doubt about those who "fall asleep" in death, or to grieve over them like men who have no hope. After all, if we believe that Jesus died and rose again from death, then we can believe that God will just as surely bring with Jesus all who are "asleep" in him. Here we have a definite message from the Lord. It is that those who are still living when he comes will not in any way precede those who have previously fallen asleep. One word of command, one shout from the archangel, one blast from the trumpet of God and the Lord himself will come down from Heaven! Those who have died in Christ will be the first to rise, and then we who are still living on the earth will be swept up with them into the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And after that we shall be with him for ever.

God has given me this message on the matter, so by all means use it to encourage one another.

THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF KNOWING THE TIMES AND DATES OF JESUS' RETURN

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 - But as far as times and seasons go, my brothers, you don't need written instructions. You are well aware that the day of the Lord will come as unexpectedly as a burglary to a householder. When men are saying "Peace and security" catastrophe will sweep down upon them as suddenly and inescapably as birth-pangs to a pregnant woman.

But because you, my brothers, are not living in darkness the day cannot take you completely by surprise. After all, burglary only takes place at night! You are all sons of light, sons of the day, and none of us belongs to darkness or the night. Let us then never fall into the sleep that stupefies the rest of the world: let us keep awake, with our wits about us. Night is the time for sleep and the time when men get drunk, but we men of the daylight should be alert, with faith and love as our breastplate and the hope of our salvation as our helmet. For God did not choose us to condemn us, but that we might secure his salvation through Jesus Christ our Lord. He died for us, so that whether we are "awake" or "asleep" we share his life. So go on cheering and strengthening each other with thoughts like these, as I have no doubt you have been doing.

CHRISTIAN LEADERS

1 Thessalonians 5:12-13a - We ask you too, my brothers, to get to know those who work so hard among you. They are your spiritual leaders to keep you on the right path. Because of this high task of theirs, hold them in highest honour.

CHRISTIAN CONDUCT

1 Thessalonians 5:13b-22 - Live together in peace, and our instruction to this end is to reprimand the unruly, encourage the timid, help the weak and be very patient with all men. Be sure that no one repays a bad turn by a bad turn; good should be your objective always, among yourselves and in the world at large. Be happy in your faith at all times. Never stop praying. Be thankful, whatever the circumstances may be.

If you follow this advice you will be working out the will of God expressed to you in Jesus Christ. Never damp the fire of the Spirit, and never despise what is spoken in the name of the Lord. By all means use your judgment, and hold on to whatever is really good, Steer clear of evil in any form.

MORE CALLS TO LIVE THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

A FINAL BLESSING

1 Thessalonians 5:23-24 - May the God of peace make you holy through and through. May you be kept in soul and mind and body in spotless integrity until the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is utterly faithful and he will finish what he has set out to do.

FAREWELLS

1 Thessalonians 5:25-28 - Pray for us, my brothers. Give a handshake all round among the brotherhood. God's command, which I give you now, is that this letter should be read to all the brothers (in Thessalonica).

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

PAUL

PAUL'S SECOND LETTER TO THE THESSALONIANS

With people, places, definitions, map .....

Writer: The apostle Paul

Date: c AD52, a few months after his First Letter to the Thessalonians

Where written: Corinth, during his 18 month stay, Acts 18:11

Readers: The church in Thessalonica

Why: Following his First Letter, Paul must have received reports that the church was still preoccupied with the Second Coming of Jesus. He therefore writes his second "eschatological" letter

Map - Paul Writes his Two Letters to the Thessalonians

Map Key: Letters sent from 1 to 2

THANKSGIVING AND ENCOURAGEMENT

PAUL AGAIN GIVES THANKS FOR THE LIFE AND WITNESS OF THE THESSALONIANS

2 Thessalonians 1:1-7a - To the church of the Thessalonians, founded on God our Father and Jesus Christ the Lord, from Paul, Silvanus (or Silas) and Timothy; grace to you and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ!

Your sufferings are a guarantee of great joy one day

My brothers, nowadays I thank God for you not only in common fairness but as a moral obligation! Your faith has made such strides, and (without any individual exceptions) your love towards each other has reached such proportions that we actually boast about you in the churches, because you have shown such endurance and faith in all the trials and persecutions you have gone through.

These qualities show how justly the judgment of God works out in your case. Without doubt he intends to use your suffering to make you worthy of his kingdom, yet his justice will one day repay trouble to those who have troubled you, and peace to all of us who, like you, have suffered ....

CHRIST WILL JUDGE EVERYONE WHEN HE RETURNS

2 Thessalonians 1:7b-12 - ..... This judgment (on those who attacked the Thessalonian Christians) will issue eventually in the final denouement (outcome or result) of Christ's personal coming from Heaven with the angels of his power. It will bring full justice in dazzling flame upon those who have refused to

know God or to obey the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Their punishment will be eternal exclusion from the radiance of the face of the Lord, and the glorious majesty of power. But to those whom he has made holy his coming will mean splendour unimaginable. It will be a breath-taking wonder to all who believe - including you, for you have believed the message that we have given you.

In view of this great prospect, we pray for you constantly, that God will think you worthy of this calling, and that he will effect in you all his goodness desires to do, and that your faith makes possible. We pray that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may become more glorious through you, and that you may share something of his glory - all through the grace of our God and Jesus Christ the Lord.

THE SECOND COMING

THE ANTI-CHRIST OF SATAN MUST APPEAR BEFORE THE SECOND COMING OF JESUS

2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 - Now we do implore you, by the very certainty of Christ's coming and of our meeting him together, to keep your heads and not be thrown off balance by any prediction or message or letter purporting to come from us (... Paul is perhaps referring to a forged letter), and saying that the day of Christ is almost here. Don't let anyone deceive you by any means whatsoever. That day will not come before there arises a definite rejection of God and the appearance of the lawless man (... the anti-christ, the man of sin, who is under the control of Satan). He is the product of all that leads to death, and he sets himself up in opposition to every religion. He himself takes his seat in the temple of God, to show that he really claims to be God.

I expect you remember now how I (Paul) talked about this when I was with you (in Thessalonica). You will probably also remember how I used to talk about a "restraining power" which would operate until the time should come for the emergence of this man (the anti-christ). Evil is already insidiously at work but its activities are restricted until what I have called the "restraining power" (of God) is removed. When that happens the lawless man will be plainly seen - though the truth of the Lord Jesus spells his doom, and the radiance of the coming of the Lord Jesus will be his utter destruction. The lawless man is produced by the spirit of evil and armed with all the force, wonders and signs that falsehood can devise. To those involved in this dying world he will come with evil's undiluted power to deceive, for they have refused to love the truth which could have saved them. God sends upon them, therefore, the full force of evil's delusion, so that they put their faith in an utter fraud and meet the inevitable judgment of all who have refused to believe the truth and who have made evil their play-fellow.

PAUL'S ENCOURAGEMENT TO STAND FIRM

2 Thessalonians 2:13-17 - But we can thank God continually for you, brothers, whom the Lord loves. He has chosen you from the beginning to save you, to make you holy by the work of his Spirit and your own belief in the truth. It was his call that you followed when we preached the Gospel to you, and he has set before you the prospect of sharing the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. So stand firm, and hold on! Be loyal to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or in writings.

May the Lord Jesus Christ and God our Father (who has loved us and given us unending encouragement and unfailing hope by his grace) inspire you with courage and confidence in every good thing you say or do.

A CALL FOR PRAYER AND TO DISCIPLINE

PAUL ASKS FOR PRAYER FOR HIS WORK AND WARNS AGAINST IDLENESS

- The warning against idleness is for those Thessalonian Christians expecting the imminent return of Jesus, who have stopped concerning themselves with day-to-day living:

2 Thessalonians 3:1-15 - Finally, my brothers, do pray for us here (in Corinth). Pray that the Lord's message may go forward unhindered and may bring him glory, as it has done with you. Pray, too, that we may not be embroiled with bigoted and wicked men; for all men, alas, have not faith. Yet the Lord is utterly to be depended upon by all who have faith in him, and he will give you stability and protection against all that is evil. It is he who makes us feel confident about you, that you are acting and will act in accordance with our commands. May he guide your hearts into ever deeper understanding of his love and the patient suffering of Christ.

Remember our example: everyone should do his fair share of work

One further order we must give you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ: don't associate with the brother whose life is undisciplined, and who despises the teaching we gave him. You know well that we ourselves are your examples here, and that our lives among you were never undisciplined. We did not eat anyone's food without paying for it. In fact we toiled and laboured night and day to avoid being the slightest expense to any of you. This was not because we had no right to ask our necessities of you, but because we wanted to set you an example. When we were actually with you we gave you this principle to work on: "If a man will not work, he shall not eat." Now we hear that you have some among you living quite undisciplined lives, never doing a stroke of work, and busy only in other people's affairs. Our order to such men, indeed our appeal by the Lord Jesus Christ, is to settle down to work and eat the food they have earned themselves.

And the rest of you - don't get tired of honest work! If anyone refuses to obey the command given above, mark that man, do not associate with him until he is ashamed of himself. I don't mean, of course, treat him as an enemy, but reprimand him as a brother.

FAREWELLS & BLESSINGS

2 Thessalonians 3:16-18 - Now may the Lord of peace personally give you his peace at all times and in all ways. The Lord be with you all.

This is the farewell message of PAUL, written in my own writing - my "mark" on all my letters.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

PAUL'S FIRST LETTER TO TIMOTHY

With people, places, definitions, map .....

But first - a word of Explanation about the three Teaching or Pastoral Letters - 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus, c AD64-67:

According to strong tradition and indirect evidence, Paul was not executed in c AD64 during the Nero persecutions. Instead, after being released from prison some time before, he continued his travels, visiting such places as Crete, Macedonia, Nicopolis in Achaia, Troas, Miletus, and Corinth, and perhaps even reaching Spain. Then he was re-arrested, tried and executed in c AD67. During his travels, he wrote two of his three "pastoral" or teaching letters - the First Letter to Timothy and the Letter to Titus. Then under sentence of death in Rome, his Second Letter to Timothy.

Writer: The apostle Paul

Date: c AD66, assuming Paul was released from house arrest in Rome and continued his travels

Where written: perhaps Macedonia

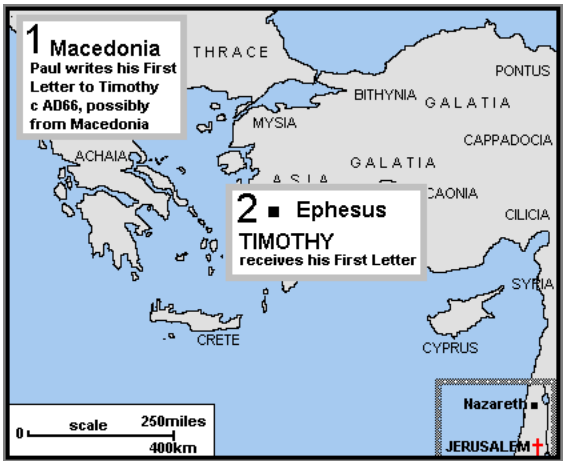
Reader: Timothy, Paul's disciples and friend, and now a minister in Ephesus

Why: Paul writes to the young Timothy to encourage and advise him on his conduct and work as a minister;

According to Some Modern Scholarship: Written by an unknown Christian towards the end of the 1st century, using Paul's name and some of his original material to give the letter authority

Map - Paul Writes his First Pastoral or Teaching Letter to Timothy

Map Key: Letter possibly from 1 to 2



PAUL INSTRUCTS TIMOTHY TO DEFEND THE TRUE GOSPEL

GREETINGS TO TIMOTHY

1 Timothy 1:1-2 - Paul, Jesus Christ's messenger by command of God our saviour and Christ our hope, to Timothy my true son in the faith: grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and Jesus Christ our master.

PAUL INSTRUCTS HIM TO STAY IN EPHESUS AND DEAL WITH FALSE TEACHERS

1 Timothy 1:3-4 - I am repeating in this letter the advice I gave you just before I went to Macedonia (... presumably after his release from prison in Rome) and urged you to stay at Ephesus. I wanted you to do

this so that you could order certain persons to stop inventing new doctrines and leave hoary old myths and interminable genealogies alone. They only raise queries in men's minds without leading them to faith in God.

CHRISTIAN LEADERS

1 Timothy 1:5-7 - The ultimate aim of the Christian minister (such as Timothy) .... is to produce the love which springs from a pure heart, a good conscience and a genuine faith. Some seem to have forgotten this and to have lost themselves in endless words. They want a reputation as teachers of the Law (or scribes), yet they fail to realise the meaning of their own words, still less of the subject they are so dogmatic about.

PAUL INSTRUCTS TIMOTHY TO DEFEND THE TRUE GOSPEL

THE LAW IS NEEDED TO CONTROL THE WICKED MAN; THE GOSPEL TO GUIDE THE GOOD ONE

1 Timothy 1:8-11 - We know, of course, that the (Jewish) Law is good in itself and has a legitimate function. Yet we also know that the Law is not really meant for the good man, but for the man who has neither principles nor self-control, for the man who is really wicked, who has neither scruples nor reverence. Yes, the Law is directed against the sort of people who attack their own parents, who kill their fellows, who are sexually uncontrolled or perverted, or who traffic in the bodies of others. It is against liars and perjurers - in fact it is against any and every action which contradicts the wholesome teaching of the glorious Gospel which our blessed God has given and entrusted to me (Paul).

CHRIST CAME TO SAVE SINNERS; LIKE PAUL, NO ONE IS BEYOND SALVATION

1 Timothy 1:12-17 - I am deeply grateful to our Lord Jesus Christ (to whom I owe all that I have accomplished) for trusting me enough to appoint me his minister, despite the fact that I had previously blasphemed his name, persecuted his Church and damaged his cause. I believe he was merciful to me because what I did was done in the ignorance of a man without faith, and then he poured out his grace upon me, giving me tremendous faith in, and love for, himself. This statement is completely reliable and should be universally accepted:- "Christ Jesus entered the world to rescue sinners". I realise that I was the worst of them all, and that because of this very fact God was particularly merciful to me. It was a kind of demonstration of the extent of Christ's patience towards the worst of men, to serve as an example to all who in the future should trust him for eternal life.

So to the king of all ages, the immortal, invisible, and only God, be honour and glory for ever and ever!

TIMOTHY IS TOLD TO HOLD ON TO HIS FAITH; PAUL NAMES TWO MEN WHO DID NOT

1 Timothy 1:18-20 - Timothy my son, I give you the following charge. (And may I say, before I give it to you, that it is in full accord with those prophecies made at your ordination - as a minister - which sent you out to battle for the right armed only with your faith and a clear conscience. Some, alas, have laid these simple weapons contemptuously aside and, as far as their faith is concerned have run their ships on the rocks. Hymenaeus and Alexander are men of this sort, and as a matter of fact I had to expel them from the Church to teach them not to blaspheme.)

Hymenaeus - A false teacher, probably from Ephesus where Timothy is now working. In 2 Timothy 2:17, Hymenaeus is again condemned by Paul, this time in association with a man named Philetus.

INSTRUCTIONS REGARDING PUBLIC WORSHIP

WORSHIP

1 Timothy 2:1-2 - (Some of Paul's instructions on worship ....) Here then is my charge: First, supplications, prayers, intercessions and thanksgivings should be made on behalf of all men: for kings and rulers in positions of responsibility, so that our common life may be lived in peace and quiet, with a proper sense of God and of our responsibility to him for what we do with our lives.

UNIQUE CLAIMS OF CHRIST: THERE IS ONLY ONE GOD, AND JESUS CHRIST IS THE ONLY MEDIATOR BETWEEN HIM AND MAN

1 Timothy 2:3-6 - In the sight of God our saviour this (... all people, including their rulers) is undoubtedly the right thing to pray for; for his purpose is that all men should be saved and come to realise the truth.

And that is, that there is only one God, and only one intermediary between God and men, Jesus Christ the man. He gave himself as a ransom for us all - an act of redemption which happened once, but which stands for all times as a witness to what he is.

PAUL APPOINTMENT AS AN APOSTLE TO THE GENTILES

1 Timothy 2:7 - I (Paul) was appointed proclaimer and messenger (apostle) of this great act of his (Jesus), to teach (incredible as it may sound) the Gentile world to believe and know the truth.

WORSHIP

1 Timothy 2:8 - I want the men to pray in all the churches with sincerity, without resentment or doubt in their minds.

WOMEN

1 Timothy 2:9-15 - The women (in church) should be dressed quietly, and their demeanour should be modest and serious. The adornment of a Christian woman is not a matter of an elaborate coiffure, expensive clothes or valuable jewellery, but the living of a good life. A woman should learn quietly and humbly. Personally, I don't allow women to teach, nor do I ever put them into positions of authority over men (but see Paul's reference to Phoebe, a deaconess in his letter to the Romans) - I believe their role is to be receptive. (My reasons are that man was created before woman. Further, it was Eve and not Adam who was first deceived and fell into sin. Nevertheless I believe that women will come safely through child-birth if they maintain a life of faith, love, holiness and gravity).

INSTRUCTIONS REGARDING THE APPOINTMENT OF CHURCH LEADERS

1 Timothy 3:1-13 - It is quite true to say that a man who sets his heart on holding office has laudable ambition. Well, for the office of a bishop (or Overseer or Leader) a man must be of blameless reputation, he must be married to one wife only, and be a man of self-control and discretion. He must be a man of disciplined life; he must be hospitable and have the gift of teaching. He must be neither intemperate nor violent, but gentle. He must not be a controversialist nor must he be fond of money-grabbing. He must have proper authority in his own household, and be able to control and command the respect of his children. (For if a man cannot rule in his own house how can he look after the Church of God?). He must not be a beginner in the faith, for fear of his becoming conceited and sharing Satan's downfall. He should, in addition to the above qualifications, have a good reputation with the outside world, in case his good name is attacked and he is caught by the devil that way.

Deacons

Deacons, similarly, should be men of serious outlook and sincere conviction. They too should be temperate and not greedy for money. They should hold the faith as a sacred trust, with complete sincerity. Let them serve a period of probation first, and only serve as deacons if they prove satisfactory. Their wives should share their serious outlook, and must be women of discretion and self-control - women who can be trusted. Deacons should be men with only one wife, able to control their children and manage their own households properly. Those who do well as deacons earn for themselves a certain legitimate standing, as well as gaining confidence and freedom in the Christian faith.

PAUL'S REASON FOR WRITING, EVEN THOUGH HE HOPES TO COME SOON

1 Timothy 3:14-15a - At the moment of writing I hope to be with you soon (in Ephesus, travelling possibly from Macedonia), but if there should be any considerable delay then what I have written will show you the sort of character men of God's household ought to have.

THE MYSTERY OF CHRIST'S COMING

1 Timothy 3:15b-16 - (God's household .... is, remember), the Church of the living God, the pillar and the foundation of the truth. No one can deny that this religion of ours is a tremendous mystery, resting as it does on the one who showed himself as a human being, and met, as such, every demand of the Spirit in the sight of angels as well as of men. Then, after his restoration to the Heaven from whence he came, he has been proclaimed among men of different nationalities and believed in all parts of the world.

HOW TIMOTHY SHOULD DEAL WITH FALSE TEACHERS

PAUL WARNS TIMOTHY ABOUT THOSE WHO WILL LOSE THEIR CHRISTIAN FAITH

1 Timothy 4:1-2 - God's Spirit specifically tells us that in later days there will be men who abandon the true faith and allow themselves to be spiritually seduced by teachings of the devil, teachings given by men who are lying hypocrites, whose consciences are as dead as seared flesh.

CELIBACY

- Priestly celibacy remains a tradition in some parts of the Christian Church, but it does not appear to have been an issue in the early Church as this and other New Testament verses show. However, Paul does point to the advantages of celibacy in his First Letter to the Corinthians:

1 Timothy 4:3a - These men (false teachers) forbid marriage ....

FOOD

1 Timothy 4:3b-5 - ..... command abstinence from food - good things which, in fact, God intends to be thankfully enjoyed by those who believe in him and know the truth. Everything God made is good, and is meant to be gratefully used, not despised. The holiness or otherwise of a certain food, for instance, depends not on its nature but on whether it is eaten thankfully or not, It is consecrated by the man who has accepted the message, and thanks God for food.

CHRISTIAN LEADERS

1 Timothy 4:6-7 - You will be doing your duty as Christ's minister if you remind your church members of these things (false teaching), and you will show yourself as one who owes his strength to the truth of the faith he has absorbed and the sound teaching he has followed. But steer clear of all these stupid Godless fictions. Take time and trouble to keep yourself spiritually fit.

SPIRITUAL WARFARE

1 Timothy 4:8-11 - Bodily fitness has a certain value, but spiritual fitness is essential both for this present life and for the life to come. There is no doubt about this at all, and Christians should remember it. It is because we realise the paramount importance of the spiritual that we labour and struggle. We place our whole confidence in the living God, the saviour of all men, and particulary of those who believe in him**.** These convictions should be the basis of your instruction and teaching.

CHRISTIAN LEADERS

1 Timothy 4:12-16 - (Paul speaking to the younger Timothy) ..... Don't let people look down on you because you are young; see that they look up to you because you are an example to them in your speech and behaviour, in your love and faith and sincerity. Concentrate until my arrival on your reading and on your preaching and teaching. Never forget that you received the gift of proclaiming God's Word when the assembled elders laid their hands on you. Give your whole attention, all your energies, to these things, so that your progress is plain for all to see. Keep a critical eye both upon your own life and on the teaching you give, and if you continue to follow the line I have indicated you will not only save your own soul but the souls of many of your hearers as well.

HOW TIMOTHY SHOULD DEAL WITH DIFFERENT TYPES OF CHURCH MEMBERS

CHRISTIAN LEADERS

1 Timothy 5:1-2 - Don't reprimand a senior member of your church, appeal to him as a father. Treat the young men as brothers, and the older women as mothers. Treat the younger women as sisters, and no more.

WIDOWS

1 Timothy 5:3-16 - You should treat with great consideration widows who are really alone in the world. But remember that if a widow has children or grandchildren it is primarily their duty to show the

genuineness of their religion in their own homes by repaying their parents for what has been done for them, and God readily accepts such service.

But the widow who is really alone and desolate can only hope in God, and she will pray to him day and night. The widow who plunges into all the pleasure that the world can give her is killing her own soul. You should therefore make the following rules for the widows to avoid abuses:

1) You should make it clear that for a man to refuse to look after his own relations, especially those actually living in his house, is a denial of the faith he professes. He is far worse than a man who makes no profession.

2) Widows for your church list should be at least sixty years of age, should have had only one husband and have a well-founded reputation for having lived a good life. Some such questions as these should be asked:- has she brought up her children well, has she been hospitable to strangers, has she been willing to serve fellow-Christians in menial ways, has she relieved those in distress, has she, in a word conscientiously done all the good she can?

3) Don't put the younger widows on your list. My experience is that when their natural desires grow stronger than their spiritual devotion to Christ they want to marry again, thus proving themselves unfaithful to their first loyalty. Moreover, they get into habits of slackness by being so much in and out of other people's houses. In fact they easily become worse than lazy, and degenerate into gossips and busybodies with dangerous tongues.

4) My advice is that younger widows should, normally, marry again, bear children and run their own households. They should certainly not be the means of lowering the reputation of the church, although some, alas, have already played into the enemy's hands.

5) As a general rule it should be taken for granted that any Christian, man or woman, who has a widow in the family should do everything possible for her, and not allow her to become the church's responsibility. The church will then be free to look after those widows who are alone in the world.

CHRISTIAN LEADERS

1 Timothy 5:17-20 - Elders with a gift of leadership should be considered worthy of respect, and of adequate salary, particularly if they work hard at their preaching and teaching. Remember the scriptural principle: 'You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads the grain', and 'The labourer is worthy of his wages'. Take no notice of charges brought against an elder unless they can be substantiated by proper witnesses. If sin is actually proved, then the offenders should be publicly rebuked as a salutary warning to others.

FAVOURITISM; PAUL'S INSISTENCE ON IMPARTIALITY

1 Timothy 5:21 - Timothy, I (Paul) solemnly charge you in the sight of God and Christ Jesus and the holy angels to follow these orders (on dealing with problems in the church) with the strictest impartiality and to have no favourites.

CHRISTIAN LEADERS

1 Timothy 5:22 - Never be in a hurry to ordain a man (laying on of hands), or you may be making yourself responsible for his sins. Be careful that your own life (as a minister) is pure.

TIMOTHY'S HEALTH, PAUL'S ADVICE

1 Timothy 5:23 - By the way, I (Paul) should advise you to drink wine in moderation, instead of water. It will do your stomach good and help you to get over your frequent spells of illness.

CHRISTIAN LEADERS

1 Timothy 5:24-25 - Remember that some men's sins are obvious, and are equally obviously bringing them to judgment. The sins of other men are not apparent, but are dogging them, nevertheless, under the surface. Similarly some virtues are plain to see, while others, though not at all conspicuous, will eventually make themselves felt.

EMPLOYEES

1 Timothy 6:1-2 - Christian slaves (employees) should treat their masters with respect, and avoid causing dishonour to the name of God and our teaching. If they have Christian masters they should not despise them because they work for brothers in the faith. Indeed they should serve them all the better because they are thereby benefiting those who have the same faith and love as themselves. This is the sort of thing you should teach

WARNINGS

FALSE CHRISTIAN TEACHING, FALSE PROPHETS, CULTS

1 Timothy 6:3-5 - ... if anyone tries to teach some doctrinal novelty which is not compatible with sound teaching (which we base on Christ's own words and which leads to Christ-like living), then he is a conceited idiot! His mind is a morbid jumble of disputation and argument, things which lead to nothing but jealousy, quarrelling, insults and malicious innuendoes - continual wrangling, in fact, among men of warped minds who have lost their real hold on the truth but hope to make some profit out of the Christian religion.

MATERIALISM

1 Timothy 6:6-8 - There is a real profit, of course (Paul describing the pursuit of wealth), but it comes only to those who live contentedly as God would have them live. We brought absolutely nothing with us when we entered the world and we can be sure we shall take absolutely nothing with us when we leave it. Surely then, as far as physical things are concerned, it is sufficient for us to keep our bodies fed and clothed.

WEALTH

1 Timothy 6:9-10 - ... men who set their hearts on being wealthy expose themselves to temptation. They fall into one of the world's traps, and lay themselves open to all sorts of silly and wicked desires, which are quite capable of utterly ruining and destroying their souls. For loving money leads to all kinds of evil, and some men in the struggle to be rich have lost their faith and caused themselves untold agonies of mind.

CHRISTIAN CONDUCT

1 Timothy 6:11-12 - ... you (Timothy, the minister), the man of God, keep clear of such things (the pursuit of wealth). Set your heart not on riches, but on goodness, Christ-likeness, faith, love, patience and humility. Fight the worthwhile battle of the faith, keep your grip on that life eternal to which you have been called, and to which you boldly professed your loyalty before many witnesses.

WARNINGS ABOUT WEALTH; FINAL WARNINGS TO TIMOTHY

TIMOTHY'S DUTY AS A MINISTER UNTIL CHRIST RETURNS

1 Timothy 6:13-16 - I (Paul) charge you (Timothy) in the sight of God who gives us life, and Jesus Christ who fearlessly witnessed to the truth before Pontius Pilate, to keep your commission (as a minister) clean and above reproach until the final coming of Christ. This will be, in his own time, the final dénouement of God, who is the blessed controller of all things, the king over all kings and the master of all masters, the only source of immortality, the one who lives in unapproachable light, the one whom no mortal eye has ever seen or ever can see. To him be acknowledged all honour and power for ever, amen!

WEALTH

1 Timothy 6:17-19 - Tell those who are rich in this present world not to be contemptuous of others, and not to rest the weight of their confidence on the transitory power of wealth but on the living God, who generously gives us everything for our enjoyment. Tell them to do good, to be rich in kindly actions, to be ready to give to others and to sympathise with those in distress. Their security should be invested in the life to come so that they may be sure of holding a share in the life which is permanent.

PAUL'S FINAL WARNING TO HOLD TO CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE; A BLESSING

1 Timothy 6:20-21 - O Timothy, guard most carefully your divine commission. Avoid the Godless mixture of contradictory notions which is falsely known as "knowledge" - some have followed it and lost

their faith.

Grace be with you.

PAUL

PAUL'S SECOND LETTER TO TIMOTHY

With people, places, definitions, map .....

Writer: The apostle Paul, his last recorded words

Date: c AD67, assuming Paul was re-arrested, and returned to Rome for trial and execution

Where written: Rome

Reader: Timothy, Paul's disciple and friend, and still a minister in Ephesus

Why: Paul's last letter before his presumed execution, in which he encourages Timothy in his difficult job as a young minister, and gives him further instruction. He also asks Timothy to visit him in Rome

According to Some Modern Scholarship: Written by an unknown Christian towards the end of the 1st century, using Paul's name and some of his original material to give the letter authority

Map - Paul Writes his Second Pastoral or Teaching Letter to Timothy

Map Key: Letter from 1 to 2

PAUL APPEALS TO TIMOTHY TO SHOW COURAGE

GREETINGS; PAUL'S AFFECTION FOR TIMOTHY

2 Timothy 1:1-4 - Paul, messenger by God's appointment in the promised life of Christ Jesus, to Timothy, my own dearly loved son: grace, mercy and peace be to you from God the Father and Christ Jesus, our Lord.

I thank God for your faith: guard it well

I thank the God of my forefathers, whom I serve with a clear conscience, as I remember you in my prayers. Every day and every night I have been longing to see you, for I can't forget how moved you were when I left you, and to have you with me again would be the greatest possible joy.

HE ENCOURAGES TIMOTHY IN HIS FAITH AND COURAGE

2 Timothy 1:5-7 - I often think of that genuine faith of yours - a faith that first appeared in your grandmother Lois, then in Eunice your mother, and is now, I am convinced, in you (Timothy) as well. Because you have this faith, I now remind you to stir up that inner fire which God gave you at your ordination. For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but a spirit of power and love and a sound mind.

TIMOTHY SHOULD BE PREPARED TO SUFFER FOR THE GOSPEL AS PAUL HAS, FOR GOD HAS CALLED US TO A HOLY LIFE AND GRANTED US IMMORTALITY

2 Timothy 1:8-12 - So never be ashamed of bearing witness to our Lord, nor of me (Paul), his prisoner. Accept, as I do, all the hardship that faithfulness to the Gospel entails in the strength that God gives you. For he has rescued us from all that is really evil and called us to a life of holiness - not because of any of our achievements but for his own purpose. Before time began he planned to give us in Christ the grace to achieve this purpose, but it is only since our saviour Jesus Christ has been revealed that the method has become apparent. For Christ has completely abolished death, and has now, through the Gospel, opened to us men the shining possibilities of the life that is eternal. It is this Gospel that I am commissioned to proclaim; it is of this Gospel that I am appointed both messenger and teacher, and it is for this Gospel that I am now suffering these things. Yet I am not in the least ashamed. For I know the one in whom I have placed my confidence, and I am perfectly certain that the work he has committed to me is safe in his hands until that day.

PAUL'S TEACHING AS AN EXAMPLE TO TIMOTHY

2 Timothy 1:13-14 - So keep my words in your mind as the pattern of sound teaching, given to you in the faith and love of Jesus Christ. Take the greatest care of the good things which were entrusted to you by the Holy Spirit who lives within us.

PAUL'S FRIENDS IN ASIA - THE DISLOYAL AND THE LOYAL

2 Timothy 1:15-18 - You will know, I expect, that all those who were in Asia have turned against me, Phygelus and Hermogenes among them. But may the Lord have mercy on the household of Onesiphorus. ....

Onesiphorus - Paul remembers Onesiphorus and his household with great affection from his time in Ephesus. He is also grateful for the effort Onesiphorus made to find him in his Roman prison. The implication of these verses and the closing greeting (2 Timothy 4:19) is that Onesiphorus is now dead -

.... Many times did that man put fresh heart into me, and he was not in the least ashamed of my being a prisoner in chains. Indeed, when he was in Rome he went to a great deal of trouble to find me - may the Lord grant he finds his mercy in that day! - and you well know in how many ways he helped me at Ephesus as well.

TIMOTHY MUST APPOINT RELIABLE TEACHERS

2 Timothy 2:1-2 - So, my son, be strong in the grace that Jesus Christ gives. Everything that you have heard me preach in public you should in turn entrust to reliable men, who will be able to pass it on to others.

CHRISTIAN CONDUCT

2 Timothy 2:3-7 - Put up with your share of hardship as a loyal soldier in Christ's army. Remember: 1) That no soldier on active service gets himself entangled in business, or he will not please his commanding officer. 2) A man who enters an athletic contest wins no prize unless he keeps the rules laid down. 3) Only the man who works on the land has the right to the first share of its produce. Consider these three illustrations of mine and the Lord will help you to understand all that I mean.

SHARING CHRIST'S SUFFERING MEANS SHARING HIS GLORY

2 Timothy 2:8-13 - Remember always, as the centre of everything, Jesus Christ, a man of human ancestry, yet raised by God from the dead according to my Gospel. For preaching this (the Gospel of the resurrected Christ) I (Paul) am having to endure being chained in prison as if I were some sort of a criminal. But they cannot chain the Word of God, and I can endure all these things for the sake of those whom God is calling, so that they too may receive the salvation of Jesus Christ, and its complement of glory after the world of time. I rely on this saying: If we died with him we shall also live with him: if we suffer with him we shall also reign with him. If we deny him he will also deny us: yet if we are faithless he always remains faithful. He cannot deny his own nature.

HOW TIMOTHY SHOULD DEAL WITH PRESENT PROBLEMS

TIMOTHY'S DUTY TO THE CHURCH AND TO GOD

2 Timothy 2:14-15 - Remind your people of things like this (... sharing Christ's suffering and glory), and tell them as before God not to fight wordy battles, which help no one and may undermine the faith of some who hear them.

For yourself, concentrate on winning God's approval, on being a workman with nothing to be ashamed of, and who knows how to use the word of truth to the best advantage.

FALSE TEACHING DESTROYS FAITH

2 Timothy 2:16-18 - But steer clear of these unchristian babblings, which in practice lead further and further away from Christian living. False teachings are as dangerous as blood-poisoning to the body, and spread like sepsis from a wound. Hymenaeus and Philetus are responsible for this sort of thing, and they are men who are palpable traitors to the truth, for they say that the resurrection has already occurred and, of course, badly upset some people's faith.

CHRISTIAN CONDUCT

2 Timothy 2:19-23 - God's solid foundation still stands, however, with this double inscription: 'the Lord knows those who belong to him', and Let every true Christian have no dealing with evil. In any big household there are naturally not only gold and silver vessels but wooden and earthenware ones as well. Some are used for the highest purposes and some for the lowest. If a man keeps himself clean from the contaminations of evil he will be a vessel used for honourable purposes, clean and serviceable for the use of the master of the household, all ready, in fact, for any good purpose.

Be positively good - and patient

Turn your back on the turbulent desires of youth and give your positive attention to goodness, faith, love and peace in company with all those who approach God in sincerity. But have nothing to do with silly and ill-informed controversies which lead inevitably, as you know, to strife.

CHRISTIAN LEADERS

2 Timothy 2:24-26 - ... the Lord's servant (such as a minister) must not be a man of strife: he must be kind to all, ready and able to teach: he must have patience and the ability gently to correct those who oppose his message. He must always bear in mind the possibility that God will give them a different outlook, and that they may come to know the truth. They may come to their senses and be rescued from the power of the devil by the servant of the Lord and set to work for God's purposes.

DEALING WITH PROBLEMS TO COME

NON-CHRISTIAN BEHAVIOUR

- There are frequent references to specific types of non-Christian, Gentile or pagan behaviour in the New Testament, but there are also general lists such as the following. These are often contrasted with lists of proper Christian conduct:

2 Timothy 3:1-5 - .... you must realise that in the last days (before the return of Jesus) the times will be full of danger (from evil men and false prophets). Men will become utterly self-centred, greedy for money, full of big words. They will be proud and contemptuous, without any regard for what their parents taught them. They will be utterly lacking in gratitude, purity and normal human affections. They will be men of unscrupulous speech and have no control of themselves. They will be passionate and unprincipled, treacherous, self-willed and conceited, loving all the time what gives them pleasure instead of loving God. They will maintain a facade of "religion", but their conduct will deny its validity. You must keep clear of people like this.

FALSE CHRISTIAN TEACHING, FALSE PROPHETS, CULTS

2 Timothy 3:6-9 - From their number (men claiming to be religious, but whose behaviour is non-Christian) come those creatures who worm their way into people's houses, and find easy prey in silly women with an exaggerated sense of sin and morbid cravings - who are always learning and yet never able to grasp the truth. These men are as much enemies to the truth as Jannes and Jambres (in Jewish tradition, the names of Pharaoh's magicians who opposed Moses before the Exodus) were to Moses.

Their minds are distorted, and they are traitors to the faith. But in the long run they won't get far. Their folly will become as obvious to everybody as did that of Moses' opponents.

TIMOTHY SHOULD KNOW WHAT PAUL HAS TAUGHT AND SUFFERED

2 Timothy 3:10-11a - But you, Timothy, have known intimately both what I have taught and how I lived. My purpose and my faith are no secrets to you. You saw my endurance and love and patience as I met all those persecutions and difficulties at Antioch, Iconium and Lystra (... Timothy came from Lystra, and was well known in Iconium, Acts 16:1-2).

TRIALS OF LIFE

2 Timothy 3:11b-13 - ... you know how the Lord brought me (Paul) safely through them all (his many difficulties). Persecution is inevitable for those who are determined to live really Christian lives, while wicked and deceitful men will go from bad to worse, deluding others and deluding themselves.

TIMOTHY'S GROUNDING IN SCRIPTURE SINCE CHILDHOOD; THE HOLY BIBLE

2 Timothy 3:14-17 - Yet you must go on steadily in all those things that you have learned and which you know are true. Remember from what sort of people (such as his mother and grandmother, as well as Paul) your knowledge has come, and how from early childhood your mind has been familiar with the holy scriptures (... which become the Christian Old Testament, and ...), which can open the mind to the salvation which comes through believing in Christ Jesus. All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching the faith and correcting error, for re-setting the direction of a man's life and training him in good living. The scriptures are the comprehensive equipment of the man of God and fit him fully for all branches of his work.

PAUL EXHORTS TIMOTHY TO PREACH AND TEACH

2 Timothy 4:1-2 - I urge you, Timothy, as we live in the sight of God and of Christ Jesus (whose coming in power will judge the living and the dead), to preach the Word of God. Never lose your sense of urgency, in season or out of season. Prove, correct, and encourage, using the utmost patience in your teaching.

CHRISTIAN LEADERS

2 Timothy 4:3-5 - For the time is coming when men will not tolerate wholesome teaching. They will want something to tickle their own fancies, and they will collect teachers who will pander to their own desires. They will no longer listen to the truth, but will wander off after man-made fictions. For yourself, stand fast in all that you are doing, meeting whatever suffering this may involve. Go on steadily preaching the Gospel and carry out to the full the commission that God gave you.

PAUL PREPARES FOR DEATH

2 Timothy 4:6-8 - As for me, I feel that the last drops of my life are being poured out for God. The glorious fight that God gave me I have fought. The course that I was set I have finished, and I have kept the faith. The future for me holds the crown of righteousness which God, the true judge, will give to those who have loved what they have seen of him.

PERSONAL MATTERS

PAUL'S LONELY IMPRISONMENT; ONLY LUKE IS LEFT TO SUPPORT HIM

2 Timothy 4: 9-15 - Do your best (Timothy) to come to me as soon as you can. Demas, loving this present world, I fear, has left me and gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, and Titus is away in Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me now.

When you come, pick up Mark (John Mark, clearly reconciled with Paul after the events of the First Missionary Journey 20 years before, Acts 13:13) and bring him with you. I can certainly find a job for him here. (I had to send Tychicus off to Ephesus.) And please bring with you the cloak I left with Carpus at Troas (where Paul may have been arrested before his final imprisonment), and the books, especially the manuscripts. Alexander the coppersmith did me a great deal of harm - the Lord will reward him for what

he did - and I should be very careful of him if I were you. He has been an obstinate opponent of our teaching.

HE FORGIVES THOSE WHO DESERTED HIM; THE LORD SUSTAINED HIM

2 Timothy 4:16-18 - The first time I had to defend myself no one was on my side - they all deserted me. God forgive them! Yet the Lord himself stood by me and gave me the strength to proclaim the message clearly and fully, so that the Gentiles could hear it, and I was rescued "from the lion's mouth". I am sure the Lord will rescue me from every evil plot, and will keep me safe until I reach his heavenly kingdom. Glory be to him for ever and ever!

FINAL GREETINGS AND INSTRUCTIONS; A BLESSING

2 Timothy 4:19-22 - Give my love to Prisca and Aquila and Onesiphorus and his family. Erastus is still staying on at Corinth, and Trophimus I had to leave sick at Miletus.

Erastus - Possibly the Erastus associated with Paul ten or twelve years earlier. Towards the end of his Third Journey, Paul sent an Erastus ahead of him from Ephesus to Macedonia (Acts 19:22). One or years later in his Letter to the Romans, Paul included Erastus, the town clerk of Corinth in his greetings (Romans 16:23). These may all be the same man;

Do your best to get here before the winter. Eubulus, Pudens, Linus, Claudia and all here send their greetings to you. ...

Pudens, Claudia & Linus - Pudens and Claudia were probably husband and wife, and Linus their son, who was traditionally bishop of Rome after the apostle Peter.

.... The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you.

PAUL

PAUL'S LETTER TO TITUS

With people, places, definitions, map .....

Writer: The apostle Paul

Date: c AD66, assuming Paul was released from house arrest in Rome and continued his travels

Where written: Perhaps Macedonia or Ephesus

Reader: Titus, a Gentile convert, and friend and helper of Paul. Now a minister on the island of Crete

Why: Paul writes to encourage Titus who is working in difficult circumstances in Crete. He also instructs him in various matters

According to Some Modern Scholarship: Written by an unknown Christian towards the end of the 1st century, using Paul's name and some of his original material to give the letter authority

Map - Paul Writes his Pastoral or Teaching Letter to Titus

Map Key: Letter possibly from 1 to 2

THE MAIN TASKS FACING TITUS IN CRETE

PAUL'S GREETING TO TITUS

Titus 1:1-4 - Paul, servant of God and messenger of Jesus Christ in the faith God gives to his chosen, in the knowledge of the truth that comes from a God-fearing life, and in the hope of the everlasting life which God, who cannot lie, promised before the beginning of time - (at the right moment he made his Word known in the declaration which has been entrusted to me by his command) to Titus, my true son in our common faith, be grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ our saviour.

THE REASON PAUL LEFT TITUS IN CRETE; CHRISTIAN LEADERS

Titus 1:5-9 - I (Paul) left you (Titus as minister) in Crete to set right matters which needed attention, and gave you instructions to appoint elders in every city. They were to be men of unquestioned integrity with only one wife, and with children brought up as Christians and not likely to be accused of loose living or law-breaking. To exercise spiritual oversight a man must be of unimpeachable virtue, for he is God's agent in the affairs of his household. He must not be aggressive or hot-tempered or over-fond of wine; nor must he be violent or greedy for financial gain. On the contrary, he must be hospitable, a genuine

lover of what is good, a man who is discreet, fair-minded, holy and self-controlled: a man who takes his stand on the orthodox faith, so that he can by sound teaching both stimulate faith and confute opposition.

ANTI-JUDAISM; THE THREAT FROM FALSE TEACHERS

- Verses attacking and ridiculing Jews in the Acts of the Apostles and the Letters are a fact and can not be ignored. However, they are not directed at the Jewish race or religion, but at those Jews who actively prevented the apostles from taking the Gospel to God's world. Or in the case of the "Judaisers", those who tried to impose Jewish religious customs on Gentile converts, and thus turn Christianity into a Jewish cult. More especially in this case, it seems that not Jews but Cretans as a whole were not exactly held in high esteem by the rest of the Mediterranean cultures:

Titus 1:10-16 - But there are many, especially among the Jews, who will not recognise authority, who talk nonsense and yet in so doing have managed to deceive men's minds. They must be silenced, for they upset the faith of whole households, teaching what they have no business to teach for the sake of what they can get. One of them, yes, one of their prophets (the Cretan poet Epimenides, c 600BC), has said: "Men of Crete are always liars, evil and beastly, lazy and greedy." There is truth in this testimonial of theirs! Don't hesitate to reprimand them sharply for you want them to be sound and healthy Christians, with a proper contempt for Jewish fairy tales and orders issued by men who have forsaken the path of truth. Everything is wholesome to those who are themselves wholesome. But nothing is wholesome to those who are themselves unwholesome and who have no faith in God - their very minds and consciences are diseased. They profess to know God, but their actual behaviour denies their profession, for they are obviously vile and rebellious and when it comes to doing any real good they are palpable frauds.

TEACHING THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

PAUL EXHORTS TITUS TO TEACH SOUND DOCTRINE; CHRISTIAN CONDUCT

Titus 2:1-8 - Now you (Titus, as a minister) must tell them the sort of character which should spring from sound teaching. The old men should be temperate, serious, wise - spiritually healthy through their faith and love and patience. Similarly the old women should be reverent in their behaviour, should not make unfounded complaints and should not be over-fond of wine. They should be examples of the good life, so that the younger women may learn to love their husbands and their children, to be sensible and chaste, home-lovers, kind-hearted and willing to adapt themselves to their husbands - a good advertisement for the Christian faith. The young men, too, you should urge to take life seriously, letting your own life stand as a pattern of good living. In all your teaching show the strictest regard for truth, and show that you appreciate the seriousness of the matters you are dealing with. Your speech should be unaffected and logical, so that your opponent may feel ashamed at finding nothing in which to pick holes.

EMPLOYEES

Titus 2:9-10 - Slaves (employees) should be told that it is their duty as Christians to obey their masters (employers) and to give them satisfactory service in every way. They are not to "answer back" or to be light-fingered, but they are to show themselves utterly trustworthy, a living testimonial to the teaching of God our saviour.

JESUS CAME THAT WE MIGHT LIVE GODLY LIVES UNTIL HE RETURNS

Titus 2:11-14 - For the grace of God, which can save every man, has now become known, and it teaches us to have no more to do with godlessness or the desires of this world but to live, here and now, responsible, honourable and God-fearing lives. And while we live this life we hope and wait for the glorious dénouement of the Great God and of Jesus Christ our saviour. For he gave himself for us all, that he might rescue us from all our evil ways and make for himself a people of his own, clean and pure, with our hearts set upon living a life that is good.

TITUS MUST TEACH AND MINISTER WITH AUTHORITY

Titus 2:15 - Tell men of these things, Titus. Urge them to action, using a reprimand where necessary with all the authority of God's minister - and as such let no one treat you with contempt.

GOVERNMENT

Titus 3:1-2 - Remind your people (in the church) to recognise the power of those who rule and bear authority. They must obey the laws of the state and be prepared to render whatever good service they can. They are not to speak evil of any man, they must not be argumentative but gentle, showing themselves agreeable to everybody.

WE ARE SAVED FROM EARTHLY SIN AND ETERNAL DAMNATION BY CHRIST'S SACRIFICE

Titus 3:3-8a - For we ourselves have known what it is to be ignorant, disobedient and deceived, the slaves of various desires and pleasant feelings, while our lives were spent in malice and jealousy - we were hateful and we hated each other. But when the kindness of God our saviour and his love towards man appeared, he saved us - not by virtue of any moral achievements of ours, but by the cleansing power of a new birth and the moral renewal of the Holy Spirit, which he gave us so generously through Jesus Christ our Saviour. The result is that we are acquitted by his grace, and can look forward to inheriting life for evermore. This is solid truth.

ARGUMENTATIVE

Titus 3:8b-11 - Subjects like this (living the Christian life) are always good and useful but mind you steer clear of stupid arguments, genealogies, controversies and quarrels over the Law. They settle nothing and lead nowhere. If a man is still argumentative after the second warning you should reject him. You can be sure that he has a moral twist, and he knows it.

FINAL INSTRUCTIONS

PAUL'S TRAVEL INSTRUCTIONS

Titus 3:12-13 - As soon as I send Artemas to you ....

Artemas - This is the only mention of Artemas in the New Testament. According to tradition he became bishop of Lystra in southern Asia Minor -

.... (or perhaps it will be Tychicus - from Asia, probably the city of Ephesus), do your best to come to me at Nicopolis, for I have made up my mind to spend the winter there. See that Zenas the lawyer and Apollos (whose teaching made such an impact on the Corinthian church) have what they require and give them a good send-off.

A FINAL WARNING ABOUT PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY; FAREWELL

Titus 3:14-15 - And our people should learn to earn what they require by leading an honest life and so be self-supporting.

All those here with me send you greetings, Please give our greetings to all who love us in the faith. Grace be with you all.

PAUL

PAUL'S LETTER TO PHILEMON

With people, places, definitions, map .....

Writer: The apostle Paul; his only surviving letter about an individual

Date: c AD62; carried by Tychicus together with the Letters to the Colossians and the Ephesians

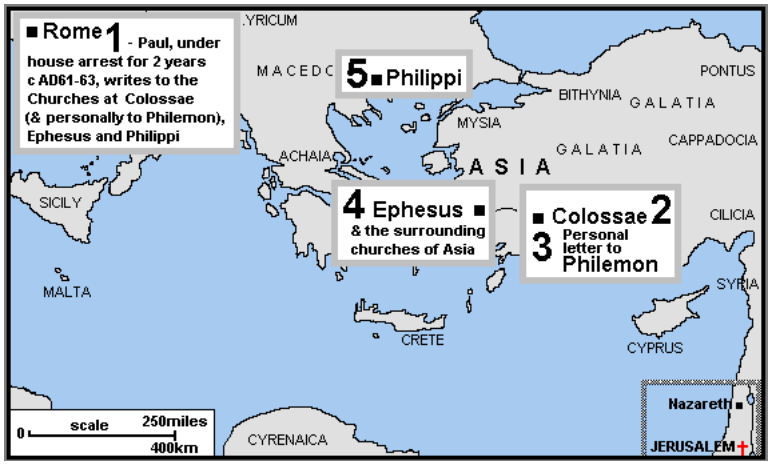
Where written: By Paul under house arrest in Rome

Reader: Philemon at Colossae;

Why: To ask Philemon to forgive and welcome back the runaway slave Onesimus, now a brother in Christ. The Letter is a model of forgiveness, love, and tact

Map - Paul Writes from Prison in Rome

Map Key: Letter for Philemon sent from 1 to 3



GREETINGS TO PHILEMON AND HIS HOUSEHOLD

Philemon v1-3 - Paul, prisoner for the sake of Jesus Christ, and brother Timothy to Philemon our much-loved fellow-worker, Apphia our sister and Archippus who is with us in the fight; ....

Philemon & Apphia - Philemon, a man of property and affluence is probably married to Apphia. They are also the parents of Archippus, all of them living in Colossae. In his Letter to the Colossians (4:17), Paul encourages Archippus to continue with his Christian work -

.... to the church that meets in your house - grace and peace be to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

PAUL GIVES THANKS FOR PHILEMON'S CHRISTIAN FAITH AND WITNESS

Philemon v4-7 - I always thank God for you, Philemon, in my constant prayers for you all, for I have heard how you love and trust both the Lord Jesus himself and those who believe in him. And I pray that those who share your faith may also share your knowledge of all the good things that believing in Jesus Christ can mean to us. It is your love, my brother, that gives us such comfort and happiness, for it cheers the hearts of your fellow Christians.

PAUL INTRODUCES THE MATTER OF ONESIMUS, PHILEMON'S ESCAPED SLAVE

Philemon v8-11 - And although I could rely on my authority in Christ and dare to order you to do what I consider right, I am not doing that. No, I am appealing to that love of yours, a simple personal appeal from Paul the old man, in prison for Jesus Christ's sake. I am appealing for my child. Yes I have become a father though I have been under lock and key, and the child's name is - Onesimus! Oh, I know you

have found him pretty useless in the past but he is going to be useful now (Onesimus means "useful" - or "profitable" in Greek), to both of us.

HE ASKS PHILEMON TO WELCOME BACK ONESIMUS AS A CHRISTIAN BROTHER

Philemon v12-21 - I am sending him back to you: will you receive him as my son, part of me? I should have dearly loved to have kept him with me: he could have done what you would have done - looked after me here in prison for the Gospel's sake. But I would do nothing without consulting you first, for if you have a favour to give me, let it be spontaneous and not forced from you by circumstances!

It occurs to me that there has been a purpose in your losing him. You lost him, a slave, for a time; now you are having him back for good, not merely as a slave, but as a brother-Christian. He is already especially loved by me - how much more will you be able to love him, both as a man and as a fellow-Christian! You and I have so much in common haven't we? Then do welcome him as you would welcome me. If you feel he has wronged or cheated you put it down to my account. I've written this with my own hand: I, Paul, hereby promise to repay you. (Of course I'm not stressing the fact that you might be said to owe me your very soul!) Now do grant me this favour, my brother - such an act of love will do my old heart good. As I send you this letter I know you'll do what I ask - I believe, in fact, you'll do more.

Slaves - That Paul a Christian enjoying freedom in Christ, should not have condemned the slavery of Onesimus may seem strange. Yet slavery was for millennia an accepted practice in all societies. To overthrow, or even question it in an Empire whose economy depended on, and who even killed slaves for entertainment was out of the question 2,000 years ago. However in showing that Philemon, the rich master, and Onesimus the poor slave were truly brothers in Christ, Paul played his part in the long journey towards official abolition in the 18th and 19th centuries. Sadly, slavery in various forms still exists in many parts of the world today -

PAUL HOPES FOR RELEASE; HIS FINAL FAREWELLS

Philemon v22-25 - Will you do something else? Get the guest-room ready for me, for I have great hopes that through your prayers I myself will be returned to you as well! (.. released from prison in Rome and able to travel to Colossae).

Epaphras, here in prison with me, sends his greetings: so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke, all fellow-workers for God. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, amen.

PAUL

HEBREWS: THE LETTER TO JEWISH CHRISTIANS

With people, places, definitions .....

Writer: The apostle Paul according to the tradition of the Roman Catholic church and the early Anglican church. Hebrews is credited in its title to Paul in the 1611 "King James Version" of the Holy Bible;

Date: c AD65 before the start of the Jewish War of AD66-73, and certainly before the Fall of Jerusalem in AD70;

Where written: Traditionally Italy, possibly Rome;

Reader: A small group of Jewish Christians, possibly known to the author, and living in a specific location. As "Hebrews", they may well have lived in Jerusalem, but other suggestions include Alexandria, Corinth, Ephesus, or Rome itself. They had been persecuted for their Christian faith, were losing their initial enthusiasm and in danger of falling away altogether and embracing some new form of Judaism;

Why: To prove to Jewish Christians the superiority of Jesus Christ over the Law and prophets of the Old Testament.

According to Some Modern Scholarship: Although credited to Paul for centuries, most modern scholars maintain Hebrews was not written by him, but by an unknown author at this time. Whoever the author was, he or she was certainly a Jewish Christian, knew the Old Testament well, and wrote excellent Greek. Suggestions include Silas and Priscilla, but the most likely candidates are Apollos or Barnabas.

The place of writing is unknown, but from Hebrews 13:24, it may have been from Italy. Or else it was sent to Italy, as it includes greetings from expatriate Italian Christians.

JESUS CHRIST IS FOR ALL MEN

GOD HAS SENT HIS SON, JESUS CHRIST, FOR ALL PEOPLE

Hebrews 1:1-3 - God, who gave our forefathers (of the Jewish nation) many different glimpses of the truth in the words of the prophets, has now, at the end of the present age, given us the truth in the Son (Jesus Christ). Through the Son God made the whole universe, and to the Son he has ordained that all creation shall ultimately belong. This Son, radiance of the glory of God, flawless expression of the nature of God, himself the upholding principle of all that is, effected in person the reconciliation between God and man and then took his seat at the right hand of the majesty on high ....

JESUS CHRIST IS GREATER THAN GOD'S ANGELS

CHRIST IS HIGHER THAN THE ANGELS

- Angels play an important part in God's dealings with his people in the Old Testament. The author of Hebrews uses Old Testament quotations (sometimes difficult to understand or appreciate) to prove just how much superior is Jesus Christ:

Hebrews 1:4-14 - .... thus proving himself, by the more glorious name that he has won, far greater than all the angels of God.

Scripture endorses this superiority

For to which of the angels did he (God) ever say such words as these:

'You are my Son, today I have begotten you?' (Psalm 2:7)

Or, again

'I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son?' (2 Samuel 7:14; 1 Chronicles 17:13)

Further, when he brings his first-born into this world of men, he says:

'Let all the angels of God worship him' (Deuteronomy 32:43 in the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Greek Septuagint version of the Jewish Bible).

This is what he says of the angels:

'Who makes his angels spirits and his ministers a flame of fire' (Psalm 104:4).

But when he speaks of the Son, he says:

'Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness more than your companions' (Psalm 45:6,7).

He also says:

'You, Lord, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands; they will perish, but you remain; and they will all grow old like a garment; like a cloak you will fold them up, and they will be changed. But you are the same, and your years will not fail' (Psalm 102:25-27).

But does he ever say this of any of the angels:

'Sit at my right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool?' (Psalm 110:1)

Surely the angels are no more than spirits in the service of God, commissioned to serve the heirs of God's salvation

FIRST WARNING - DON'T DRIFT AWAY FROM THE GOSPEL OF JESUS

Hebrews 2:1-4 - We ought, therefore, to pay the greatest attention to the truth (of the Gospel) that we have heard and not allow ourselves to drift away from it. For if the message (... the Law) given through angels proved authentic (.. angels traditionally gave the Law to Moses), so that defiance of it and disobedience to it (the Law) received appropriate retribution, how shall we escape if we refuse to pay proper attention to the salvation that is offered us today (in the Gospel)? For this salvation came first through the words of the Lord himself (... the three year ministry and Gospel of Jesus): it was confirmed for our hearing by men who had heard him speak (the apostles), and God moreover has plainly endorsed their witness (the apostles again) by signs and miracles, by all kinds of spiritual power, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit, all working to the divine plan.

JESUS CHRIST THE SON OF GOD ALSO BECAME A MAN, LOWER THAN THE ANGELS

Hebrews 2:5-18 - For though in past ages God did grant authority to angels, yet he did not put the future world of men under their control, and it is this world that we are now talking about.

But someone has said:

'What is man that you are mindful of him, or the son of man that you take care of him? You made him a little lower than the angels; you crowned him with glory and honour, and set him over the works of your hands. You have put all things in subjection under his feet' (Psalm 8:4-6).

Notice that the writer puts "all things" under the sovereignty of man: he left nothing outside his control. But we do not yet see "all things" under his control.

Christ became man, not angel, to save mankind

What we actually see is Jesus, after being made temporarily inferior to the angels (and so subject to pain and death - through crucifixion), in order that he should, in God's grace, taste death for every man, now crowned with glory and honour. It was right and proper that in bringing many sons to glory, God (from whom and by whom everything exists) should make the leader of their salvation a perfect leader through the fact that he suffered. For the one who makes men holy and the men who are made holy share a common humanity. So that he is not ashamed to call them his brothers, for he says:

'I will declare your name to my brethren; in the midst of the congregation I will sing praise to you' (Psalm 22:22).

And again, speaking as a man, he says:

'I will put my trust in him' (Isaiah 8:17).

And, one more instance, in these words:

'Here am I and the children whom God has given me' (Isaiah 8:18).

Since, then, "the children" have a common physical nature as human beings, he (Jesus) also became a human being, so that by going through death as a man he might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil; and might also set free those who lived their whole lives a prey to the fear of death. It is plain that for this purpose he did not become an angel; he became a man, in actual fact a descendant of Abraham (as the genealogies of Jesus in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke show). It was imperative that he should be made like his brothers in nature, if he were to become a High Priest both compassionate and faithful in the things of God, and at the same time able to make atonement for the sins of the people. For by virtue of his own suffering under temptation he is able to help those who are exposed to temptation.

HE IS GREATER THAN MOSES

MOSES WAS A FAITHFUL SERVANT, JESUS IS A FAITHFUL SON

Hebrews 3:1-6 - So then, my brothers in holiness who share the highest of all callings, I want you to think of the messenger (or apostle) and High Priest of the faith we hold, Christ Jesus. See him as faithful to the charge God gave him, and compare him with Moses who also faithfully discharged his duty in the household of God. For this man (Jesus) has been considered worthy of greater honour than Moses, just as the founder of a house may be truly said to have more honour than the house itself. Every house is founded by someone, but the founder of everything is God himself. Moses was certainly faithful in all his duties in God's household, but he was faithful as a servant and his work was only a foreshadowing of the truth that would be known later. But Christ was faithful as a loyal son in the household of the founder, his own Father. And we are members of this household if we maintain our trust and joyful hope steadfast to the end.

SECOND WARNING - STAND FIRM; REJECTING JESUS IS FAR MORE SERIOUS THAN REJECTING MOSES

- The author reminds his readers about the rebellious ways of the tribes of Israel after the Exodus from Egypt. In consequence, they were condemned to wander with Moses in the Sinai Desert for 40 years, and that generation never entered the "worldly rest" of Canaan - the promised land of "milk and honey":

Hebrews 3:7-19 - We ought to take note of these words in which the Holy Spirit says:

'Today, if you will hear his voice, do not harden your hearts in the rebellion, in the day of trial in the wilderness, where your fathers tested me (the Lord God), proved me, and saw my works for forty years. Therefore I was angry with that generation, and said they always go astray in their heart, and they have not known my ways. So I swore in my wrath, they shall not enter my rest' (Psalm 95:7-11).

You should therefore be most careful, my brothers, that there should not be in any of you that wickedness of heart which refuses to trust, and deserts the cause of the living God (... the Gospel of Jesus). Help each other to stand firm in the faith every day, while it is still called "today", and beware that none of you becomes deaf and blind to God through the delusive glamour of sin. For we continue to share in all that Christ has for us so long as we steadily maintain until the end the trust with which we began. These words are still being said for our ears to hear:

'Today, if you will hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion' (Psalm 95:7-8).

For who was it who heard the Word of God and yet provoked his indignation? Was is not all who were rescued from slavery in Egypt under the leadership of Moses? And who was it with whom God was displeased for forty long years? Was it not those who, after all their hearing of God's Word, fell into sin, and left their bones in the desert? And to whom did God swear that they should never enter his rest? Was it not these very men who refused to trust him?

Yes, it is all too plain that it was refusal to trust God that prevented these men from entering his rest.

THE ETERNAL REST OF HEAVEN IS PROMISED TO THOSE WHO REMAIN FAITHFUL TO CHRIST

Hebrews 4:1-10 - Now since the same promise of rest is offered to us today, let us be continually on our guard that none of us even looks like failing to attain it. For we too have had a Gospel preached to us, as those men (the Israelites of the Exodus) had. Yet the message proclaimed to them did them no good, because they only heard and did not believe as well. It is only as a result of our faith and trust that we experience that rest. For he (God) said:

'So I swore in my wrath, they shall not enter my rest' (Psalm 95:11);

not because the (heavenly) rest was not prepared - it had been ready since the work of creation was completed, as he says elsewhere in the scriptures, speaking of the seventh day of creation,

'And God rested on the seventh day from all his works' (Genesis 2:2).

And in the passage above he refers to "my rest" as something already in existence. No, it is clear that some were intended to experience this rest and, since the previous hearers of the message (the Israelites) failed to attain to it because they would not believe God, he proclaims a further opportunity (... a second chance for mankind) when he says through David, many years later, "today", just as he had said "today" before.

'Today, if you will hear his voice, do not harden your hearts' (Psalm 95:7,8).

For if Joshua (Moses' successor who led the new generation of Israelites into Canaan) had given them the rest, we should not find God saying, at a much later date, "today". There still exists, therefore, a full and complete rest for the people of God. And he who experiences his real rest is resting from his own work as fully as God from his.

THIRD WARNING - ACCEPT GOD'S SECOND CHANCE, AND KNOW THAT NOTHING IS HIDDEN FROM HIM

Hebrews 4:11-13 - Let us then be eager to know this (full and complete) rest for ourselves, and let us beware that no one misses it through falling into the same kind of unbelief as those we have mentioned. For the Word that God speaks is alive and active; it cuts more keenly than any two-edged sword: it strikes through to the place where soul and spirit meet, to the innermost intimacies of a man's being: it exposes the very thoughts and motives of a man's heart. No creature has any cover from the sight of God; everything lies naked and exposed before the eyes of him with whom we have to do.

JESUS IS GREATER THAN EVERY HIGH PRIEST

JESUS CHRIST THE GREAT HIGH PRIEST CONTRASTED WITH AARON, THE HIGH PRIEST OF MOSES

Hebrews 4:14-5:10 - Seeing that we have a great High Priest who has entered the inmost Heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to our faith. For we have no superhuman High Priest to whom our weaknesses are unintelligible - he himself (Jesus as man) has shared fully in all our experience of temptation, except that he never sinned.

Let us therefore approach the throne of grace (of God, freely and ...) with fullest confidence, that we may receive mercy for our failures and grace to help in the hour of need.

A High Priest must be duly qualified and divinely appointed

(Chapter 5 .....) Note that when a man is chosen as High Priest (in the Jerusalem Temple) he is appointed on men's behalf as their representative in the things of God - he offers gifts to God and makes the necessary sacrifices for sins on behalf of his fellow-men. He must be able to deal sympathetically with the ignorant and foolish because he realises that he is himself prone to human weakness. This naturally means that the offering which he makes for sin is made on his own personal behalf as well as on behalf of those whom he represents.

Note also that nobody chooses for himself the honour of being a High Priest, but he is called by God to the work, as was Aaron, the first High Priest in ancient times (appointed by Moses at God's command).

Thus we see that the Christ did not choose for himself the glory of being High Priest, but he was honoured by the one who said:

'You are my Son, today I have begotten you' (Psalm 2:7).

And he says in another passage:

'You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek' (Psalm 110:4).

Christ, the perfect High Priest, was the perfect Son

Christ, in the days when he was a man on earth, appealed to the one (God) who could save him from death in desperate prayer and the agony of tears (in the Garden of Gethsemane). His prayers were heard; he was freed from his shrinking from death but, Son though he was, he had to prove the meaning of obedience through all that he suffered. Then, when he had been proved the perfect Son, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who should obey him, being now recognised by God himself as High Priest "after the order of Melchizedek.

Melchizedek - The mysterious priest-king of Salem (Jerusalem), and priest of God Most High. In Genesis 14, after Abraham had rescued his kidnapped nephew Lot, Melchizedek brought out bread and wine, and blessed Abraham. In return, Abraham gave him a tenth, or tithe, of all he had.

FOURTH WARNING - MOVE ON TOWARDS CHRISTIAN MATURITY; DON'T TURN BACK; PERSEVERE

Hebrews 5:11-6:20 - There is a great deal that we should like to say about this high priesthood (of Christ of the order of Melchizedek, introduced in Genesis 14:18-20), but it is not easy to explain to you since you seem so slow to grasp spiritual truth. At a time when you should be teaching others, you need teachers yourselves to repeat to you the ABC of God's Revelation to men. You have become people who need a milk diet and cannot face solid food! For anyone who continues to live on "milk" is obviously immature - he simply has not grown up. "Solid food" is only for the adult, that is, for the man who has developed by experience his power to discriminate between what is good and bad for him.

Can we not leave spiritual babyhood behind - and go on to maturity?

(Chapter 6 ....) Let us leave behind the elementary teaching about Christ and go forward to adult understanding. Let us not lay over and over again the foundation truths (and keep going over the basic principles of Christian life, such as ....) - repentance from the deeds which led to death, believing in God, baptism and laying-on of hands, belief in the life to come and the final judgment. No, if God allows, let us go on (towards Christian maturity).

Going back to the foundations will not help those who have deliberately turned away from God

When you find men who have been enlightened, who have experienced salvation and received the Holy Spirit, who have known the wholesome nourishment of the Word of God and touched the spiritual resources of the eternal world and who then fall away, it proves impossible to make them repent as they did at first. For they are re-crucifying the Son of God in their own souls, and by their conduct exposing him to shame and contempt. Ground which absorbs the rain that is constantly falling upon it and produces plants which are useful to those who cultivate it, is ("faithful") ground which has the blessing of God. But ground which produces nothing but thorns and thistles is of no value and is bound sooner or later to be condemned - the only thing to do is to burn it clean (as in Jesus' parables about sowing the seed, and the wheat and the weeds).

We want you to make God's promise real through your faith, hope and patience

But although we give these words of warning we feel sure that you, whom we love, are capable of better things and will enjoy the full experience of salvation. God is not unfair: he will not lose sight of all that you have done nor of the loving labour which you have shown for his sake in looking after fellow-Christians (as you are still doing). It is our earnest wish that every one of you should show a similar keenness in fully grasping the hope that is within you. We do not want any of you to grow slack, but to follow the example of those who through sheer patient faith came to possess the promises.

When God made his promise to Abraham he swore by himself, for there was no one greater by whom he (God) could swear, and he said:

'Surely blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply you' (Genesis 22:17).

And then Abraham, after patient endurance, found the promise true.

Among men it is customary to swear by something greater than themselves. And if a statement is confirmed by an oath, that is the end of all quibbling. So in this matter, God, wishing to show beyond doubt that his plan was unchangeable, confirmed it with an oath. So that by two utterly immutable things, the word of God and the oath of God, who cannot lie, we who are refugees from this dying world might have a source of strength, and might grasp the hope that he holds out to us. This hope we hold as the utterly reliable anchor for our souls, fixed in the very certainty of God himself in Heaven, where Jesus has already entered on our behalf, having become, as we have seen, "High Priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek".

JESUS CHRIST, THE GREAT HIGH PRIEST COMPARED WITH MELCHIZEDEK

Hebrews 7:1-28 - Now this Melchizedek was, we know, king of Salem and priest of God most high. He met Abraham when the latter was returning from the defeat of the kings, and blessed him. Abraham gave him a tribute of a tenth part (a tithe) of all the spoils of battle.

(Melchizedek means "king of righteousness," and his other title is "king of peace", for Salem means peace. He had no father or mother and no family tree. He was not born nor did he die, but, being like the Son of God, is a perpetual priest.)

Now notice the greatness of this (mysterious) man. Even Abraham the patriarch pays him a tribute of a tenth part of the spoils. Further, we know that, according to the Law, the descendants of Levi (one of the sons of Jacob, otherwise known as "Israel") who accept the office of priest have the right to demand a "tenth" from the people, that is from their brothers, despite the fact that the latter are (also)descendants of Abraham. But here we have one (Melchizedek) who is quite independent of Levitic ancestry taking a "tenth" from Abraham, and giving a blessing to Abraham, the holder of God's promises! And no one can deny that the receiver of a blessing (in this case Abraham) is inferior to the one who gives it (Melchizedek). Again, in the one case it is mortal men who receive the "tenths", and in the other is one who, we are assured, is alive. One might say that even Levi, the proper receiver of "tenths", has paid his tenth to this man, for in a sense he already existed in the body of his father Abraham when Melchizedek met him.

The revival of the Melchizedek priesthood means that the Levitical priesthood is superseded

We may go further. If it be possible to bring men to spiritual maturity through the Levitical priestly system (for that is the system under which the people were given the Law), why does the necessity arise for another priest to make his appearance after the order of Melchizedek, instead of following the normal priestly calling of Aaron? For if there is a transference of priestly powers, there will necessarily follow an alteration of the Law regarding priesthood. He (Jesus) who is described as our High Priest belongs to another tribe, no member of which had ever attended the altar! For it is a matter of history that our Lord was a descendant of Judah (also according to the genealogies of Matthew and Luke), and Moses made no mention of priesthood in connection with that tribe.

How fundamental is this change becomes all the more apparent when we see this other priest appearing according to the Melchizedek pattern, and deriving his priesthood not by virtue of a command imposed from outside, but from the power of indestructible life within. For the witness to him, as we have seen, is:

'You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.' (Psalm 110:4)

Quite plainly, then, there is a definite cancellation of the previous commandment (of the Law) because of its ineffectiveness and uselessness - the Law was incapable of bringing anyone to real maturity - followed by the introduction of a better hope (in Jesus), through which we approach our God.

The high Priesthood of Christ rests upon the oath of God

This means a "better" hope for us because Jesus has become our priest by the oath of God. Other men have been priests without any sworn guarantee, but Jesus has the oath of him that said of him:

'The Lord has sworn and will not relent, You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek' (Psalm 110:4).

And he is, by virtue of this fact, himself the living guarantee of a "better" agreement. Human High Priests have always been changing, for death made a permanent appointment impossible. But Christ, because he lives for ever, possesses a priesthood that needs no successor. This means that he can save fully and completely those who approach God through him, for he is always living to intercede on their behalf.

Christ the perfect High Priest, who meets our need

Here is the High Priest we need. A man who is holy, faultless, unstained, beyond the very reach of sin and lifted to the very Heavens. There is no need for him, like the High Priest we know, to offer up sacrifice, first for our own sins and then for the people's. He made one sacrifice, once for all, when he offered up himself (on the cross).

The Law makes for its High Priests men of human weakness. But the word of the oath, which came after the Law, makes for High Priest the Son (Jesus Christ), who is perfect for ever!

THE SUPERIORITY OF CHRIST IN HEAVEN OVER THE HIGH PRIEST IN HIS EARTHLY TEMPLE

Hebrews 8:1-5 - Now to sum up - we have an ideal High Priest (in Jesus Christ) such as has been described above. He has taken his seat on the right hand of the heavenly majesty (of God). He is the minister of the sanctuary and of the real tabernacle (of heaven) ....

Tabernacle - The original tabernacle was the place of worship built in the desert to God's detailed instructions (Exodus 25-27) given to Moses on Mount Sinai. Within the tabernacle courtyard was the altar where the Levite priests made the prescribed blood and other sacrifices. Beyond it was the "holy of holies" where God met with his people -

.... - that is the one God has set up and not man. Every High Priest is appointed to offer gifts and make sacrifices. It follows, therefore, that in these holy places this man has something that he is offering.

Now if he were still living on earth he would not be a priest at all, for there are already priests offering the gifts prescribed by the Law. These men are serving what is only a pattern or reproduction of things that exist in Heaven. (Moses, you will remember, when he was going to construct the tabernacle, was cautioned by God in these words:

'See that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain' (Exodus 25:40)).

A NEW AGREEMENT WITH GOD; THE ONE SACRIFICE OF JESUS CHRIST CANCELS ALL SIN

THE NEW AGREEMENT OF JESUS SUPERSEDES THE OLD AGREEMENT OF THE LAW

Hebrews 8:6-13 - But Christ had been given a far higher ministry for he mediates a higher agreement (or covenant), which in turn rests upon higher promises. If the first agreement (made with Moses at Sinai) had proved satisfactory there would have been no need for the second (of Jesus crucified on the cross of Calvary).

Actually, however, God does show himself dissatisfied for he says to those under the first agreement:

'Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant ....

Covenant - A "treaty" between God and his people. In the Old Testament, God's most important covenant was at Sinai, where he gave his chosen people the Law and called on Israel to be a holy nation.

In the New Testament the covenant is God's gift of his son to both Jew and Gentile, and the call is for all people to believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour -

.... with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah (from whom Jesus was descended) - not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they did not continue in my covenant, and I disregarded them, says the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel: After those days, says

the Lord, I will put my laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. None of them shall teach his neighbour, and none his brother, saying, Know the Lord, for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest of them. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more' (Jeremiah 31:31-34).

The mere fact that God speaks of a new covenant or agreement makes the old one out of date. And when a thing grows weak and out of date it is obviously soon going to be dispensed with altogether (.... thus the author of Hebrews declares the Jewish Law obsolete).

THE HIGH PRIEST'S EARTHLY MINISTRY IN THE TEMPLE UNDER THE OLD AGREEMENT, COMPARED WITH .....

Hebrews 9:1-10 - Now the first agreement (or covenant) had certain rules for the service of God, and it had a sanctuary (the tabernacle), a holy place in this world for the eternal God. A tent was erected: in the outer compartment were placed the lamp-standard, the table and the sacred loaves. Inside, beyond the curtain, was the inner tent called the holy of holies ....

Holy of holies - The Jerusalem Temple also had a curtain in front of the holy of holies through which the High Priest passed once a year. When Jesus died on the cross, the Temple curtain was torn in two (Matthew 27:51), symbolising that everyone can now approach God directly through Jesus Christ at any time, and not just through the High Priest once a year -

.... in which were the golden censer and the gold inlaid ark of the agreement, containing the golden jar of manna, Aaron's budding staff and the stone tablets inscribed with the words of the actual agreement. Above these things were fixed representations of the cherubim of glory, casting their shadow over the ark's covering, known as the mercy seat. (All this is full of meaning but we cannot enter now into a detailed explanation - which can be found in Exodus 25-27.)

Under this arrangement the outer tent was habitually used by the priests in the regular discharge of their religious duties. But the inner tent (with the "holy of holies") was entered once a year only, by the High Priest, alone, bearing a sacrifice of shed blood to be offered for his own sins and those of the people.

The old arrangements stood as symbols until Christ, the truth, came

By these things the Holy Spirit means us to understand that the way to the holy of holies was not yet open (except to the High Priest), that is, so long as the first tent and all that it stands for still exist. For in this outer tent we see a picture of the present time, in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered and yet are incapable of cleansing the soul of the worshipper. The ceremonies are concerned with food and drink, various washings and rules for bodily conduct, and were only intended to be valid until the time when Christ should establish the truth.

.... THE HEAVENLY MINISTRY OF JESUS CHRIST UNDER THE NEW AGREEMENT

Hebrews 9:11-28 - For now Christ has come among us, the High Priest of the good things which were to come, and has passed through a greater and more perfect tent (of God's heaven) which no human hand has made (for it was no part of this world of ours). It was not with goats' or calves' blood but with his own blood (on the cross of Calvary) that he entered once and for all into the holy of holies, having won for us men eternal reconciliation with God. And if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a burnt heifer were, when sprinkled on the unholy, sufficient to make the body pure, then how much more will the blood of Christ himself, who in his eternal spirit offered himself to God as the perfect sacrifice, purify your souls from the deeds of death, that you may serve the living God!

The death of Christ gives him power to administer the new agreement

Christ is consequently the administrator of an entirely new agreement, having the power, by virtue of his death, to redeem transgressions (... to pay the price for men and women's sins) committed under the first agreement: to enable those who obey God's call to enjoy the promises of the eternal inheritance. For, as in the case of a will, the agreement is only valid after death. While the testator lives, a will has no legal power. And indeed we find that even the first agreement of God's will was not put into force without the shedding of blood. For when Moses had told the people every command of the Law he took calves' and goats' blood with water and scarlet wool, and sprinkled both the book and all the people with a sprig of hyssop, saying:

'This is the blood of the covenant which God has commanded you' (Exodus 24:8).

Moses also sprinkled with blood the tent itself and all the sacred vessels. And you will find that in the Law almost all cleansing is made by means of blood - as the common saying has it: "No shedding of blood, no remission of sin."

Christ has achieved the real appearance before God for us

- The importance of blood sacrifice under both the old and new covenants is now emphasised:

It was necessary for the earthly reproductions of heavenly realities to be purified by such methods, but the actual heavenly things could only be made pure in God's sight by higher sacrifices than these. Christ did not therefore enter into any holy places made by human hands (however truly these may represent heavenly realities), but he entered Heaven itself to make his appearance before God as High Priest on our behalf. There is no intention that he should offer himself regularly, like the High Priest entering the holy of holies every year with the blood of another creature. For that would mean that he would have to suffer death every time he entered Heaven from the beginning of the world! No, the fact is that now, at this point in time, the end of the present age, he has appeared once and for all to abolish sin by the sacrifice of himself (as the crucified Christ). And just as surely as it is appointed for all men to die and after that pass to their judgment, so it is certain that Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many and after that, to those who look for him, he will appear a second time, not this time to deal with sin, but to bring them to full salvation (when he returns).

SACRIFICES UNDER THE LAW CANNOT CANCEL SIN; CHRIST'S ONE SACRIFICE IN OBEDIENCE TO GOD, DOES

Hebrews 10:1-18 - The Law possessed only a dim outline of the benefits Christ would bring and did not actually reproduce them. Consequently it was incapable of perfecting the souls of those who offered their regular annual sacrifices. For if it had, surely the sacrifices would have been discontinued - on the grounds that the worshippers, having been really cleansed, would have had no further consciousness of sin. In practice, however, the sacrifices amounted to an annual reminder of sins; for the blood of bulls and goats cannot really remove the guilt of sin.

Christ, however, makes the old order obsolete and makes the perfect sacrifice

Therefore, when Christ enters the world, he says:

'Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you have prepared for me. In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin you had no pleasure. Then I said, Behold, I have come - in the volume of books it is written of me - to do your will, O God' (Psalm 40:6-8).

After saying, "Sacrifice and offering, burnt offerings, and offerings for sin you did not desire, nor had pleasure in them" (which are made according to the Law), Christ then says, "Behold, I have come to do your will, O God."

That means he is dispensing with the old order of sacrifices, and establishing a new order of obedience to the will of God, and in that will we have been made holy by the single unique offering of the body of Christ.

Every human priest stands day by day performing his religious duties and offering time after time the same sacrifices - which can never actually remove sins. But this man (Jesus), after offering one sacrifice for sins for ever, took his seat at God's right hand (in heaven), from that time offering no more sacrifice, but waiting until "his enemies be made his footstool". For by virtue of that one offering he has perfected for all time every one (of those Christians) whom he makes holy. The Holy Spirit himself endorses this truth for us, when he says, first:

'This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them' (Jeremiah 31:33).

And then, he adds,

'Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more' (Jeremiah 31:34).

Where God grants remission of sin there can be no question of making further atonement.

KEEP GOING AS CHRISTIANS IN FAITH

IN FAITH, APPROACH GOD THROUGH CHRIST; AND DO SO IN FELLOWSHIP WITH OTHER BELIEVERS

Hebrews 10:19-25 - So by virtue of the blood of Jesus, you and I, my brothers, may now have courage to enter the holy of holies by way of the one (Jesus) who died and is yet alive (in heaven), who has made for us a holy means of entry by himself passing through the curtain, that is, his own human nature. Further, since we have a great High Priest set over the household of God, let us draw near with true hearts and fullest confidence, knowing that our inmost souls have been purified by the sprinkling of his blood just as our bodies are cleansed by the washing of clean water. In this confidence (that Jesus is the new high priest of the Jews) let us hold on to the hope that we profess without the slightest hesitation - for he is utterly dependable - and let us think of one another and how we can encourage each other to love and do good deeds. And let us not hold aloof from our church meetings, as some do. Let us do all we can to help one another's faith, and this the more earnestly as we see the final day drawing ever nearer.

FIFTH WARNING - WHAT HOPE DO WE HAVE IF WE REJECT CHRIST'S SACRIFICE

Hebrews 10:26-31 - Now if we sin deliberately after we have known and accepted the truth (of Christ's sacrifice), there can be no further sacrifice for sin for us but only a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fire of God's indignation, which will one day consume all that sets itself against him. The man who showed contempt for Moses' Law died without hope of appeal on the evidence of two or three of his fellows. How much more dreadful a punishment will he be thought to deserve who has poured scorn on the (crucified) Son of God, treated like dirt the blood of the agreement which had once made him holy, and insulted the very Spirit of grace? For we know the one who said:

'Vengeance is mine: I will repay' (Deuteronomy 32:35),

And again:

'The Lord will judge his people' (Deuteronomy 32:36; Psalm 135:14).

Truly it is a terrible thing for a man who has done this to fall into the hands of the living God!

HAVING COME SO FAR IN FAITH, DON'T TURN BACK, ENDURE

Hebrews 10:32-39 - You must never forget those past days when you had received the light and went through such a great and painful struggle (after conversion). It was partly because everyone's eye was on you as you endured harsh words and hard experiences, partly because you threw in your lot with those who suffered much the same. You sympathised with those who were put in prison and you were cheerful when your own goods (which moth and rust destroy) were confiscated, for you knew that you had a much more solid and lasting treasure in Heaven. Don't throw away your trust now - it carries with it a rich reward in the world to come. Patient endurance is what you need if, after doing God's will, you are to receive what he has promised.

'For yet a little while, and he who is coming will come and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith; but if anyone draws back, my soul has no pleasure in him' (Habakkuk 2:3,4).

Surely we are not going to be men who cower back and are lost, but men who maintain their faith until the salvation of their souls is complete!

EXAMPLES OF FAITH FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT

Hebrews 11:1-40 - Now faith means putting our full confidence in the things we hope for, it means being certain of things we cannot see. It was this kind of faith that won their reputation for the saints of old. And it is after all only by faith that our minds accept as fact that the whole scheme of time and space was created by God's command - that the world which we can see has come into being through principles which are invisible.

Faith is the distinctive mark of the saints of the old agreement

ABEL

It was because of his faith that Abel (a son of Adam and Eve) made a better sacrifice to God than Cain (his brother), and he had evidence that God looked upon him as a righteous man, whose gifts he could accept. And though Cain killed him (over the gifts), yet by his faith he still speaks to us today.

ENOCH

It was because of his faith that Enoch (a descendant of Adam who did not die, but was "taken away" by God) was promoted to the eternal world without experiencing death. He disappeared from this world because God promoted him, and before that happened his reputation was that "he pleased God". And without faith it is impossible to please him. The man who approaches God must have faith in two things, first that God exists and secondly that it is worth a man's while to try to find God.

NOAH

It was through faith that Noah, on receiving God's warning of impending disaster, reverently constructed an ark to save his household. This action of faith condemned the unbelief of the rest of the world, and won for Noah the righteousness before God which follows such a faith.

ABRAHAM

It was by faith that Abraham obeyed the summons to go out to a place (Canaan) which he would eventually possess, and he set out (from Ur of the Chaldees via Haran) in complete ignorance of his destination. It was faith that kept him journeying like a foreigner through the land of promise, with no more home than the tents which he shared with Isaac and Jacob (his son and grandson), co-heirs with him of the promise. For Abraham's eyes were looking forward to that city (of heaven) with solid foundations of which God himself is both architect and builder.

SARAH

It was by faith that even Sarah (wife of Abraham) gained the physical vitality to become a mother despite her great age, and she gave birth to a child (Isaac) when far beyond the normal years of child-bearing. She could do this because she believed that the one (God) who had given the promise was utterly trustworthy. So it happened that from one man (Abraham), who as a potential father was already considered dead, there arose a race "as numerous as the stars", as "countless as the sands of the sea-shore".

All the heroes of faith looked forward to their true country

All these whom we have mentioned maintained their faith but died without actually receiving God's promises, though they had seen them in the distance, had hailed them as true and were quite convinced of their reality. They freely admitted that they lived on this earth as exiles and foreigners. Men who say that mean, of course, that their eyes are fixed upon their true home-land (not on earth, but in heaven). If they had meant the particular (earthly) country they had left behind, they had ample opportunity to return. No, the fact is that they longed for a better country altogether, nothing less than a heavenly one. And because of this faith of theirs, God is not ashamed to be called their God for in sober truth he has prepared for them a city in Heaven.

Abraham's faith once more

It was by faith that Abraham, when put to the test (by God), made (or prepared to make) a sacrifice of Isaac (his son). Yes, the man who had heard God's promises was prepared to offer up his only son of whom it had been said

'In Isaac your seed shall be called' (Genesis 21:12).

He believed that God could raise his son up, even if he were dead. And he did, in a manner of speaking, receive him back from death (when a ram was sacrificed in his place).

The faith of Isaac, Jacob and Joseph

It was by faith that Isaac gave Jacob and Esau (his own sons) his blessing, for his words dealt with what should happen in the future. It was by faith that the dying Jacob (in Egypt to escape the famine) blessed each of Joseph's sons (Ephraim and Manasseh) as he bowed in prayer over his staff. It was by faith that

Joseph on his death-bed spoke of the exodus of the Israelites, and gave confident orders about the disposal of his own mortal remains (in the promised land of Canaan).

Moses

It was by faith that Moses was hidden (among the reeds of the river Nile) by his parents for three months after his birth, for they saw that he was an exceptional child and refused to be daunted by the king's decree that all male children should be drowned. It was also by faith that Moses himself when grown up refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He preferred sharing the burden of God's people (the Hebrew slaves - the Israelites) to enjoying the temporary advantages of alliance with a sinful nation. He considered the "reproach of Christ" more precious than all the wealth of Egypt, for he looked steadily at the ultimate, not the immediate, reward.

By faith he led the exodus from Egypt; he defied the king's (the pharaoh's) anger with the strength that came from obedience to the invisible king.

By faith Moses kept the first Passover and made the blood-sprinkling, so that the angel of death which killed the first-born should not touch his people.

By faith the people walked through the Red Sea as though it were dry land, and the Egyptians who tried to do the same thing were drowned.

Rahab

It was by faith that the walls of Jericho collapsed (under threat from Joshua's army), for the people had obeyed God's command to encircle them for seven days. It was because of her faith that Rahab the prostitute (of Jericho who helped Joshua's spies escape) did not share the fate of the disobedient, for she showed her faith in the true God when she welcomed the Israelites sent out to reconnoitre.

The Old Testament is full of examples of faith

And what other examples shall I give? There is simply not time to continue by telling the stories of

Gideon, Barak, Samson and Jeptha (Judges who ruled Israel, and defeated the armies respectively of Midian, Canaan, Philistia, and Amon);

.... of David, Samuel (judge and prophet who anointed Israel's first two kings, Saul and David) and the prophets. Through their faith these men conquered kingdoms, ruled in justice and proved the truth of God's promises.

....They shut the mouths of lions (... Daniel in the lion's den), they quenched the furious blaze of fire (... the three Hebrew young men in the fiery furnace), they escaped from death itself. From being weaklings they became strong men and mighty warriors; they routed whole armies of foreigners. Some returned to their womenfolk from certain death, while others were tortured and refused to be ransomed, because they wanted to deserve a more honourable resurrection in the world to come.

.... Others were exposed to the test of public mockery and flogging, and to the torture of being left bound in prison. They were killed by stoning, by being sawn in two (... possibly the fate of Isaiah the great prophet); they were tempted by specious promises of release and then were killed with the sword. Many became refugees with nothing but sheepskins or goatskins to cover them. They lost everything and yet were spurned and ill-treated by a world that was too evil to see their worth. They lived as vagrants in the desert, on the mountains, or in caves or holes in the ground.

All these won a glowing testimony to their faith, but they did not then and there receive the fulfilment of the promise. God had something better planned for our day, and it was not his plan that they should reach perfection without us.

KEEP GOING IN FAITH, ACCEPT GOD'S DISCIPLINE

Hebrews 12:1-24 - Surrounded then as we are by these serried ranks of (Old Testament) witnesses, let us strip off everything that hinders us, as well as the sin which dogs our feet, and let us run the race that we have to run with patience, our eyes fixed on Jesus the source and the goal of our faith. For he himself endured a cross and thought nothing of its shame because of the joy he knew would follow his

suffering; and he is now seated at the right hand of God's throne. Think constantly of him enduring all that sinful men could say against him and you will not lose your purpose or your courage.

Look upon suffering as heavenly discipline

After all, your fight against sin has not yet meant the shedding of blood (... persecution of the Christians to whom the Letter was addressed probably had not yet reached the stage of torture and martyrdom), and you have perhaps lost sight of that piece of advice which reminds you of our sonship in God:

'My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by him; for whom the Lord loves he chastens, and scourges every son whom he receives' (Proverbs 3:11-12).

Bear what you have to bear as "chastening" - as God's dealing with you as sons. No true son ever grows up uncorrected by his father. For if you had no experience of the correction which all sons have to bear you might well doubt the legitimacy of your sonship. After all, when we were children we had fathers who corrected us, and we respected them for it. Can we not much more readily submit to a heavenly Father's discipline, and learn how to live?

For our fathers used to correct us according to their own (imperfect) ideas during the brief days of childhood. But God corrects us all our days for our own benefit, to teach us his holiness. Now obviously no "chastening" seems pleasant at the time: it is in fact most unpleasant. Yet when it is all over we can see that is has quietly produced the fruit of real goodness in the characters of those who have accepted it in the right spirit. So take a fresh grip on life and brace your trembling limbs. Don't wander away from the path but forge steadily onward. On the right path the limping foot recovers strength and does not collapse.

In times of testing be especially on your guard against certain sins

Let it be your ambition to live at peace with all men and to achieve holiness "without which no man shall see the Lord". Be careful that none of you fails to respond to the grace which God gives, for if he does there can very easily spring up in him a bitter spirit which is not only bad in itself but can also poison the lives of many others. Be careful too, that none of you falls into impurity or loses his reverence for the things of God and then, like Esau (brother of Jacob), is ready to sell his birthright (for a plate of stew, a "mess of pottage") to satisfy the momentary hunger of his body. Remember how afterwards, when he wanted to have the blessing which was his birthright, he was refused. He never afterwards found the way of repentance though he sought it desperately and with tears.

Your experience is not that of the old agreement but of the new

You have not had to approach things which your senses could experience as they did in the old days (... the Israelites at Mount Sinai under the old covenant) - flaming fire, black darkness, rushing wind and out of it a trumpet-blast, a voice speaking human words. So terrible was that voice that those who heard it begged and prayed that it might stop speaking, for what it had already commanded was more than they could bear -

'And if so much as a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned or thrust through with an arrow' (Exodus 19:12-13).

So fearful was the spectacle that Moses cried out,

'I am exceedingly afraid and trembling' (Deuteronomy 9:19).

No, you have been allowed to approach the true Mount Zion (of the new covenant), the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. You have drawn near to the countless angelic army, the great assembly of Heaven and the Church of the first-born whose names are written above. You have drawn near to God, the judge of all, to the souls of good men made perfect, and to Jesus, mediator of a new agreement, to the cleansing of blood which tells a better story than the age-old sacrifice of Abel (son of Adam, killed by his brother Cain because of his sacrifice to the Lord).

Hebrews 12:25-29 - So be sure you do not refuse to hear the voice of God! For if they (the Israelites) who refused to hear those who spoke to them on earth did not escape, how little chance of escape is there for us if we refuse to hear the one (God) who speaks from Heaven. Then his voice shook the earth, but now he promises:

'Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven' (Haggai 2:6).

This means that in this final "shaking" all that is impermanent will be removed, that is, everything that is merely "made", and only the unshakeable things will remain. Since then we have been given a kingdom that is "unshakeable", let us serve God with thankfulness in the ways which please him, but always with reverence and holy fear. For it is perfectly true that our

'God is a burning fire' (Deuteronomy 4:24).

CALL TO LIVE AS CHRISTIANS

CHRISTIAN LIVING; WARNINGS AGAINST STRANGE TEACHINGS; SHARING CHRIST'S DISGRACE

Hebrews 13:1-17 - Never let your brotherly love fail, nor refuse to extend your hospitality to strangers - sometimes men have entertained angels unawares. Think constantly of those in prison as if you were prisoners at their side. Think too of all who suffer as if you shared their pain.

Both honourable marriage and chastity should be respected by all of you. God himself will judge those who traffic in the bodies of others or defile the relationship of marriage. Keep your lives free from the lust for money: be content with what you have.

God has said:

'I will never leave you nor forsake you' (Deuteronomy 31:6; Joshua 1:5).

We, therefore, can confidently say:

'The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?' (Psalm 118:6)

Be loyal to your leaders and, above all, to Christ

Never forget your leaders, who first spoke to you the Word of God. Remember how they lived, and imitate their faith.

Jesus Christ is always the same, yesterday, today and for ever. Do not be swept off your feet by various peculiar teachings. Spiritual stability depends on the grace of God, and not on rules of diet - which after all have not spiritually benefited those who have made a speciality of that kind of thing. We have an altar from which those who still serve the tabernacle have no right to eat.

When the blood of animals was presented as a sin-offering by the High Priest in the sanctuary (of the tabernacle), their bodies were burned outside the precincts of the camp. That is why Jesus, when he sanctified men by the shedding of his own blood, suffered and died outside the city gates (at Golgotha, or Calvary). Let us go out to him, then, beyond the boundaries of the camp, proudly bearing his "disgrace". For we have no permanent city here on earth, we are looking for one in the (heavenly) world to come. Our constant sacrifice to God should be the praise of lips that give thanks to his name. Yet we should not forget to do good and to share our good things with others, for these too are the sort of sacrifices God will accept.

Obey your rulers and recognise their authority. They are like men standing guard over your spiritual good, and they have great responsibility. Try to make their work a pleasure and not a burden - by so doing you will help not only them but yourselves.

PERSONAL MESSAGES

PERSONAL MESSAGES AND BLESSINGS

Hebrews 13:18-25 - Pray for us. Our conscience is clear before God, and our great desire is to lead a life that is completely honest. Please pray earnestly that I may be restored to you the sooner.

Now the God of peace, who brought back from the dead that great shepherd of the sheep, our Lord Jesus, by the blood of the everlasting agreement, equip you thoroughly for the doing of his will! May he effect in you everything that pleases him through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever.

All I have said, my brothers, I ask you to accept as though it were an appeal in person, although I have compressed it into a short letter.

You will be glad to know that brother Timothy (also Paul's travelling companion, friend, and recipient of the two Letters) is now at liberty (after an unknown imprisonment). If he comes here soon, he and I will perhaps visit you together.

Greetings to all your leaders and all your church members. The Christians of Italy send their greetings.

Grace be with you all.

JAMES LETTER TO JEWISH CHRISTIANS

With people, places, definitions, map .....

Writer: James, brother of Jesus, and a leader of the church in Jerusalem

Date: c AD45-50, before the Council at Jerusalem of c AD49. The Letter includes no hint of the important decisions made at that time

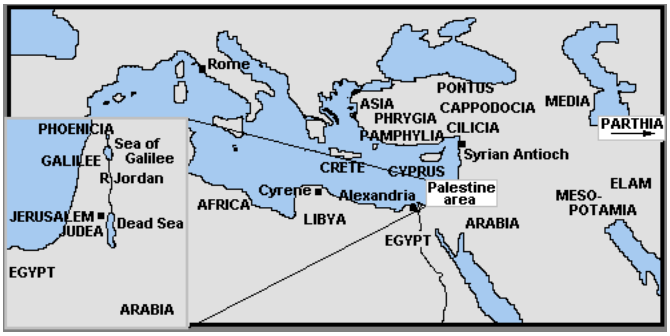
Where written: Possibly Jerusalem

Readers: Jewish Christians living outside Palestine as Jews of the "Dispersion"

Why: An early letter to Jewish Christians, encouraging them in times of trial, and teaching them how to respond in Godly ways. In language similar to the Sermon on the Mount, James instructs his readers on many aspects of practical Christian living. In doing so, he shows that the Christian life reveals itself through faith leading to good works, not by merely claiming to have faith and holiness.

According to Some Modern Scholarship: Most of the material was written by James in Judea before the Council at Jerusalem, and edited into its final form following his death in c AD62; OR written by an unknown Christian Jew around the end of the 1st century, using James' name to give the letter authority.

Map - Some of the Many Centres of Jewish Population Outside Israel: the 'Dispersion' or 'Diaspora'



THE CHARACTERISTICS OF REAL RELIGION

GREETING; THE TRIALS FACED BY JEWISH CHRISTIANS AND HOW THEY SHOULD RESPOND

James 1:1-8 - James, servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, sends greetings to the twelve dispersed tribes (the Jews living outside Palestine, and throughout the Roman and Parthian Empires and beyond. Some of the areas are shown in map above).

The Christian can even welcome trouble

When all kinds of trials and temptations crowd into your lives my brothers, don't resent them as intruders, but welcome them as friends! Realise that they come to test your faith and to produce in you the quality of endurance. But let the process go on until that endurance is fully developed, and you will find you have become men of mature character with the right sort of independence. And if, in the process, any of you does not know how to meet any particular problem he has only to ask God - who gives generously to all men without making them feel foolish or guilty - and he may be quite sure that the necessary wisdom will be given him. But he must ask in sincere faith without secret doubts as to whether he really wants God's help or not. The man who trusts God, but with inward reservations, is like a wave of the sea, carried forward by the wind one moment and driven back the next. That sort of man cannot hope to receive anything from God, and the life of a man of divided loyalty will reveal instability at every turn.

POVERTY

James 1:9 - The brother who is poor may be glad because God has called him to the true riches.

WEALTH

James 1:10-11 - The rich may be glad that God has shown him his spiritual poverty. For the rich man, as such, will wither away as surely as summer flowers. One day the sunrise brings a scorching wind; the grass withers at once and so do all the flowers - all that lovely sight is destroyed. Just as surely will the rich man and all his extravagant ways fall into the blight of decay.

TRIALS OF LIFE

James 1:12 - The man who patiently endures the temptations and trials that come to him is the truly happy man. For once his testing is complete he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to all who love him.

TEMPTATION

James 1:13-16 - A man must not say when he is tempted, "God is tempting me." For God has no dealings with evil, and does not himself tempt anyone. No, a man's temptation is due to the pull of his own inward desires, which can be enormously attractive. His own desire takes hold of him, and that produces sin. And sin in the long run means death - make no mistake about that, brothers of mine!

GOD PROVIDES ALL OUR NEEDS

James 1:17-18 - ... every good endowment that we possess and every complete gift that we have received must come from above, from the Father of all lights (God), with whom there is never the slightest variation or shadow of inconsistency. By his own wish he made us his own sons through the Word of truth that we might be, so to speak, the first specimens of his new creation.

ANGER

James 1:19-20 - In view of what he (God) has made us then, dear brothers, let every man be quick to listen but slow to use his tongue, and slow to lose his temper. For man's temper is never the means of achieving God's true goodness.

FREEDOM AS CHRISTIANS

James 1:21-25 - Have done .... with impurity and every other evil which touches the lives of others, and humbly accept the message that God has sown in your hearts, and which can save your souls. Don't I beg you, only hear the message, but put it into practice; otherwise you are merely deluding yourselves. The man who simply hears and does nothing about it is like a man catching the reflection of his own face in a mirror. He sees himself, it is true, but he goes on with whatever he was doing without the slightest recollection of what sort of person he saw in the mirror. But the man who looks into the perfect mirror of God's law, the law of liberty (or freedom), and makes a habit of so doing, is not the man who sees and forgets. He puts that law into practice and he wins true happiness.

the "TONGUE"

James 1:26 - If anyone appears to be "religious" but cannot control his tongue, he deceives himself and we may be sure that his religion is useless.

REAL RELIGION

James 1:27 - Religion that is pure and genuine in the sight of God the Father will show itself by such things as visiting orphans and widows in their distress and keeping oneself uncontaminated by the world.

SOCIAL DIFFERENCES

SNOBBERY

James 2:1-11 - Don't ever attempt, my brothers, to combine snobbery with faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ! Suppose one man comes into your meeting well-dressed and with a gold ring on his finger, and another man, obviously poor, arrives in shabby clothes. If you pay special attention to the well-

dressed man by saying, "Please sit here - it's an excellent seat", and say to the poor man, "You stand over there, please, or if you must sit, sit on the floor", doesn't that prove that you are making class-distinctions in your mind, and setting yourselves up to assess a man's quality? - a very bad thing. For do notice, my brothers, that God chose poor men, whose only wealth was their faith, and made them heirs to the kingdom promised to those who love him. And if you behave as I have suggested, it is the poor man that you are insulting. Look around you. Isn't it the rich who are always trying to "boss" you, isn't it the rich who drag you into litigation? Isn't it usually the rich who blaspheme the glorious name by which you are known?

If you obey the royal law, expressed by the scripture, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself', all is well. But once you allow any invidious distinctions to creep in, you are sinning, you have broken God's Law. Remember that a man who keeps the whole Law but for a single exception is none the less a law-breaker. The one who said, 'Do not commit adultery', also said, 'Do not murder'. If you were to keep clear of adultery but were to murder a man you would have become a breaker of God's whole Law.

TOLERANCE

James 2:12-13 - ..... you should speak and act as men who will be judged by the law of freedom. The man who makes no allowances for others will find none made for him. It is still true that "mercy smiles in the face of judgment."

FAITH WITHOUT CHRISTIAN ACTION IS USELESS

- Part of the way through this practical letter on such subjects as the Trials of life, Wealth, Temptation, Snobbery, the "Tongue" etc, James teaches the importance of demonstrating the reality of Christian faith by the way Christians live:

James 2:14-26 - ... what use is it, my brothers, for a man to say he "has faith" if his actions do not correspond with it? Could that sort of faith save anyone's soul? If a fellow man or woman has no clothes to wear and nothing to eat, and one of you say, "Good luck to you I hope you'll keep warm and find enough to eat", and yet give them nothing to meet their physical needs, what on earth is the good of that? Yet that is exactly what a bare faith without a corresponding life is like - useless and dead. If we only "have faith" a man could easily challenge us by saying, "you say that you have faith and I have merely good actions. Well, all you can do is to show me a faith without corresponding actions, but I can show you by my actions that I have faith as well."

To the man who thinks that faith by itself is enough I feel inclined to say, "So you believe that there is one God? That's fine. So do all the devils in hell and shudder in terror!" For, my dear short-sighted man, can't you see far enough to realise that faith without the right actions is dead and useless? Think of Abraham, our ancestor. Wasn't it his action which really justified him in God's sight when his faith led him to offer his son Isaac on the altar? (Genesis 22) Can't you see that his faith and his actions were, so to speak, partners - that his faith was implemented by his deed? That is what the scripture means when it says:

'Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness' (Genesis 15:6).

And he was called the friend of God

A man is justified before God by what he does as well as by what he believes. Rahab who was a prostitute and a foreigner ....

Rahab - She has already been listed in Matthew 1 and Luke 3 as one of the four female ancestors of Jesus. She lived in Jericho, and helped Joshua's spies before the attack on the city in c 1,200BC (Joshua 2 and 6) at the start of his campaign to conquer "the promised land" of Canaan -

.... has been quoted as an example of faith, yet surely it was her action that pleased God, when she welcomed Joshua's reconnoitring party and got them safely back by a different route.

Yes, faith without action is as dead as a body without a soul.

CONTROLLING THE TONGUE

TEACHING

James 3:1 - Don't aim at adding to the number of teachers, my brothers, I beg you! Remember that we who are teachers will be judged by a much higher standard.

the "TONGUE"

James 3:2-12 - We all make mistakes in all kinds of ways, but the man who can claim that he never says the wrong thing can consider himself perfect, for if he can control his tongue he can control every other part of his personality! Men control the movements of a large animal like the horse with a tiny bit placed in its mouth. Ships too, for all their size and the momentum they have with a strong wind behind them, are controlled by a very small rudder according to the course chosen by the helmsman. The human tongue is physically small, but what tremendous effects it can boast of! A whole forest can be set ablaze by a tiny spark of fire, and the tongue is as dangerous as any fire, with vast potentialities for evil. It can poison the whole body, it can make the whole of life a blazing hell.

Beasts, birds, reptiles and all kinds of sea-creatures can be, and in fact are, tamed by man, but no one can tame the human tongue. It is an evil always liable to break out, and the poison it spreads is deadly. We use the tongue to bless our Father, God, and we use the same tongue to curse our fellow-men, who are all created in God's likeness. Blessing and curses come out of the same mouth - surely, my brothers, this is the sort of thing that never ought to happen! Have you ever known a spring to give sweet and bitter water simultaneously? Have you ever seen a fig-tree with a crop of olives, or seen figs growing on a vine? It is just as impossible for a spring to give fresh and salt water at the same time.

REAL WISDOM

WORLDLINESS

James 3:13-16 - Are there some wise and understanding men among you? Then your lives will be an example of the humility that is born of true wisdom. But if your heart is full of rivalry and bitter jealousy, then do not boast of your wisdom - don't deny the truth that you must recognise in your inmost heart. You may acquire a certain superficial wisdom, but it does not come from God - it comes from this world, from your own lower nature, even from the devil. For wherever you find jealousy and rivalry you also find disharmony and all other kinds of evil.

WISDOM, also HEAVEN

James 3:17-18 - The wisdom that comes from God (in Heaven) is first utterly pure, then peace-loving, gentle, approachable, full of tolerant thoughts and kindly actions, with no breath of favouritism or hint of hypocrisy. And the wise are peace-makers who go on quietly sowing for a harvest of righteousness - in other people and in themselves.

THE WORLD'S WAYS

GREED

James 4:1-3 - .... about the feuds and struggles that exist among you - where do you suppose they come from? Can't you see that they arise from conflicting passions within yourselves? You crave for something and don't get it, you are jealous and envious of what others have got and you don't possess it yourselves. Consequently in your exasperated frustration you struggle and fight with one another. You don't get what you want because you don't ask God for it. And when you do ask he doesn't give it to you, for you ask in quite the wrong spirit - you only want to satisfy your own desires.

WORLDLINESS

James 4:4-6 - You are like unfaithful wives, flirting with the glamour of this world, and never realising that to be the world's lover means becoming the enemy of God! Anyone who deliberately chooses to love the world is thereby making himself God's enemy. Do you think what the scriptures have to say about this is a mere formality? Or do you imagine that this spirit of passionate jealousy is the Spirit he has caused to live in us? No, he gives us grace potent enough to meet this and every other evil spirit, if we are humble enough to receive it. That is why he says: 'God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.'

the DEVIL

James 4:7 - Be humble then before God. but resist the devil and you'll find he'll run away from you.

HUMILITY

James 4:8-10 - Come close to God and he will come close to you. Realise that you have sinned and get your hands clean again. Realise that you have been disloyal and get your hearts made true once more. As you come close to God you should be deeply sorry, you should be grieved, you should even be in tears. Your laughter will have to become mourning, your high spirits will have to become heartfelt dejection. You will have to feel very small in the sight of God before he will set you on your feet once more.

JUDGING OTHERS

James 4:11-12 - Never pull each other to pieces, my brothers. If you do you are judging your brother and setting yourself up in the place of God's Law; you have become in fact a critic of the Law. Yet if you start to criticise the Law instead of obeying it you are setting yourself up as judge, and there is only one judge, the one who gave the Law, to whom belongs absolute power of life and death. How can you then be so silly as to imagine that you are your neighbour's judge?

PLANS

James 4:13-17 - Just a moment, now, you who say, "We are going to such-and-such a city today or tomorrow. We shall stay there a year doing business and make a profit"! How do you know what will happen even tomorrow? What, after all, is your life? It is like a puff of smoke visible for a little while and then dissolving into thin air. Your remarks should be prefaced with, "If it is the Lord's will, we shall be alive and will do so-and-so." As it is, you get a certain pride in yourself in planning your future with such confidence. That sort of pride is all wrong. No doubt you agree with the above in theory. Well, remember that if a man knows what is right and fails to do it, his failure is a real sin.

WEALTH

James 5:1-6 - ... now, you plutocrats (tycoons), is the time for you to weep and moan because of the miseries in store for you!! Your richest goods are ruined, your hoard of clothes is moth-eaten, your gold and silver are tarnished. Yes, their very tarnish will be the evidence of your wicked hoarding and you will shrink from them as if they were red-hot. You have made a fine pile in these last days, haven't you? But look, here is the pay of the reaper you hired and whom you cheated, and it is shouting against you! And the cries of the other labourers you swindled are heard by the Lord of Hosts himself. Yes, you have had a magnificent time on this earth, and have indulged yourselves to the full. You have picked out just what you wanted like soldiers looting after battle. You have condemned and ruined innocent men in your career, and they have been powerless to stop you.

PATIENCE AND PRAYER

PATIENCE

James 5:7-8 - ... be patient, my brothers, as you wait for the Lord to come. Look at the farmer quietly awaiting his precious harvest. See how he has to possess his soul in patience till the land has had the early and late rains. So must you be patient, resting your hearts on the ultimate certainty. The Lord's coming is very near.

GRUMBLING

James 5:9 - Don't make complaints against each other in the meantime my brothers (as you wait for Christ's return) - you may be the one at fault yourself. The judge himself is already at the door.

PATIENCE

James 5:10-11 - For our example of the patient endurance of suffering we can take the prophets who have spoken in the Lord's name. Remember that it is usually those who have patiently endured to whom we accord the word "blessed!" You have heard of Job's patient endurance (in the Old Testament Book of Job) and how God dealt with him in the end, and therefore you have seen that the Lord is merciful and full of understanding pity for us men.

SWEARING AND OATHS

James 5:12 - It is of the highest importance, my brothers, that your speech should be free from oaths (whether they are "by" heaven or earth or anything else). Your yes should be a plain yes, and your no a plain no, and then you cannot go wrong in the matter.

PROBLEMS, also PRAYER

James 5:13a - If any of you is in trouble let him pray.

the HAPPY

James 5:13b - If anyone is flourishing (or happy) let him sing praises to God.

the SICK

James 5:14-16a - If anyone is ill he should send for the Church elders. They should pray over him, anointing him with oil in the Lord's name. Believing prayer will save the sick man; the Lord will restore him and any sins that he has committed will be forgiven. You should get into the habit of admitting your sins to each other, and praying for each other, so that if sickness comes to you, you may be healed.

PRAYER

James 5:16b-18 - Tremendous power is made available through a good man's earnest prayer. Do you remember Elijah? (in 1 Kings 17-18). He was a man like us but he prayed earnestly that it should not rain. In fact, not a drop fell on the land for three and a half years. Then he prayed again, the heavens gave the rain and the earth sprouted with vegetation as usual.

RESPONSIBILITY FOR OTHERS

James 5:19-20 - My brothers, if any of you should wander away from the truth and another should turn him back on to the right path, then the latter may be sure that in turning a man back from his wandering course he has rescued a soul from death, and his loving action will "cover a multitude of sins".

PETER'S FIRST LETTER, TO ASIA MINOR

With people, places, definitions, map .....

Writer: The Apostle Peter, dictating to Silvanus (otherwise known as Silas) as his secretary

Date: c AD64, some time before Peter's execution

Where written: Rome, symbolically "Babylon" (1 Peter 5:13)

Readers: The churches of Asia Minor - present-day Turkey, with their largely Jewish, but also Gentile membership

Why: To encourage the church members as they experience apparently undeserved trials and suffering. Also to provide practical advice on relations with the civil authorities, and within society and families

According to Some Modern Scholarship: Written by followers of Peter after his death

Map - Peter Writes his First Letter, to the Christian Jews of most of Asia Minor

Map Key: Letter from 1 to 2

GREETINGS; BEARING TRIALS WITH JOY

GREETINGS; BECAUSE CHRIST HAS RISEN FROM THE DEAD, WE HAVE BEEN BORN AGAIN

1 Peter 1:1-5 - Peter, messenger (or apostle) of Jesus Christ, sends this letter to the exiles of the dispersed tribes (in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia - comprising nearly all of Asia Minor), whom God the Father knew and chose long ago to be made holy by his Spirit, that they might obey Jesus Christ and be cleansed by his blood: may you know more and more of God's grace and peace.

Your faith is being tested, but your future is magnificent

Thank God, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, that in his great mercy we men have been born again into a life full of hope, through Christ's rising again from the dead! You can now hope for a perfect inheritance beyond the reach of change and decay, "reserved" in Heaven for you. And in the meantime you are guarded by the power of God operating through your faith, till you enter fully into the salvation which is all ready for the dénouement (outcome or result) of the last day.

WE HAVE EVERY REASON FOR REJOICING IN SPITE OF OUR TRIALS

1 Peter 1:6-9 - This means tremendous joy to you, I know, even though you are temporarily harassed by all kinds of trials and temptations (... probably as Christian families by the local people). This is no accident - it happens to prove your faith, which is infinitely more valuable than gold, and gold, as you know, even though it is ultimately perishable, must be purified by fire. This proving of your faith is planned to bring you praise and honour and glory in the day when Jesus Christ reveals himself (at his second coming). And though you have never seen him, yet I know that you love him. At present you trust him without being able to see him, and even now he brings you a joy that words cannot express and which has in it a hint of the glories of Heaven; and all the time you are receiving the result of your faith in him - the salvation of your own souls.

OUR RELATIONS WITH GOD

CHRISTIANS CAN KNOW MORE THAN THE PROPHETS OR ANGELS EVER DID OR COULD OF GOD'S MYSTERIES

1 Peter 1:10-12 - The prophets of old did their utmost to discover and obtain this salvation. They did not find it, but they prophesied of this grace that has now come to you. They tried hard to discover to what time and to what sort of circumstances the Spirit of Christ working in them was referring. For he (the Spirit of Christ) foretold the sufferings of Christ and the glories that should follow them. It was then made clear to them (the prophets) that they were dealing with matters not meant for themselves, but for you (Christians). It is these very matters which have been made plain to you by those who preached the Gospel to you by the same Spirit sent from Heaven - and these are facts to command the interest of the very angels!

LIVE HOLY LIVES ACCORDINGLY

1 Peter 1:13-16 - So brace up your minds, and, as men who know what they are doing, rest the full weight of your hopes on the grace that will be yours when Jesus Christ reveals himself. Live as obedient children before God. Don't let your character be moulded by the desires of your ignorant days (... before you knew Christ), but be holy in every department of your lives, for the one (God) who has called you is himself holy. The scripture says:

'Be holy, for I am holy' (Leviticus 11:44,45; 19:2; 20:7).

THE ETERNAL CHRIST DIED THAT YOU MAY LIVE IN HOLINESS

1 Peter 1:17-21 - If you pray to a Father who judges men by their actions without the slightest favouritism, then you should spend the time of your stay here on earth with reverent fear. For you must realise all the time that you have been "ransomed" (as a slave may be freed) from the futile way of living passed on to you by your fathers' traditions, not with some money payment of transient value, but by the costly shedding of blood. The price was in fact the life-blood of Christ (on the cross), the unblemished and unstained lamb of sacrifice. It is true that God chose him to fulfil this part before the world was founded, but it was for your benefit that he was revealed in these last days - for you who found your faith in God through Christ. And God raised him from the dead and gave him unimaginable splendour, so that all your faith and hope might be centred in God.

LOVE EACH OTHER BECAUSE YOU ARE SONS OF GOD; DO AWAY WITH ALL EVIL

1 Peter 1:22-2:3 - Now that you have, by obeying the truth, made your souls clean enough for a genuine love of your fellows, see that you do love each other, fervently and from the heart. For you are the sons of God now; the live, permanent Word of the living God has given you his own indestructible heredity. It is true that:

'All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and its flower falls away, but the word of the Lord endures for ever' (Isaiah 40:6-8).

The Word referred to, as far as you are concerned, is the message of the Gospel that was preached to you.

(Chapter 2 ....) Have done, then, with all evil and deceit, all pretence and jealousy and slander. You are babies, new-born in God's family, and you should be crying out for unadulterated spiritual milk to make you grow up to salvation! And so you will, if you have already tasted the goodness of the Lord.

YOU HAVE BEEN CHOSEN BY GOD AS A ROYAL PRIESTHOOD TO BECOME THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

1 Peter 2:4-10 - To change the metaphor, you come to him (Jesus Christ), as living stones to the immensely valuable living stone (which men rejected but God chose), to be built up into a spiritual House of God, in which you, like holy priests, can offer those spiritual sacrifices which are acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. There is a passage to this effect in scripture, and it runs like this:

'Behold, I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious, and he who believes on him will by no means be put to shame' (Isaiah 28:16).

It is you who believe in him that he is "precious", but to those who disobey God, it is true that:

'The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone' (Psalm 118:22).

And he is, to them,

'a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence' (Isaiah 8:14).

Yes, they (who will not believe in Jesus) stumble at the Word of God for in their hearts they are unwilling to obey it - which makes stumbling a foregone conclusion. But you are God's "chosen generation", his "royal priesthood", his "holy nation", his "peculiar people" - all the old titles of God's people (previously only given to the Jewish nation) now belong to you (Jew and Gentile). It is for you now to demonstrate the goodness of him who has called you out of darkness into his amazing light. In the past you (Jew and Gentile) were not "a people" at all: now you are the people of God. In the past you had no experience of his mercy, but now it is intimately yours.

CIVIL, SOCIAL AND FAMILY RELATIONS

WORLDLINESS

1 Peter 2:11 - I (Paul) beg you, as those whom I love, to live in this world as strangers and "temporary residents", to keep clear of the desires of your lower natures, for they are always at war with your souls.

WITNESSES TO CHRIST

1 Peter 2:12 - Your conduct among the surrounding peoples in your different countries should always be good and right, so that although they may in the usual way slander you as evil-doers yet when disasters come, they may glorify God when they see how well you conduct yourselves.

GOVERNMENT

1 Peter 2:13-17 - Obey every man-made authority for the Lord's sake - whether it is the emperor, as the supreme ruler, or the governors whom he has appointed to punish evil-doers and reward those who do good service. It is the will of God that you may thus silence the ill-informed criticisms of the foolish. As free men you should never use your freedom as an excuse for doing something that is wrong, for you are at all times the servants of God. You should have respect for everyone, you should love our brotherhood, fear God and honour the emperor.

EMPLOYEES

1 Peter 2:18-20 - You who are servants (employees) should submit to your masters (employers) with proper respect - not only to the good and kind, but also to the difficult. A man does something valuable when he endures pain, as in the sight of God, though he knows he is suffering unjustly. After all, it is no credit to you if you are patient in bearing a punishment which you have richly deserved! But if you do your duty and are punished for it and can still accept it patiently, you are doing something worthwhile in God's sight

TRIALS OF LIFE

1 Peter 2:21-25 - (Being punished even when in the right) is part of your calling. For Christ suffered for you and left you a personal example, and wants you to follow in his steps. 'Who committed no sin, nor was guile found in his mouth'. Yet when he was insulted he offered no insult in return. When he suffered he made no threats of revenge. He simply committed his cause to the one (God) who judges fairly. And he personally bore our sins in his own body on the cross, so that we might be dead to sin and be alive to

all that is good. It was the suffering that he bore which has healed you. You had wandered away like so many sheep, but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls.

WIVES

1 Peter 3:1-6 - In the same spirit (as Christ) you married women should adapt yourselves to your husbands, so that even if they do not obey the Word of God they may be won to God without any word being spoken, simply by seeing the pure and reverent behaviour of you, their wives. Your beauty should not be dependent on an elaborate coiffure, or on the wearing of jewellery or fine clothes, but on the inner personality - the unfading loveliness of a calm and gentle spirit, a thing very precious in the eyes of God. This was the secret of the beauty of the holy women of ancient times who trusted in God and were submissive to their husbands. Sara (or Sarah - Genesis chapters 12-23), you will remember, obeyed Abraham and called him her lord. And you have become, as it were, her true descendants today as long as you too live good lives and do not give way to hysterical fears.

HUSBANDS, also PRAYER

1 Peter 3:7 - Similarly, (as wives should honour their husbands, so ....) you husbands should try to understand the wives you live with, honouring them as physically weaker yet equally heirs with you of the grace of eternal life. If you don't do this, you will find it impossible to pray properly.

CHRISTIAN CONDUCT

1 Peter 3:8-12 - To sum up, you should all be of one mind living like brothers with true love and sympathy for each other, generous and courteous at all times. Never pay back a bad turn with a bad turn or an insult with another insult, but on the contrary pay back with good. For this is your calling - to do good and one day to inherit all the goodness of God. For: 'He who would love life and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips from speaking guile: let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayers; but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil'.

CHRISTIAN SUFFERING

NOW BE PREPARED TO SUFFER PATIENTLY YOURSELVES

1 Peter 3:13-22 - After all, who in the ordinary way is likely to injure you for being enthusiastic for good? And if it should happen that you suffer "for righteousness' sake", that is a privilege. You need neither fear their threats nor worry about them (who persecute you); simply concentrate on being completely devoted to Christ in your hearts. Be ready at any time to give a quiet and reverent answer to any man who wants a reason for the hope that you have within you. Make sure that your conscience is perfectly clear, so that if men should speak slanderously of you as rogues they may come to feel ashamed of themselves for libelling your good Christian behaviour.

If it is the will of God that you should suffer it is really better to suffer unjustly than because you have deserved it. Remember that Christ the just suffered for us the unjust, to bring us to God. That meant the death of his body, but he came to life again in the spirit. It was in the spirit that he went and preached to the imprisoned souls of those who had been disobedient in the days of Noah - the days of God's great patience during the period of the building of the ark, in which eventually only eight souls were saved in the flood. ...

- A difficult passage to interpret, but one perhaps suggesting that between his death and resurrection, Christ preached to the dead. Noah's ark and the flood also help to introduce the significance of water in baptism -

... And I cannot help pointing out what a perfect illustration this is of the way you have been admitted to the safety of the Christian "ark" by baptism, which means, of course, far more than the mere washing of a dirty body: it means the ability to face God with a clear conscience. For there is in every true baptism the virtue of Christ's rising from the dead. And he has now entered Heaven and is at God's right hand, with all angels, authorities and powers subservient to him.

LIVE TO OBEY GOD

1 Peter 4:1-6 - Since Christ had to suffer physically for you, you must fortify yourselves with the same inner attitude that he must have had. You must realise that to be dead to sin inevitably means pain, and you should not therefore spend the rest of your time here on earth indulging your physical nature, but in doing the will of God. Our past life may have been good enough for pagan purposes, though it meant sensuality, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousals and worshipping forbidden gods. Indeed your former companions may think it very queer that you will no longer join with them in their riotous excesses, and accordingly say all sorts of unpleasant things about you. Don't worry: they are the ones who will have to explain their behaviour before the one (Jesus Christ) who is prepared to judge all men, whether living or dead. (For that is why the dead also had the Gospel preached to them - that it might judge the lives they lived as men and give them also the opportunity to share the eternal life of God in the spirit - possibly referring back to the verses above about "the imprisoned souls" in the time of Noah.)

MATURITY

1 Peter 4:7 - We are near the end of all things now, and you should therefore be calm, self-controlled men of prayer.

LOVE

1 Peter 4:8 - Above everything else be sure that you have real deep love for each other, remembering how 'love will cover a multitude of sins'.

HOSPITALITY

1 Peter 4:9 - Be hospitable to each other without secretly wishing you hadn't got to be!

TALENTS and ABILITIES

1 Peter 4:10-11 - Serve one another with the particular gifts God has given each of you, as faithful dispensers of the magnificently varied grace of God. If any of you is a preacher then he should preach his message as from God. And in whatever way a man serves the Church he should do it recognising the fact that God gives him his ability, so that God may be glorified in everything through Jesus Christ. To him belong praise and power for ever, amen!

WHEN YOU DO GOD'S WILL, BEAR YOUR SUFFERING AS CHRIST DID

1 Peter 4:12-19 - And now dear friends of mine. I beg you not to be unduly alarmed at the fiery ordeals which come to test your faith, as though this were some abnormal experience. You should be glad, because it means that you are called to share Christ's sufferings. One day, when he shows himself in full splendour to men, you will be filled with the most tremendous joy. If you are reproached for being Christ's followers, that is a great privilege, for you can be sure that God's Spirit of glory is resting upon you. But take care that none of your number suffers as a murderer, or a thief, a rogue or a spy! If he suffers as a Christian he has nothing to be ashamed of and may glorify God in Christ's name.

The time has evidently arrived for God's judgment to begin, and it is beginning at his own House. And if it starts with us, what is it going to mean to those who refuse to obey the Gospel of God? 'If the righteous one is scarcely saved, where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?'.

And if it is true that we are living in a time of judgment, then those who suffer according to God's will can only commit their souls to their faithful creator, and go on doing all the good they can.

CHRISTIAN LEADERS

1 Peter 5:1-4 - Now may I (the apostle Peter) who am myself an elder say a word to you my fellow-elders? I speak as one who actually saw Christ suffer, and as one who will share with you the glories that are to be unfolded to us. I urge you then to see that your "flock of God" is properly fed and cared for. Accept the responsibility of looking after them willingly and not because you feel you can't get out of it, doing your work not for what you can make, but because you are really concerned for their well-being. You should aim not at being "little tin gods" but as examples of Christian living in the eyes of the flock committed to your charge. And then, when the chief shepherd reveals himself, you will receive that crown of glory which cannot fade.

YOUTH

1 Peter 5:5 - You younger members must ... submit to the elders. Indeed all of you should defer to one another and wear (or clothe yourself with) the "overall" of humility in serving each other. 'God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble'.

WORRY

1 Peter 5:6-7 - So, humble yourselves under God's strong hand, and in his own good time he will lift you up. You can throw the whole weight of your anxieties upon him, for you are his personal concern.

SPIRITUAL WARFARE - THROUGH CHRIST, GOD WILL RESTORE AND CARRY YOU

1 Peter 5:8-11 - Be self-controlled and vigilant always, for your enemy the devil is always about, prowling like a lion roaring for its prey. Resist him, standing firm in your faith and remember that the strain is the same for all your fellow-Christians in other parts of the world. And after you have borne these sufferings a very little while, God himself (from whom we receive all grace and who has called you to share his eternal splendour through Christ) will make you whole and secure and strong. All power is his for ever and ever, amen!

FAREWELLS AND BLESSINGS

1 Peter 5:12-14 - I am sending this short letter by Silvanus (or Silas; Paul's companion on his Second Missionary Journey, and now Peter's secretary), whom I know to be a faithful brother, to stimulate your faith and assure you that the above words represent the true grace of God. See that you stand fast in that grace!

Your sister-church here in "Babylon" (probably Rome) sends you greetings, and so does my son Mark (writer of the Second Gospel). Give each other a handshake all round as a sign of love.

Peace be to all true Christians.

PETER'S SECOND LETTER, TO AN UNKNOWN CHURCH

With people, places, definitions .....

Writer: The apostle Peter;

Date: c AD65-67, not long before Peter's execution;

Where written: Rome;

Readers: Scattered Christian churches, possibly the same ones referred to in 1 Peter;

Why: A warning about false teachers, especially their denial of Christ's divinity and his second coming.

According to Some Modern Scholarship: This is the most disputed Letter of the New Testament, partly because it appears to include material from the Letter of Jude. It may therefore have been written by an unknown Christian towards the end of the 1st century or early in the 2nd

---

WE HAVE BEEN GIVEN GOD'S MESSAGE

GREETINGS; THE PRECIOUSNESS OF FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST

2 Peter 1:1-2 - Simon Peter, a servant and messenger of Jesus Christ, sends this letter to those who have been given a faith as valuable as yours in the righteousness of our God, and saviour Jesus Christ. May you know more and more of grace and peace as your knowledge of God and Jesus our Lord grows deeper.

THROUGH HIM, WE HAVE EVERYTHING WE NEED TO LIVE GODLY LIVES IN AN EVIL WORLD

2 Peter 1:3-4 - He (God) has by his own action given us everything that is necessary for living the truly good life, in allowing us to know the one who has called us to him, through his own glorious goodness. It is through him that God's greatest and most precious promises have become available to us men, making it possible for you to escape the inevitable disintegration that lust produces in the world and to share in God's essential nature.

STEPS TOWARDS GODLY LIVING

2 Peter 1:5-11 - For this very reason (... God's gift of Christ) you must do your utmost from your side, and see that ...

... your faith carries with it real goodness of life.

... Your goodness must be accompanied by knowledge,

... your knowledge by self-control,

... your self-control by the ability to endure.

... Your endurance too must always be accompanied by devotion to God;

... that in turn must have in it the quality of brotherliness,

... and your brotherliness must lead on to Christian love.

If you have these qualities existing and growing in you then it means that knowing our Lord Jesus Christ has not made your lives either complacent or unproductive. The man whose life fails to exhibit these qualities is short-sighted - he can no longer see the reason why he was cleansed from his former sins.

Set your minds, then, on endorsing by your conduct the fact that God has called and chosen you. If you go along the lines I have indicated above, there is no reason why you should stumble, and if you have lived the sort of life I have recommended God will open wide to you the gates of the eternal kingdom of our Lord and saviour Jesus Christ.

PETER'S NEED TO REMIND HIS READERS OF THESE THINGS

2 Peter 1:12-15 - I shall not fail to remind you of things like this (... the challenges of the Christian life) although you know them and are already established in the truth. I consider it my duty, as long as I live in the temporary dwelling of this body (with death as a martyr very near), to stimulate you by these reminders. I know that I shall have to leave this body at very short notice, as our Lord Jesus Christ made clear to me (... presumably Jesus' prophecy of Peter's death on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, recorded in John 21:18). Consequently I shall make the most of every opportunity, so that after I am gone you will remember these things.

PETER WAS AN EYE-WITNESS TO THE PROMISED MESSIAH; HE IS NOT A TELLER OF MAN-MADE STORIES

2 Peter 1:16-21 - We were not following a cleverly written-up story when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ - we actually saw his majesty with our own eyes (... during the transfigured appearance of Jesus with Moses and Elijah, Matthew 17:1-13). He received honour and glory from God the Father himself when that voice said to him, out of the sublime glory of Heaven,

'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased' (Matthew 17:5; Mark 9:7; Luke 9:35).

We actually heard that voice speaking from Heaven while we were with him on the sacred mountain (of Mount Hermon or Mount Tabor during the transfiguration of Jesus, Matthew 17:1-8). The word of prophecy was fulfilled in our hearing! You should give that word your closest attention, for it shines like a lamp amidst all the dirt and darkness of the world, until the day dawns, and the morning star rises in your hearts.

False prophets will flourish, but only for a time

But you must understand this at the outset, that no prophecy of scripture arose from an individual's interpretation of the truth. No prophecy came because a man wanted it to: men of God spoke because they were inspired by the Holy Spirit.

THE FALSE TEACHERS WHO DENY THIS

THE FALSE TEACHERS WHO DENY THE DIVINITY OF JESUS

2 Peter 2:1-3a - But even in those days (of the Old Testament) there were false prophets, just as there will be false teachers among you today. They will be men who will subtly introduce dangerous heresies. They will thereby deny the Lord who redeemed them, and it will not be long before they bring on themselves their own downfall. Many will follow their pernicious teaching and thereby bring discredit on the way of truth. In their lust to make converts these men will try to exploit you too with their bogus arguments.

HOW GOD DEALS WITH THE UNGODLY AND RESCUES THE GODLY

2 Peter 2:3b-9 - But judgment has been for some time hard on their heels and their downfall is inevitable. For if God did not spare angels who sinned against him, but banished them to the dark imprisonment of hell till judgment day: if he did not spare the ancient world but only saved Noah (the solitary voice that cried out for righteousness) and his seven companions when he brought the flood upon the world in its wickedness; and if God reduced the entire cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes (when he sentenced them to destruction as a fearful example to those who wanted to live in defiance of his laws), and yet saved Lot the righteous man, in acute mental distress at the filthy lives of the godless - Lot, remember, was a good man suffering spiritual agonies day after day at what he saw and heard of their lawlessness - then you may be absolutely certain that the Lord knows how to rescue a good man surrounded by temptation, and how to reserve his punishment for the wicked until his day comes.

THE BEHAVIOUR OF THE UNGODLY

2 Peter 2:10-17 - His judgment is chiefly reserved for those who have indulged all the foulness of their lower natures, and have nothing but contempt for authority. These men are arrogant and presumptuous - they think nothing of scoffing at the glories of the unseen world. Yet even angels, who are their superiors in strength and power, do not bring insulting criticisms of such things before the Lord.

But these men, with no more sense than the unreasoning brute beasts which are born to be caught and killed, scoff at things outside their own experience, and will most certainly be destroyed in their own

corruption. Their wickedness has earned them an evil end and they will be paid in full.

These are the men who delight in daylight self-indulgence; they are foul spots and blots, playing their tricks at your very dinner-table. Their eyes cannot look at a woman without lust, they captivate the unstable ones, and their techniques of getting what they want is, through long practice, highly developed. They are born under a curse, for they have abandoned the right road and wandered off to follow the old trail of Balaam, son of Peor, the man who had no objection to wickedness as long as he was paid for it (the Book of Numbers chapters 22-24). But he, you remember, was sharply reprimanded for his wickedness - by a donkey, of all things, speaking with a human voice to check the prophet's wicked infatuation!

These men are like wells without a drop of water in them, like the changing shapes of whirling storm-clouds, and their fate will be the black night of utter darkness.

HOW THEY MISLEAD CHRISTIANS; ESPECIALLY THE NEWLY CONVERTED

2 Peter 2:18-19 - With their high-sounding nonsense they use the sensual pull of the lower passions to attract those who were just on the point of cutting loose from their companions in misconduct. They promise them liberty. Liberty! - when they themselves are bound hand and foot to utter depravity. For a man is the slave of whatever masters him.

BECAUSE SUCH MEN WERE ONCE CHRISTIANS, THEY ARE WORSE OFF THAN THEY WERE BEFORE

2 Peter 2:20-22 - If men have escaped from the world's contaminations through knowing our Lord and saviour Jesus Christ, and then become entangled and defeated all over again, their last position is far worse than their first. It would be better for them not to have known the way of goodness at all, rather than after knowing it to turn their backs on the sacred commandments given to them. Alas, for them, the old proverbs have come true about

'a dog returns to his own vomit' (Proverbs 26:11),

and "the sow that had been washed going back to wallow in the muck".

THE END-TIMES WILL COME AND CHRIST WILL RETURN

PETER'S REASON FOR WRITING YET AGAIN

2 Peter 3:1-2 - This is the second letter I have written to you, dear friends of mine, and in both of them I have tried to stimulate you, as men with minds uncontaminated by error, by simply reminding you of what you really know already. For I want you to remember the words spoken of old by the holy prophets as well as the commands of our Lord and saviour given to you through his messengers (the apostles).

THERE ARE THOSE WHO DENY CHRIST WILL COME AGAIN

2 Peter 3:3-4 - First of all you must realise that in the last days mockers will undoubtedly come - men whose only guide in life is what they want for themselves - and they will say, "What has happened to his promised coming? Since the first Christians fell asleep, everything remains exactly as it was since the beginning of creation!"

GOD DESTROYED THE WORLD ONCE, BY WATER; HE WILL DO SO AGAIN, BY FIRE

2 Peter 3:5-7 - They are deliberately shutting their eyes to a fact that they know very well, that there were, by God's command, heavens in the old days and an earth formed out of the water and surrounded by water. It was by water that the world of those days (of Noah) was deluged and destroyed, but the present heavens and earth are, also by God's command, being kept and maintained for the fire of the day of judgment and the destruction of wicked men.

THE DAY WILL COME, BUT IN GOD'S TIME

2 Peter 3:8-10 - But you should never lose sight of this fact, dear friends, that time is not the same with the Lord as it is with us - to him a day may be a thousand years, and a thousand years only a day. It is not that he is dilatory about keeping his own promise as some men seem to think; the fact is that he is very patient towards you. He has no wish that any man should be destroyed. He wishes that all men should come to repent. Yet it remains true that the day of the Lord will come as suddenly and

unexpectedly as a thief. In that day the heavens will disappear in a terrific tearing blast, the very elements will disintegrate in heat and the earth and all that is in it will be burnt up to nothing.

UNTIL THEN, LIVE PATIENT AND GODLY LIVES

2 Peter 3:11-15a - In view of the fact that all these things are to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be? Surely men of good and holy character, who live expecting and earnestly longing for the coming of the day of God. True, this day will mean that the heavens will disappear in fire and the elements disintegrate in fearful heat, but our hopes are set not on these but on the new Heaven and the new earth which he has promised us, and in which nothing but good shall live.

Because, my dear friends, you have a hope like this before you, I urge you to make certain that such a day would find you at peace with God and man, clean and blameless in his sight. Meanwhile, consider that God's patience is meant to be man's salvation ....

PAUL'S LETTERS RANK AS SCRIPTURE, AND CONFIRM THESE THINGS

2 Peter 3:15b-16 - .... as our dear brother Paul pointed out in his letter to you, written out of the wisdom God gave him. In that letter, as indeed in all his letters, he referred to these matters. There are, of course, some things which are difficult to understand (... it may help modern readers to know that even early Christian leaders had problems following some of Paul's teaching!), and which, unhappily, ill-informed and unbalanced people distort (as they do the other scriptures), and bring disaster on their own heads.

REJECT FALSE TEACHING; CONTINUE TO GROW IN YOUR CHRISTIAN LIFE

2 Peter 3:17-18 - But you, my friends whom I love, are forewarned, and should therefore be very careful not to be carried away by the errors of wicked men and so lose your proper foothold. On the contrary, you should grow in grace and in your knowledge of our Lord and saviour Jesus Christ - to him be glory now and until the dawning of the day of eternity!

JOHN'S FIRST LETTER, TO THE CHURCHES AROUND EPHESUS

With people, places, definitions .....

Writer: The apostle John, towards the end of his life;

Date: c AD90-100

Where written: Ephesus, on the west coast of Asia Minor (to where Paul wrote his Letter to the Ephesians in c AD62)

Readers: The church in Ephesus and throughout the province of Asia; also as a circular letter to the church at large

Why: A general letter on living the Christian life through faith in Jesus Christ, and in accordance with the Gospel they have been taught. He warns his readers about the ways of the world and false teachers, and proclaims the preeminence of love - God's love for us, and in response, our duty to love each other

According to Some Modern Scholarship: Written by a close companion of John, known as John the Elder.

GOD'S SON REALLY BECAME MAN; THROUGH HIM WE CAN LIVE IN GOD'S LIGHT

JOHN WAS AN EYE-WITNESS TO JESUS, THE WORD OF LIFE

1 John 1:1-4 - We are writing to you about something which has always existed yet which we ourselves actually saw and heard: something which we had an opportunity to observe closely and even to hold in our hands, and yet, as we know now, was something of the very Word of life (Jesus Christ) himself! For it was life which appeared before us: we (as apostles) saw it, we are eye-witnesses of it, and are now writing to you about it. It was the very life of all ages, the life that has always existed with the Father, which actually became visible in person to us mortal men. We repeat, we really saw and heard what we are now writing to you about. We want you to be with us in this - in this fellowship with the Father, and Jesus Christ his Son. We must write and tell you about it, because the more that fellowship extends the greater the joy it brings to us who are already in it.

TO REALLY KNOW GOD, LIVE IN HIS LIGHT, AND ACCEPT THAT YOU ARE SINNERS

1 John 1:5-10 - Here, then, is the message which we heard from him, and now proclaim to you: GOD IS LIGHT and no shadow of darkness can exist in him. Consequently, if we were to say that we enjoyed fellowship with him and still went on living in darkness, we should be both telling and living a lie. But if we really are living in the same light in which he eternally exists, then we have true fellowship with each other, and the blood which his Son shed for us keeps us clean from all sin. If we refuse to admit that we are sinners, then we live in a world of illusion and truth becomes a stranger to us. But if we freely admit that we have sinned, we find God utterly reliable and straightforward - he forgives our sins and makes us thoroughly clean from all that is evil. For if we take up the attitude "we have not sinned", we flatly deny God's diagnosis of our condition and cut ourselves off from what he has to say to us.

TO KNOW GOD IS TO OBEY HIM AND LIVE CHRISTIAN LIVES

IF WE DO SIN, JESUS WILL DEFEND US

1 John 2:1-2 - I write these things to you (may I call you "my children" - for that's how I think of you), to help you to avoid sin. But if a man should sin, remember that our advocate before the Father is Jesus Christ the righteous, the one who made personal atonement for our sins (and for those of the rest of the world as well).

THE TRUE CHRISTIAN OBEYS ALL GOD'S COMMANDS

1 John 2:3-6 - It is only when we obey God's laws that we can be quite sure that we really know him. The man who claims to know God but does not obey his laws is not only a liar but lives in self-delusion. In practice, the more a man learns to obey God's laws the more truly and fully does he express his love for him. Obedience is the test of whether we really live "in God" or not. The life of a man who professes to be living in God must bear the stamp of Christ.

THE CHRISTIAN LIVING IN GOD'S LIGHT, LOVES, AND DOES NOT HATE

1 John 2:7-11 - I am not really writing to tell you of any new command, brothers of mine. It is the old, original command which you had at the beginning; it is the old message which you have heard before. And yet as I give it to you again I know that it is true - in your life as it was in his. For the darkness is beginning to lift and the true light is now shining in the world. Anyone who claims to be "in the light" and hates his brother is, in fact, still in complete darkness. The man who loves his brother lives and moves in the light, and has no reason to stumble. But the man who hates his brother is shut off from the light and gropes his way in the dark without seeing where he is going. To move in the dark is to move blindfold.

JOHN'S READERS KNOW GOD, THEY HAVE BEEN FORGIVEN, THEY HAVE REJECTED EVIL, AND THEY LIVE GODLY LIVES

1 John 2:12-14 - I write this letter to you all, as my dear children, because your sins are forgiven for his name's sake. I write to you who are now fathers, because you have known him who has always existed. And to you vigorous young men I am writing because you have been strong in defeating the evil one. Yes, I have written these lines to you all, dear children, because you know the Father; to you fathers because of your experience of the one who has always existed, and to you young men because you have all the vigour of youth, because you have a hold on God's truth and because you have defeated the evil one.

TO LOVE AS GOD LOVES, YOU CANNOT ALSO LOVE THE WORLD

1 John 2:15-17 - Never give your hearts to this world or to any of the things in it. A man cannot love the Father and love the world at the same time. For the whole world-system, based as it is on men's primitive desires, their greedy ambitions and the glamour of all that they think splendid, is not derived from the Father at all, but from the world itself. The world and all its passionate desires will one day disappear. But the man who is following God's will is part of the permanent and cannot die.

THE FALSE TEACHERS WERE NEVER REALLY CHRISTIANS; BUT YOU, THROUGH THE SPIRIT, KNOW BOTH GOD AND CHRIST

1 John 2:18-23 - Even now, dear children, we are getting near the end of things. You have heard, I expect, the prophecy about the coming of the anti-Christ. Believe me, there are anti-christs about already, which confirms my belief that we are near the end. These men went out from our company, it is true, but they never really belonged to it. If they had really belonged to us they would have stayed. In fact, their going proves beyond doubt that men like that were not "our men" at all.

Be on your guard against error

God has given you all a certain amount of spiritual insight, and indeed I have not written this warning as if I were writing to men who don't know what error is. I write because your eyes are clear enough to discern a lie when you come across it. And what, I ask you, is the crowning lie? Surely the denial that Jesus is God's anointed one, his Christ. I say, therefore, that any man who refuses to acknowledge the Father and the Son is an anti-christ. The man who will not recognise the Son cannot possibly know the Father; yet the man who believes in the Son will find that he knows the Father as well.

CONTINUE TO LIVE AS YOU WERE TAUGHT

1 John 2:24-29 - For yourselves I beg you to stick to the original teaching. If you do, you will be living in fellowship with both the Father and the Son. And that means sharing his own life for ever, as he has promised.

It is true that I felt I had to write the above about men who would dearly love to lead you astray. Yet I know that the touch of his Spirit never leaves you, and you don't really need a human teacher. You know that his Spirit teaches you about all things, always telling you the truth and never telling you a lie. So, as he has taught you, live continually in him. Yes, now, little children remember to live continually in him. So

that if he were suddenly to (return and) reveal himself we should still know exactly where we stand, and should not have to shrink away from his presence.

What it means to be sons of God

You all know that God is really good. You may be just as sure that the man who leads a really good life is a true child of God.

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE MEANS LIVING IN LOVE

IT IS A MIRACLE WE ARE "CHILDREN OF GOD"; WE SHOULD LIVE OUR LIVES IN CHRIST ACCORDINGLY

1 John 3:1-6 - Consider the incredible love that the Father has shown us in allowing us to be called "children of God" - and that is not just what we are called, but what we are. Our heredity on the Godward side is no mere figure of speech - which explains why the world will no more recognise us than it recognised Christ.

Oh, dear children of mine (forgive the affection of an old man!), have you realised it? Here and now we are God's children. We don't know what we shall become in the future. We only know that, if reality were to break through, we should reflect his likeness, for we should see him as he really is!

Everyone who has at heart a hope like that keeps himself pure, for he knows how pure Christ is.

Conduct will show who is a man's spiritual father

Everyone who commits sin breaks God's law, for that is what sin is, by definition - a breaking of God's law. You know, moreover, that Christ became man for the purpose of removing sin, and he himself was quite free from sin. The man who lives "in Christ" does not habitually sin. The regular sinner has never seen or known him.

SIN IS OF THE DEVIL, GOODNESS IS FROM GOD

1 John 3:7-10 - You, my children, are younger than I am, and I don't want you to be taken in by any clever talk just here. The man who lives a consistently good life is a good man, as surely as God is good. But the man whose life is habitually sinful is spiritually a son of the devil, for the devil is behind all sin, as he always has been. Now the Son of God came to earth with the express purpose of liquidating the devil's activities. The man who is really God's son does not practise sin, for God's nature is in him, for good, and such a heredity is incapable of sin.

Here we have a clear indication as to who are the children of God and who are the children of the devil. The man who does not lead a good life is no son of God, nor is the man who fails to love his brother.

TO LOVE OUR BROTHERS IS OF GOD, TO HATE IS A PATH TOWARDS MURDER

1 John 3:11-15 - For the original command, as you know, is that we should love one another. We are none of us to have the spirit of Cain (brother of the murdered Abel- Genesis chapter 4), who was a son of the devil and murdered his brother. Have you realised his motive? It was just because he realised the goodness of his brother's life and the rottenness of his own. Don't be surprised, therefore, if the world hates you.

Love and life are inter-connected

We know that we have crossed the frontier from death to life because we do love our brothers. The man without love for his brothers is living in death already. The man who actively hates his brother is a potential murderer, and you will readily see that the eternal life of God cannot live in the heart of a murderer.

TRUE LOVE IS MORE THAN WORDS, IT IS TRUTH IN ACTION

1 John 3:16-20 - We know and, to some extent realise, the love of God for us because Christ expressed it in laying down his life for us. We must in turn express our love by laying down our lives for those who are our brothers. But as for the well-to-do man who sees his brothers in want but shuts his eyes - and his heart - how could anyone believe that the love of God lives in him? My children, let us not love merely in theory or in words - let us love in sincerity and in practice!

Living in love means confidence in God

If we live like this, we shall know that we are children of the truth and can reassure ourselves in the sight of God, even if our own hearts make us feel guilty. For God is infinitely greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.

WE KNOW WHEN WE ARE OBEYING GOD; AND HE REWARDS US ACCORDINGLY

1 John 3:21-24 - And if, dear friends of mine, when we realise this (... that love shows itself in true action) our hearts no longer accuse us, we may have the utmost confidence in God's presence. We receive whatever we ask for, because we are obeying his orders and following his plans. His orders are that we should put our trust in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another - as we used to hear him (Jesus) say in person.

The man who does obey God's commands lives in God and God lives in him, and the guarantee of his presence within us is the Spirit he has given us.

GOD IS TRUTH AND LOVE

A SIMPLE TEST FOR FALSE PROPHETS IS THAT THEY DENY JESUS BECAME A MAN

1 John 4:1-3 - Don't trust every spirit, dear friends of mine, but test them to discover whether they come from God or not. For the world is full of false prophets. You can test them in this simple way: every spirit that acknowledges the fact that Jesus Christ actually became man, comes from God, but the spirit which denies this fact does not come from God. The latter comes from the anti-christ, which you were warned would come and which is already in the world.

GOD, THROUGH CHRIST, ENABLES US TO DISTINGUISH TRUTH FROM LIES

1 John 4:4-6 - You, my children, who belong to God have already defeated this spirit, because the one who lives in you is far stronger than the anti-Christ in the world. The agents of the anti-christ are children of the world, they speak the world's language and the world, of course, pays attention to what they say. We are God's children and only the man who knows God hears our message; what we say means nothing to the man who is not himself a child of God. This gives us a ready means of distinguishing the true from the false.

LOVE COMES FROM GOD, AND HE LOVES US SO MUCH, HE SENT HIS ONLY SON TO DIE FOR US

1 John 4:7-10 - To you whom I love I say, let us go on loving one another, for love comes from God. Every man who truly loves is God's son and has some knowledge of him. But the man who does not love cannot know him at all, for God is love.

To us, the greatest demonstration of God's love for us has been his sending his only Son into the world to give us life through him. We see real love, not in that fact that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to make personal atonement for our sins.

WE TOO SHOULD LOVE ONE ANOTHER, AND GOD WILL LIVE IN US

1 John 4:11-16a - If God loved us as much as that, surely we, in our turn, should love each other!

It is true that no human being has ever had a direct vision of God. Yet if we love each other God does actually live within us, and his love grows in us towards perfection. And, as I wrote above, the guarantee of our living in him and his living in us is the share of his own Spirit which he gives us.

Knowing Christ means more love and confidence, less and less fear

We ourselves are eye-witnesses able and willing to testify to the fact that the Father did send the Son to save the world. Everyone who acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God lives in him, and he lives in God. So we have come to know and trust the love God has for us.

GOD IS LOVE, AND PERFECT LOVE DRIVES AWAY ALL FEAR

1 John 4:16b-18 - God is love, and the man whose life is lived in love does, in fact, live in God, and God does, in fact, live in him. So our love for him grows more and more, filling us with complete confidence for the day when he shall judge all men - for we realise that our life in this world is actually his life lived in

us. Love contains no fear - indeed fully-developed love expels every particle of fear, for fear always contains some of the torture of feeling guilty. This means that the man who lives in fear has not yet had his love perfected.

WE CANNOT HATE OUR BROTHER, AND CLAIM TO LOVE GOD

1 John 4:19-21 - Yes, we love him because he first loved us. If a man says, "I love God" and hates his brother, he is a liar. For if he does not love the brother before his eyes how can he love the one beyond his sight? And in any case it is his explicit command that the one who loves God must love his brother too.

OUR CONFIDENCE AS CHRISTIANS

THE TEST OF OUR LOVE IS OBEDIENCE TO GOD AND BELIEF IN JESUS

1 John 5:1-5 - Everyone who really believes that Jesus is the Christ proves himself one of God's family. The man who loves the Father cannot help loving the Father's own Son.

The test of the genuineness of our love for God's family lies in this question - do we love God himself and do we obey his commands? For loving God means obeying his commands, and these commands of his are not burdensome, for God's "heredity" within us will always conquer the world outside us. In fact, this faith of ours is the only way in which the world has been conquered. For who could ever be said to conquer the world, in the true sense, except the man who really believes that Jesus is God's Son?

TO BELIEVE JESUS IS THE CHRIST IS TO RECEIVE GOD'S GIFT OF ETERNAL LIFE

1 John 5:6-13 - Jesus Christ himself is the one who came by water and by blood - not by the water only, but by the water and the blood. The Spirit bears witness to this, for the Spirit is the truth. The witness therefore is a triple one - the Spirit in our own hearts, the signs of the water of baptism and the blood of atonement - and they all say the same thing. If we are prepared to accept human testimony, God's own testimony concerning his own Son is surely infinitely more valuable. The man who really believes in the Son of God will find God's testimony in his own heart. The man who will not believe God is making him out to be a liar, because he is deliberately refusing to accept the testimony that God has given concerning his own Son. This is, that God has given men eternal life and this real life is to be found only in his Son. It follows naturally that any man who has genuine contact with Christ has this life; and if he has not, then he does not possess this life at all.

I have written like this to you who already believe in the name of God's Son so that you may be quite sure that, here and now, you possess eternal life.

WHATEVER OUR NEEDS, GOD WILL ANSWER OUR PRAYERS

1 John 5:14-15 - We have such confidence in him that we are certain that he hears every request that is made in accord with his own plan. And since we know that he invariably gives his attention to our prayers, whatever they are about, we can be quite sure that our prayers will be answered.

PRAYING FOR THOSE WHO SIN

1 John 5:16-17 - If any of you should see his brother committing a sin (I don't mean deliberately turning his back on God and embracing evil), he should pray to God for him and secure fresh life for the sinner. It is possible to commit sin that is a deliberate embracing of evil and that leads to spiritual death - that is not the sort of sin I have in mind when I recommend prayer for the sinner. Every failure to obey God's laws is sin, of course, but there is sin that does not preclude repentance and forgiveness.

JESUS PROTECTS AND EMPOWERS US TO LIVE THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

1 John 5:18-21 - We know that the true child of God does not sin, he is in the charge of God's own Son and the evil one must keep his distance.

We know that we ourselves are children of God, and we also know that the world around us is under the power of the evil one. We know too that the Son of God has actually come to this world, and has shown us the way to know the one who is true. We know that our real life is in the true one, and in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the real God and this is real, eternal life.

But be on your guard, my dear children, against every false god!

JOHN

JOHN'S SECOND LETTER

With people, places, definitions .....

Writer: The apostle John, towards the end of his life

Date: c AD90-100

Where written: Ephesus

Readers: Either a Christian lady and her family, or symbolically a church and its members

Why: Whether written to a church or a family, it encourages them to live in love, and warns against false teachers

According to Some Modern Scholarship: Written by the author of the First Letter, or by another elder of the church in Ephesus

---

GREETINGS IN LOVE AND TRUTH

2 John v1-3 - This letter comes from the Elder to a certain Christian lady and her children, held in the highest affection not only by me but by all who know the truth. For the truth's sake (which even now we know and which will be our companion for ever) I wish you, in all love and sincerity, grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, the Father's Son.

OBEDIENCE TO GOD MEANS REAL LOVE FOR ONE ANOTHER

2 John v4-6 - I was overjoyed to find some of your children living the life of truth, as the Father himself instructed us. I beg you now, dear lady, not as though I were issuing any new order but simply reminding you of the original one, to see that we continue to love one another. Real love means obeying the Father's orders, and you have known from the beginning that you must live in obedience to him.

DON'T WELCOME THOSE WHO DENY CHRIST BECAME A MAN; FOLLOW CHRIST'S TEACHING

2 John v7-11 - For the world is becoming full of impostors - men who will not admit that Jesus the Christ really became man. ....

- A major heresy known as "docetism". Unless God became man in Jesus Christ, the Gospel becomes meaningless. Then, as Paul taught in 1 Corinthians (15:19b), those of us who believe in Jesus Christ "should, of all mankind, be the most to be pitied!". The true humanity of Jesus can be seen throughout the Gospels, especially in his distress in the Garden of Gethsemane, and his hurt at the disciple's behaviour before his arrest -

.... Now this (denying the humanity of Jesus) is the very spirit of deceit and is anti-Christ. Take care of yourselves; don't throw away all the labour that has been spent on you, but persevere till God gives you your reward.

Have nothing to do with false teachers

The man who is so "advanced" that he is not content with what Christ taught. has in fact no God. The man who bases his life on Christ's teaching, however, has both the Father and the Son as his God. If any teacher comes to you who is disloyal to what Christ taught, don't have him inside your house. Don't even wish him "God-speed", unless you want to share in the evil that he is doing.

JOHN'S PLAN TO VISIT; HIS FAREWELL

2 John v12-13 - I have a lot that I could write to you, but somehow I find it hard to put down on paper. I hope to come and see you personally, and we will have a heart-to-heart talk together - and how we shall enjoy that! Your sister's children send their love.

JOHN

JOHN'S THIRD LETTER, to Gaius

With people, places, definitions .....

Writer: The apostle John, towards the end of his life

Date: c AD90-100

Where written: Ephesus

Reader: Gaius, a common Roman name. Other Gaius' in the New Testament are from Corinth (Romans 16:23, 1 Corinthians 1:14), from Macedonia (Acts 19:29); and from Derbe (Acts 20:4,5)

Why: To give thanks for Gaius' faith, and his hospitality to visiting Christians

According to Some Modern Scholarship: Written by the author of the First Letter, or by another elder of the church in Ephesus

---

JOHN GIVES THANKS FOR GAIUS' FAITH AND HIS HOSPITALITY TO VISITING EVANGELISTS

3 John v1-8 - The elder sends this personal letter to his very dear friend Gaius with love in the truth.

I thank God for you and pray for you

My heartfelt prayer for you, my very dear friend, is that you may be as healthy and prosperous in every way are you are in soul. I was delighted when the brothers arrived and spoke so highly of the sincerity of your life - obviously you are living in the truth. Nothing brings me greater joy nowadays than hearing that "my children" are living "in the truth".

Your actions have been just right

You are doing a fine faithful piece of work, my dear friend, in looking after the brothers who come your way, especially when you have never seen them before. They have testified to your love before the Church. It is a fine thing to help them on their way - it shows you realise the importance of what they are doing. They set out on this work, as you know for the sake of "the name" (of Jesus) and they accept no help from non-Christians. We ought to give such men a real welcome and prove that we too are co-operating with the truth.

THE INHOSPITALITY OF DIOTREPHES CONTRASTED

3 John v9-10 - I did write a letter to the church, but Diotrephes (... perhaps the minister of Gaius' church), who wants to be head of everything, does not recognise us (including the apostle John)! If I do come to you, I shall not forget his actions nor the slanderous things he has said against us. And it doesn't stop there, alas, for although he wants to be leader he refuses the duty of welcoming the brothers (... the visiting evangelists) himself, and stops those (such as Gaius) who would like to do so - he even excommunicates them!

JOHN COMMENDS DEMETRIUS

3 John v11-12 - Never let evil be your example, dear friend of mine, but always good. The man who does good is God's man, but the man who does evil does not know God at all.

Everyone has a good word to say for Demetrius (possibly an evangelist, and bearer of the Letter) and the very truth speaks well of him. He has our warm recommendation also, and you know you can trust what we say about anyone.

JOHN PLANS TO VISIT; A FAREWELL

3 John v13-14 - There is a great deal I want to say to you but I can't put it down in black and white. I hope to see you before long, and we will have a heart-to-heart talk. Peace be with you. All our friends here send love: please give ours personally to all our friends at your end.

JOHN

JUDE'S LETTER, TO AN UNKNOWN CHURCH

With people, places, definitions .....

Writer: Jude, the brother of James, and thus of Jesus

Date: c AD67, before the fall of Jerusalem in AD70

Where written: Possibly Palestine

Readers: A church, or number of churches of mainly Jewish Christians, perhaps in the Palestine area. Or in Assyria or Persia where Jude traditionally preached

Why: To warn against immoral teachers and heresies undermining their faith in Jesus

According to Some Modern Scholarship: Written by an unknown Christian towards the end of the 1st century or in to the 2nd.

GREETINGS

Jude v1-2 - Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James, to those who have obeyed the call, who are loved by God the Father and kept in the faith by Jesus Christ - may you ever experience more and more of mercy, peace and love!

FALSE AND IMMORAL TEACHERS ARE AMONG YOU

Jude v3-4 - I fully intended, dear friends, to write to you about our common salvation, but I feel compelled to make my letter to you an earnest appeal to put up a real fight for the faith which has been once and for all committed to those who belong to Christ. For there are men who have surreptitiously entered the Church but who have for a long time been heading straight for the condemnation I shall plainly give them. They have no real reverence for God, and they abuse his grace as an opportunity for immorality. They will not recognise the only master, Jesus Christ our Lord.

THE PUNISHMENT AWAITING THOSE WHO DECEIVE

Jude v5-11 - I want to remind you of something that you really know already: and although the Lord saved all the people from the land of Egypt, yet afterwards he brought to their downfall those who would not trust him. And the very angels who failed in their high duties and abandoned their proper sphere have been deprived by God of both light and liberty until the judgment of the great day. Sodom and Gomorrah and the adjacent cities who, in the same way as these men today, gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion, stand in their punishment as a permanent warning of the fire of judgment. Yet these men are defiling their bodies by their filthy fantasies in just the same way; they show utter contempt for authority and make a jest of the heavenly glories. But I would remind you that even the archangel Michael when he was contending with the devil in the dispute over the body of Moses did not dare to condemn him with mockery. He simply said, the Lord rebuke you!

These fellows, however, are ready to mock at anything that is beyond their immediate knowledge, while in the things that they know by instinct like unreasoning beasts they have become utterly depraved. I say, Woe to them! For they have taken the road of Cain (who killed Abel, Genesis 4:8); for what they could get they have rushed into the same error as Balaam (killed by the Israelites, Numbers 31:8); they have destroyed themselves by rebelling against God as did Korah long ago (who rose up against Moses and was killed, Numbers chapter 16).

THEY COME AS TROUBLE-MAKERS

Jude v12-16 - These men are a menace to the good-fellowship of your feasts, for they eat in your company without a qualm yet they care for no one but themselves. They are like clouds driven up by the wind, but they bring no rain. They are like trees with the leaves of autumn but without a single fruit - they are doubly dead for they have no roots either. They are like raging waves of the sea producing only the spume of their own shameful deeds. They are like stars which follow no orbit, and their proper place is

the everlasting blackness of the regions beyond the light. It was men like that Enoch (seventh descendant from Adam) prophesied (in the apocryphal book of Enoch) when he said: 'Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of his saints, to execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against him.'

These are the men who complain and curse their fate while trying all the time to mould life according to their own desires. They "talk big" but will pay men great respect it if is to their own advantage.

JESUS FORETOLD THE COMING OF SUCH MEN

Jude v17-19 - Now do remember, dear friends, the words that the messengers of Jesus Christ gave us beforehand when they said "there will come in the last days mockers who live according to their own Godless desires". These are the men who split communities, for they are led by human emotions and never by the Spirit of God.

CONTINUE IN YOUR CHRISTIAN LIFE; SAVE THOSE YOU CAN

Jude v20-23 - But you, dear friends of mine, build yourselves up on the foundation of your most holy faith and by praying through the Holy Spirit keep yourselves within the love of God. Wait patiently for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ which will bring you to the life eternal. For some of these men you can feel pity and you can treat them differently. Others you must try to save by fear, snatching them as it were out of the fire while hating the very garments their deeds have befouled.

A BEAUTIFUL BENEDICTION

Jude v24-25 - Now to him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glory without fault and with unspeakable joy, to the only God, our saviour, be glory and majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before time was, now, and in all ages to come, amen.

BOOK OF REVELATION

With people, places, definitions, map .....

Writer: The apostle John in exile

Date: EITHER c AD68-70 following the persecutions of Emperor Nero, but before the destruction of Jerusalem in AD70; OR c AD90-95 during the persecutions attributed to Emperor Domitian at the end of his reign AD81-96

Where written: The Aegean island of Patmos off the west coast of Asia Minor

Reader: The seven named churches of Asia, and the entire Church of Christ

Why: An apocalyptic book describing the revelation Jesus Christ gave to John. The beginning of the Bible (Genesis 1-11) is a prologue describing the downfall of mankind and his separation from God. Revelation is an epilogue in which God and man are reconciled through Christ

Apocalyptic - Greek for "uncover", "reveal". The revealing of great or violent events and especially the end of the world, often described in Jewish apocalyptic literature. The word is applied especially to the Book of Revelation which bears comparison with the Old Testament Books of Daniel and parts of Isaiah, Ezekiel and Zechariah.

According to Some Modern Scholarship: Written towards the end of the 1st century by a close companion of John known as John the Elder, or by another follower. The earlier date of c AD68-70 for the apostle John would help account for the differences in style and language between Revelation and the later Gospel of John

Revelation was written .....

To warn and encourage the churches of Asia as they underwent internal problems and external persecution within the Roman Empire (chapters 1:1-3:22). It then describes how Jesus Christ the Lamb of God is the "instrument" of:

(1) God's judgment on the whole universe (chapters 4:1-19:10);

(2) The final defeat of evil (chapters 19:11-20:15), and:

(3) The coming of a new heaven and a new earth - the new Jerusalem (chapters 21:1-22:5).

It closes with Christ's final appeal to all mankind (chapter 22:6-21).

In the Book, John describes a series of highly symbolic, mainly Old Testament-type visions, many of which incorporate the sacred and perfect number "seven" - seven churches, seven seals, seven trumpets, seven angels, seven last plagues. Much of the Book appears to be in sequence but many of the events may overlap. Some of the contents and characters seem straightforward; others are confusing and difficult to understand.

The attempts to interpret Revelations are beyond measure but here the aim is simply to clarify how the different stages in the Book develop and to identify the variety of "beings", objects and events the reader encounters.

In making sense of the Book, it can prove helpful to view it at three levels:

(1) John wrote Revelation when the seemingly all-powerful Roman Empire with its cult of emperor-worship was persecuting the followers of Jesus Christ. It was also widely expected that the dead emperor Nero would come back to life to take revenge against the Rome he once ruled. The Book is therefore a product of that period in world history 2,000 years ago;

(2) How mankind behaved and ruled in Roman times is no different from any other period in human history in any other part of the world, right through to the end of time - whether the empire or way of life is Ancient Indian, Chinese, Persian, Islamic, Holy Roman, Incan, Napoleonic, British, modern American, European, Pacific, world government, or some other form of future empire. Certainly the parallels between Rome and the present are striking;

(3) Most importantly, God is sovereign. He will destroy all forms of evil in his own time and everyone will face a final judgement. Only faith in Jesus Christ can give us life to the full on earth, no matter what trials we may go through, followed by eternal life with Him in heaven - the new Jerusalem.

However in keeping with this arrangement of the New Testament, the reader is recommended to read Revelation not as a book to be analysed and understood, but as a spiritual book to feed upon, and through it, to better understand the power of God and the place of Jesus Christ in his scheme of things. Later, he or she can study the Book knowing they will never plumb its depths nor make much difference to their Christian lives.

More likely, they could find themselves "engaging in stupid arguments, genealogies, controversies and quarrels (over the Law)" that Paul warned Titus to avoid.

As Paul continued "They settle nothing and lead nowhere" (Titus 3:9-10).

Map - John Writes to Seven Churches in the Province of Asia

Map Key: Letter from 1 to 2

I - PROLOGUE

GOD CHOOSES JOHN TO RECEIVE AND TESTIFY TO THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST

Revelation 1:1-3 - This is a Revelation from Jesus Christ, which God gave him (Christ) so that he might show his servants (such as John) what must very soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who is the witness of all that he saw - the message of God, and the testimony of Jesus Christ.

Happy is the man who reads this prophecy (... the Book of Revelation) and happy are those who hear it read and pay attention to its message; for the time is near (when God will judge the world and establish his kingdom on earth. As this has not yet happened, this suggests that some of the visions in Revelation represent events that have already taken place, some refer to events that subsequently existed or continue to exist in the world, and others to events that have yet to happen).

JOHN'S GREETINGS TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES IN THE PROVINCE OF ASIA

Revelation 1:4-6 - John (normally living in Ephesus and ministering to the Christians of Asia), to the seven Churches in Asia:

Grace and peace be to you from him who is and who was and who is coming (... God the eternal Father), from the seven Spirits before his throne (... possibly the Holy Spirit described as an Old

Testament-type sevenfold Spirit), and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, first-born of the dead, and ruler of kings upon earth (... Jesus Christ the Son). To him who loves us and has set us free from our sins through his own blood, who has made us a kingdom of priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and power for timeless ages, amen.

THE SECOND COMING OF JESUS

Revelation 1:7-8 - See, he is coming in the clouds and every eye shall see him, even those who pierced him, and his coming will mean bitter sorrow to every tribe upon the earth. So let it be!

"I am Alpha and Omega (the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, the beginning and the end, the alphabet from which all words, the Word, are formed), says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is coming, the Almighty."

II -THE FIRST VISION OF CHRIST

JOHN RECEIVES HIS FIRST COMMAND FROM JESUS TO WRITE TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES IN ASIA

Revelation 1:9-11 - I, John, who am your brother and your companion in the distress (and persecution), the kingdom and the faithful endurance to which Jesus calls us, was on the island called Patmos (as an exile) because I had spoken God's message and borne witness to Jesus. On the Lord's day (a Sunday) I knew myself inspired by the Spirit, and I heard from behind me a voice loud as a trumpet-call saying, "Write down in a book what you see (in a series of visions), and send it to the seven Churches - to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea! (lying on a clockwise circular route from Ephesus on the coast to Laodicea inland)"

HE DESCRIBES THE AWESOME APPEARANCE OF JESUS CHRIST

Revelation 1:12-16 - I turned to see whose voice it was that was speaking to me and when I had turned I saw seven golden lamp stands (representing the seven churches, in turn representative of all churches), and among these lampstands I saw someone

'like a Son of Man' (Daniel 7:13).

He (Christ, now described in essentially Old Testament priestly terms) was dressed in a long robe with a golden girdle around his breast; his head and his hair were white as snow-white wool, his eyes blazed like fire, and his feet shone as the finest bronze glows in the furnace. His voice had the sound of a great waterfall, and I saw that in his right hand he held seven stars (representing the angels, or possibly guardians or leaders of the seven churches). A sharp two-edged sword came out of his mouth, and his face was ablaze like the sun at its height.

CHRIST REPEATS HIS INSTRUCTIONS, AND EXPLAINS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STARS AND LAMPSTANDS

Revelation 1:17-20 - When my eyes took in this sight I fell at his feet like a dead man. And then he (Christ) placed his right hand upon me and said, "Do not be afraid. I am the first and the last, the living one. I am he who was dead, and now you see me alive for timeless ages! I hold in my hand the keys of death and the grave. Therefore, write down what you have seen, both the things which are now, and the things which are to be hereafter. The secret meaning of the seven stars which you saw in my right hand, and of the seven golden lampstands is this: the seven stars are the angels of the seven Churches and the lampstands are the Churches themselves."

III - SEVEN COVERING LETTERS TO THE CHURCHES OF ASIA

FORMAT OF THE LETTERS

All seven named churches receive the entire Book of Revelation, but each with its own covering letter. Each letter is in three parts

(Part 1) A greeting from Christ, using some of the imagery of chapter 1, to the "angel" of that church - possibly the guardian or leader

(Part 2) A summary of the church's strengths and weaknesses, together with encouragements and warnings. The problems collectively faced are both internal - false prophets and teachers, lack of love for God and each other, sexual immorality, apathy and complacency and

external - paganism, Roman emperor-worship, Jewish hostility, persecution.

As so often in human affairs, most of the problems are internal, with the possible exceptions of Smyrna and Philadelphia

(Part 3) A closing promise of the rewards for those individual Christians who endure the trials their churches face

TO THE CHURCH IN EPHESUS - STEADFAST, BUT LACKING IN LOVE

- Ephesus is already known from Paul's visit there (Acts 17:19-21), his three year stay (Acts 19), and his Letter to the Ephesians:

Revelation 2:1-7 - (Part 1) "Write this to the angel of the Church in Ephesus: 'These words are spoken by the one who holds the seven stars safe in his right hand, and who walks among the seven golden lampstands. ....

(Part 2) ... I know what you have done; I know how hard you have worked and what you have endured. I know that you will not tolerate wicked men (... false teachers), that you have put to the test self-styled 'apostles', who are nothing of the sort, and have found them to be liars. I know your powers of endurance - how you have suffered for the sake of my name and have not grown weary. But I hold this(internal problem) against you, that you do not love as you did at first. Remember then how far you have fallen. Repent and live as you lived at first. Otherwise, if your heart remains unchanged, I shall come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.

Yet you have this to your credit, that you hate the practices of the Nicolaitans (little is known of them, and there is no reason to link them with Nicolas of Antioch, one of the first deacons, Acts 6:5), which I myself detest. ...

(Part 3) ... Let every listener hear what the Spirit says to the Churches: 'To the victorious I will give the right to eat from the tree of life which grows in the paradise of God.'

TO THE CHURCH IN SMYRNA - TROUBLED AND POOR, BUT RICH IN SPIRIT

Revelation 2:8-11 - (Part 1) "Write this to the angel of the Church in Smyrna: 'These words are spoken by the first and the last, who died and came to life again. ...

(Part 2) ... I know of your tribulation and of your poverty - though in fact you are rich! I know how you are slandered by those who call themselves Jews, but in fact are no Jews but a synagogue of Satan (because they reject Christ as the Jewish messiah of prophecy). Have no fear of what you will suffer. I tell you now that the devil is going to cast some of your number into prison where your faith will be tested and your distress will last for ten days (... symbolically a short period). Be faithful in the face of death and I will give you the crown of life. ...

(Part 3) ... Let every listener hear what the Spirit says to the Churches: 'The victorious cannot suffer the slightest hurt from the second death (when mankind is finally judged).'

TO THE CHURCH IN PERGAMUM - FAITHFUL, BUT SOME FOLLOW FALSE AND IMMORAL TEACHING

Revelation 2:12-17 - (Part 1) "Write this to the angel of the Church in Pergamum: 'These words are spoken by him who has the sharp two-edged sword. ...

(Part 2) ... I know where you live - where Satan sits enthroned (... a large altar to the god Zeus dominated Pergamum, which was also a centre of Roman emperor-worship). I know that you hold fast to my name and that you never denied your faith in me even in the days when Antipas (an early named Christian martyr, about whom nothing more is known), my faithful witness, was martyred before your eyes in the very house of Satan.

Yet I have a few things (of an internal nature) against you - some of your number cling to the teaching of Balaam, the man who taught Balak (king of Moab) how to entice the children of Israel into eating meat sacrificed to idols and into sexual immorality (... the full story of Balaam is found in Numbers 22-24 and summarised in Numbers 31:16). I have also against you the fact that among your number are some who hold just as closely to the teaching of the Nicolaitans (as in the Ephesus church). Repent then, or else I shall come to you quickly and make war upon them with the sword of my mouth. ...

(Part 3) ... Let the listener hear what the Spirit says to the Churches: 'I will give the victorious some of the hidden manna, and I will also give him a white stone with a new name written upon it which no man knows except the man who receives it.

TO THE CHURCH IN THYATIRA - HARD-WORKING, BUT SOME REMAIN PAGANS

- Thyatira was the home town of Lydia, converted by Paul in Philippi (Acts 16:14):

Revelation 2:18-29 - (Part 1) "Write this to the angel of the Church in Thyatira: 'These are the words of the Son of God whose eyes blaze like fire and whose feet shine like the finest bronze: ...

(Part 2) ... I know what you have done. I know of your love and your loyalty, your service and your endurance. Moreover, I know that you are doing more than you did at first. But I have this (internal problem) against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel who calls herself a prophetess (.. apparently a local woman who is a contemporary version of the pagan wife of King Ahab who seduced Israel into idolatry and immorality. The story of Ahab and Jezebel can be found in 1 Kings 16:29-22:40, and Jezebel's fate in 2 Kings 9:30-37), but who by her teaching deceives my servants into sexual immorality and eating idols'-meat. I have given her time to repent but she has shown no desire to repent of her immorality. See, now, how I throw her into bed and her lovers with her, and I will send them terrible suffering unless they repent of what she has done. As for her children (or followers), I shall strike them dead. Then all the Churches will know that I am the one who searches men's hearts and minds, and that I will reward each one of you according to your deeds.

But for the rest of you at Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, and have not learned what they call 'the deep things of Satan' (.. a secret, and it was claimed, superior knowledge of God known as Gnosticism - a major Christian heresy), I will lay no further burden upon you, except that you hold on to what you have until I come (... the burden John is referring to, is the guidelines laid down for Gentile converts at the Council at Jerusalem, Acts 15:28-29. John was no doubt present when they were drawn up)!

(Part 3) To the one who is victorious, who carries out my work to the end, I will give authority over the nations, just as I myself have received authority from my Father, and I will give him the morning star.

'He shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the potter's vessels shall be broken to pieces' (Psalm 2:9).

Let the listener hear what the Spirit says to the Churches.

TO THE CHURCH IN SARDIS - APPARENTLY ALIVE, BUT MAINLY DEAD

Revelation 3:1-6 - (Part 1) "Write this to the angel of the Church in Sardis: 'These are the words of him who holds in his hand the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: ...

(Part 2) ... I know what you have done, that you have a reputation for being alive, but that in fact (your problems are internal, and ...) you are dead. Now wake up! Strengthen what you still have before it dies! For I have not found any of your deeds complete in the sight of my God. Remember then what you were given and what you were taught. Hold to those things and repent. If you refuse to wake up, then I will come to you like a thief, and you will have no idea of the hour of my coming.

Yet you still have a few names in Sardis of people who have not soiled their garments. They shall walk with me in white (... a symbol of purity), for they have deserved to do so. ...

(Part 3) ... The victorious shall wear such white garments, and never will I erase his name from the book of life. Indeed, I will speak his name openly in the presence of my Father and of his angels. Let the listener hear what the Spirit says to the Churches.

TO THE CHURCH IN PHILADELPHIA - WEAK IN POWER, BUT LOYAL

Revelation 3:7-13 - (Part 1) "Then write this to the angel of the Church in Philadelphia: These are the words of the holy one and the true,

'He who has the key of David. He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens' (Isaiah 22:22).

(Part 2) I know what you have done. See, I have given you a door flung wide open, which no man can close! For you have some little power and have been faithful to my message and have not denied my name. See how I deal with those of Satan's synagogue, who claim to be Jews, yet are no Jews but liars (... as in Smyrna, persecution came from local Jews, not pagan Gentiles)! Watch how I make them come and bow down before your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you. Because you have obeyed my call to patient endurance I will keep you safe from the hour of trial which is to come upon the whole world, to test all who live upon the earth. I am coming soon; hold fast to what you have - let no one deprive you of your crown. ...

(Part 3) ... As for the victorious, I will make him a pillar in the Temple of my God, and he will never leave it. I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem which comes down out of Heaven from my God. And I will write upon him my own new name. Let the listener hear what the Spirit says to the Churches.

TO THE CHURCH IN LAODICEA - WORLDLY SUCCESSFUL, AND COMPLACENT

- Laodicea is referred to in Paul's Letter to the Colossians, 4:15-16:

Revelation 3:14-22 - (Part 1) "Then write this to the angel of the Church in Laodicea: 'These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation: ...

(Part 2) ... I know what you have done, and that you are neither cold nor hot (as a church). I could wish that you were either cold or hot! but since you are lukewarm and neither hot nor cold, I intend to spit you out of my mouth! While you say, 'I am rich, I have prospered, and there is nothing that I need', you have no eyes to see that you are wretched, pitiable, poverty-stricken, blind and naked (in God's sight). My advice to you is to buy from me that gold which is purified in the furnace so that you may be rich, and white garments to wear so that you may hide the shame of your nakedness, and salve to put on your eyes to make you see. All those whom I love I correct and discipline. Therefore, shake off your complacency and repent. See, I stand knocking at the door. If anyone listens to my voice and opens the door, I will go into his house, and dine with him, and he with me. ...

(Part 3) ... As for the victorious, I will give him the honour of sitting beside me on my throne, just as I myself have won the victory and have taken my seat beside my Father on his throne. Let the listener hear what the spirit says to the Churches."

Revelations continues with vision's of God's judgements and the defeat of evil:

SUMMARY OF THIS CENTRAL PART OF REVELATION
Chapters 4:1-19:10

The seven letters to the churches of Asia are followed by GOD'S JUDGMENT ON THE UNIVERSE.

The heart of this major section is three sets of sevenfold judgments:

(1) The opening of Seven Seals (chapters 6:1-8:1);

(2) The sounding of Seven Trumpets (chapters 8:7-11:15);

(3) The pouring out of Seven Plagues (chapters 16:2-16:21);

Sometimes preceding, sometimes interposed within, sometimes following these judgments are a variety of other visions and deeds:

(1) The opening of Seven Seals (chapters 6:1-8:1):

- The opening of the First Seal (6:1) is preceded by John's vision of heaven and the Revelation that only Christ, the lamb of God is worthy to open all Seven Seals (4:1-5:14);

- Before the Seventh Seal is opened (8:1), there is an interlude in which the Jews of Israel and a multitude of mankind are marked or identified for rescue before God's final judgment (7:1-17);

(2) The sounding of Seven Trumpets (chapters 8:7-11:15):

- Before the First Trumpet sounds (8:7), an angel appears with an incense burner. The incense and the prayers of the saints rise up before God (8:2-6).

- Before the Seventh Trumpet (11:15), another angel hands John a "little book" to eat and he is told to prophesy (10:1-11). The Temple is measured (11:1-2), two witnesses are killed by Satan but taken up into heaven (11:3-12), and an earthquake takes place (11:13-14);

(3) The pouring out of Seven Plagues (chapters 16:2-16:21):

- After the Last Trumpet sounds (11:15) but before the First Plague is poured out (16:2), there are a number of major visions:

11:16-19 - God is worshipped and the ark of the covenant revealed;

12:1-17 - A woman and a dragon appear; the dragon attempts to destroy her;

13:1-18 - Two beasts appear - one from the sea, one from the earth;

14:1-20 - The Christians saved in heaven are described; six angels make a series of pronouncements;

15:1-16:1 - Seven more angels prepare to pour out seven plagues:

- Between the Sixth Plague (16:12) and the Seventh (16:17-21) a great struggle, the Battle of Armageddon takes place (16:13-16)

- The pouring out of the Last Plague leads to the Fall of "Babylon" and approaching victory for those Christians who endured (17:1-19:10)

The Conclusion of Revelation, Chapters 19:11-22:21 has its own Introduction

IV - VISION OF HEAVEN

THE THRONE OF GOD

JOHN'S VISION - THE THRONE OF GOD, THE 24 ELDERS, THE SEVEN SPIRITS

Revelation 4:1-6a - Later I looked again, and before my eyes a door stood open in Heaven, and in my ears was the voice with the ring of a trumpet, which I had heard at first, speaking to me and saying, "Come up here, and I will show you what must happen in the future."

Immediately I knew myself to be inspired by the Spirit, and in my vision I saw a throne had been set up in Heaven, and there was someone seated upon the throne. His appearance (could not be described in human terms, but ...) blazed like diamond and topaz, and all around the throne shone a halo like an emerald rainbow. In a circle around the throne (of God) there were twenty-four thrones and seated upon them twenty-four elders (... possibly 12 patriarchs and 12 apostles representing the entire Church and all mankind saved by God) dressed in white with golden crowns upon their heads. From the central

throne come flashes of lightning, noises and peals of thunder. Seven lamps are burning before the throne, and they are the seven Spirits (or sevenfold Holy Spirit) of God. In front of the throne there appears a sea of glass as clear as crystal.

THE FOUR LIVING CREATURES, WHO WITH THE 24 ELDERS WORSHIP GOD ETERNALLY

Revelation 4:6b-11 - On each side, encircling the throne, are four living creatures (or "beings", perhaps representing all living creation) covered with eyes in front and behind. ...

- The four living creatures are similar in appearance to the Cherubim (heavenly angels) of Ezekiel 1 and 10, and the Seraphim (heavenly beings or attendants) of Isaiah 6 in the Old Testament -

... The first living creature is like a lion, the second is like a calf, the third has a face like a man, and the fourth living creature appears like an eagle in flight. These four creatures have each of them six wings and are covered with eyes, all around them, and even within them. Day and night they never cease to say, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty, who was and who is and who is coming."

The ceaseless worship of Heaven

And whenever the living creatures give glory and honour and thanksgiving to the one (God) who sits upon the throne, who lives for timeless ages, the twenty-four elders prostrate themselves before him who is seated upon the throne and worship the one who lives for timeless ages. They cast their crowns before the throne and say, "You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power, for you created all things and by your will they exist and were created."

THE SEVEN-SEALED BOOK, AND JESUS THE LAMB OF GOD

THE BOOK WITH SEVEN SEALS IN GOD'S HAND; THE CALL FOR ONE WORTHY TO OPEN IT; THE LION OF JUDAH IS PROCLAIMED WORTHY

Revelation 5:1-5 - Then I noticed in the right hand of the one (God) seated upon the throne a book (presumably containing the world's destiny - God's final judgment) filled with writing both inside and on its back, and it was sealed with seven seals. And I saw a mighty angel who called out in a loud voice, "Who is fit to open the book and break its seals (and release God's judgments)?"

And no one in Heaven or upon the earth or under the earth was able to open the book, or even to look at it. I (John) began to weep bitterly because no one could be found fit to open the book, or even to look at it, when one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep. See, the lion from the tribe of Judah (... one of Christ's titles), the root of David, has won the victory and is able to open the book and break its seven seals."

JOHN'S VISION OF THE SACRIFICED LAMB WHO TAKES THE BOOK; THE CREATURES AND ELDERS WORSHIP HIM

- Christ appears not as a mighty king but as the gentle, slaughtered Lamb of God:

Revelation 5:6-10 - Then, standing in the very centre of the throne and of the four living creatures and of the elders, I saw a Lamb that seemed to have been slaughtered. He had seven horns and seven eyes (symbolically holding all power and all wisdom respectively), which are the seven Spirits (Holy Spirit) of God and are sent out into every corner of the earth. Then he (the Lamb) came and took the book from the right hand of him (God) who was seated upon the throne.

The new hymn of the created and of the redeemed

When he had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders prostrated themselves before the Lamb. Each of them had a harp, and they had golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. They sang a new song and these are the words they sang, "You (Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God) are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for you were slain, and have redeemed us to God by your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth."

THE WHOLE OF CREATION PRAISES AND WORSHIPS THE LAMB

Revelation 5:11-14 - Then in my vision I heard the voices of many angels encircling the throne, the living creatures and the elders. There were myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, crying in a

great voice, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honour and glory and blessing!"

Then I heard the voice of everything created in Heaven, upon earth, under the earth and upon the sea, and all that are in them saying, "Blessing and honour and glory and power be to him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, for ever and ever!"

The four living creatures said, "Amen", while the elders fell down and worshipped.

V - THE SEVEN SEALS ARE BROKEN

THE LAMB BREAKS THE FIRST FOUR SEALS - THE FOUR HORSEMEN OF THE APOCALYPSE ARE RELEASED

- The first horseman represents the desire for empire and power, leading on to war, famine, and death:

THE FIRST SEAL IS BROKEN BY THE LAMB - A *WHITE HORSE* APPEARS, ITS RIDER "CONQUEST"

Revelation 6:1-2 - Then I watched while the Lamb broke one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures say in a voice of thunder, "Come out!"

I looked, and before my eyes was a white horse. Its rider carried a bow, and he was given a crown. He rode out conquering and bent on conquest (empire and domination).

THE SECOND SEAL IS BROKEN - A RED HORSE, THE RIDER "WAR"

Revelation 6:3-4 - Then, when the Lamb broke the second seal, I heard the second living creature, cry, "Come out!"

And another horse came forth, red in colour. Its rider was given power to deprive the earth of peace, so that men should kill each other. A huge sword was put into his hand.

THE THIRD SEAL - **A BLACK HORSE**, "FAMINE"

Revelation 6:5-6 - When the Lamb broke the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, "Come out!"

I looked again and there before my eyes was a black horse. Its rider had a pair of scales in his hand, and I heard a voice which seemed to come from the four living creatures, saying, "A quart of wheat for a shilling, and three quarts of barley for a shilling (... a day's wages for one man's food for a day) - but no tampering with the oil or the wine!"

THE FOURTH SEAL - **A SICKLY GREEN HORSE**, "DEATH"

Revelation 6:7-8 - Then, when he broke the fourth seal I heard the voice of the fourth living creature cry, "Come out!"

Again I looked, and there appeared a horse sickly green in colour. The name of its rider was death (from the disease and pestilence that follows hard on the heels of famine), and the grave (Hades or hell) followed close behind him. A quarter of the earth was put into their power, to kill with the sword, by famine, by violence, and through the wild beasts of the earth.

THE LAMB BREAKS THE FIFTH AND SIXTH SEALS

- The cries of the martyrs and the release of cosmic forces:

THE FIFTH SEAL - THE MARTYRS OF GOD CRY OUT FOR JUSTICE

Revelation 6:9-11 - When the Lamb (of God) broke the fifth seal, I could see, beneath the altar, the souls of those (martyrs) who had been killed for the sake of the Word of God (the Gospel of Christ) and because of the faithfulness of their witness. They cried out in a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until you judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell (in prosperity) on the earth?"

Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to be patient a little longer, until the number of their fellow-servants and of their brethren, who were to die as they had died, should be complete.

THE SIXTH SEAL - UNIVERSAL CATASTROPHE; MANKIND, IN TERROR, HIDES FROM THE ANGER OF GOD AND THE LAMB

Revelation 6:12-17 - Then I watched while he (the Lamb) broke the sixth seal. There was a tremendous earthquake, the sun turned dark like coarse black cloth, and the full moon was red as blood. The stars of the sky fell upon the earth, just as a fig-tree sheds unripe figs when shaken in a gale. The sky vanished as though it were a scroll being rolled up, and every mountain and island was jolted out of its place. Then the kings of the earth, and the great men, the captains, the wealthy, the powerful, and every man, whether slave or free, hid themselves in caves and among mountain rocks. They called out to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of his wrath has come, and who is able to stand against it?"

INTERLUDE - VISION BEFORE THE SEVENTH SEAL IS OPENED

- There is now a pause before God's final judgments, while those who are to be saved are marked and identified:

GOD'S SERVANTS FROM THE TWELVE TRIBES OF ISRAEL ARE MARKED FOR PROTECTION

Revelation 7:1-8 - Later I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth holding in check the four (destroying) winds of the earth that none should blow upon the earth or upon the sea or upon any tree. Then I saw another angel ascending out of the east, holding the seal of the living God. He cried out in a loud voice to the four angels who had the power to harm the earth and the sea: "Do no harm to the earth, nor to the sea, nor to the trees until we have sealed the servants of our God upon their foreheads."

I heard the number of those who were thus sealed and it was 144,000 (or 12 x 12 x 1,000 - a symbolic number based on the square of twelve representing completeness or a great multitude of people), from every (one of the twelve Jewish) tribe(s) of the sons of Israel. Twelve thousand were sealed from the tribe of Judah; twelve thousand from the tribe of Reuben; twelve thousand from the tribe of Gad; twelve thousand from the tribe of Asher; twelve thousand from the tribe of Naphtali; twelve thousand from the tribe of Manasseh; twelve thousand from the tribe of Simeon; twelve thousand from the tribe of Levi; twelve thousand from the tribe of Issachar; twelve thousand from the tribe of Zebulun; twelve thousand from the tribe of Joseph; and twelve thousand from the tribe of Benjamin.

THE EVEN GREATER MULTITUDE OF MANKIND WHO ARE SAVED BY THE BLOOD OF THE LAMB

Revelation 7:9-17 - When this was done I looked again, and before my eyes appeared a vast crowd (of presumably the world's Gentiles, saved by God and carried to heaven) beyond man's power to number. They came from every nation and tribe and people and language, and they stood before the throne of the Lamb, dressed in white robes with palm-branches in their hands. With a great voice they shouted these words: "Salvation belongs to our God who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb!"

Then all the angels (of heaven) stood encircling the throne, the (twenty four) elders and the four living creatures, and prostrated themselves with heads bowed before the throne and worshipped God, saying, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honour and power and strength be given to our God for timeless ages!"

The countless host explained

Then one of the elders addressed me (John) and asked, "These who are dressed in white robe - who are they, and where do they come from?!

"You know, my Lord," I answered him.

Then he told me, "These are those who have come through the great oppression (or the tribulation and saved by God): they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. That is why they now have their place before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple. He who sits upon the throne will be their shelter. They will never again know hunger or thirst. The sun shall never beat upon them, neither shall there be any scorching heat, for the Lamb who is in the centre of the throne will be their shepherd and will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

THE SEVENTH SEAL IS OPENED - SILENCE

- The opening of the Seventh Seal is followed by the release of seven more judgments:

Revelation 8:1 - Then, when he had broken the seventh seal, there was utter silence in Heaven for what seemed to me half-an-hour.

VI - SEVEN TRUMPETS ARE SOUNDED

SEVEN ANGELS BEFORE GOD ARE GIVEN SEVEN TRUMPETS

Revelation 8:2 - Then I saw the seven angels who stand in the presence of God, and seven trumpets were put into their hands.

THE EIGHTH ANGEL AND THE INCENSE-BURNER; THE PRAYERS OF THE SAINTS

Revelation 8:3-6 - Then another angel came and stood by the altar holding a golden censer (a pan for burning incense). He was given a great quantity of incense to add to the prayers of all the saints, to be laid upon the golden altar before the throne. And the smoke of the incense rose up before God from the angel's hand, mingled with the prayers of the saints. Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and hurled it upon the earth (as a symbol of disaster). And at that there were thunderings and noises, flashes of lightning and an earthquake. Then the seven angels who were holding the seven trumpets prepared to blow them.

FOUR ANGELS SOUND THE FIRST FOUR TRUMPETS

- The trumpets announce natural disasters which destroy a third of heaven and earth:

THE FIRST TRUMPET - HAIL AND FIRE DESTROYS A THIRD OF THE EARTH AND ITS VEGETATION

Revelation 8:7 - The first angel blew his trumpet. Hail and fire mingled with blood appeared, and were hurled upon the earth. One-third of the earth was burnt up, one-third of all the trees was burnt up, and every blade of green grass was burnt up.

THE SECOND TRUMPET - A FIERY MASS DESTROYS A THIRD OF THE SEA AND ITS CREATURES AND SHIPS

Revelation 8:8-9 - The second angel blew his trumpet, and something like a vast mountain (a mass as large as a mountain) blazing with fire was thrown into the sea. A third-part of the sea turned into blood, a third of all live creatures in the sea died, and a third-part of all shipping was destroyed.

THE THIRD TRUMPET - A BLAZING STAR POISONS A THIRD OF THE WORLD'S FRESH WATER

Revelation 8:10-11 - Then the third angel blew his trumpet and there fell from the sky a huge star blazing like a torch. It fell upon a third of the rivers and springs of water. The name of the star is said to be Apsinthus (Wormwood). ...

- "Wormwood", a type of wood, "apsinthion" in Greek. A liqueur made from extract of wormwood is the French "absinthe". In Old Testament terms the bitterness of wormwood represents divine punishment -

... A third of all the waters turned into wormwood, and many people died because the waters had become so bitter.

THE FOURTH TRUMPET - A THIRD OF THE UNIVERSE IS DESTROYED

Revelation 8:12 - The fourth angel blew his trumpet, and a third-part of the sun, a third-part of the moon and a third of the stars were struck. A third-part of the light of each of them was darkened, so that light by day and light by night were both diminished by a third-part.

THE THREE CRIES OF WOE BECAUSE OF THE THREE REMAINING TRUMPETS

- The cries of the eagle separate the first four natural disasters which destroy a third of heaven and earth, from the last three which directly involve mankind:

Revelation 8:13 - Then in my vision I saw a solitary eagle flying in mid-heaven, crying in a loud voice, "Alas, alas, alas for the inhabitants of the earth for there are three more trumpet blasts which the three

angels shall sound!"

THE SYMBOLS IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION

The Book of Revelation is full of symbolism, no more so than in the remaining chapters. Some of the symbols are outlined here together with their possible interpretation, both contemporary and eternal:

THE SERVANTS OF GOD

THE PREGNANT WOMAN - possibly representing God's chosen people, both Jew and Christian; possibly the mother of the Messiah and the Church

JESUS CHRIST, THE MESSIAH - possibly the male child born to the pregnant woman. Also THE LAMB and THE RIDER ON THE WHITE HORSE (but not the rider of Revelation 6:2, one of the four Horsemen of the Apocalypse)

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST; also THE BRIDE

ARCHANGEL MICHAEL - the Protector or guardian angel of Israel (Daniel 10:13,21; 12:1)

THE SAINTS - God's people, Christians, the saved

POWERS OPPOSED TO GOD

THE DEVIL or SATAN - possibly the Star fallen from heaven, the Angel or star of the Pit, Angel of the Abyss; personified as "Abaddon" (destruction) in Hebrew or "Apollyon" in Greek.

Also THE DRAGON, the red dragon, the primeval Serpent who is called the devil or Satan, the Adversary, the Accuser

HELL or THE GRAVE - the fathomless pit, the Abyss, "Sheol" or "Abaddon" (destruction) in Hebrew, "Hades" or "Apollyon" from the Greek; the place of the dead, where fallen angels are imprisoned, eternal separation from God

DEMONS, EVIL SPIRITS - the locusts or scorpion locusts

Contemporary translation - possibly mounted Parthian archers who could shoot backwards from their horses on the gallop. The Parthian Empire across the River Euphrates was a major threat to the Roman Empire

THE ANIMAL FROM THE SEA - the Beast from the Sea, an anti-God power, an authoritarian godless state

Contemporary translation - the Roman Empire. The capital Rome was "over the seas" relative to the province of Asia where John was writing. Personified as the dead emperor Nero who "returns to life" as the Book of Revelation develops.

Eternally - any world empire or system, and its leaders.

THE PROSTITUTE OR HARLOT; also "BABYLON", THE WOMAN

Contemporary translation - the city of Rome.

Eternally - the centre or centres of any world power or powers

THE ANIMAL FROM THE EARTH - the Beast from the Earth, an anti-god power, state-sanctioned, state-dominated religion

Contemporary translation - the high priest of Roman emperor-worship, possibly centred in the province of Asia.

Eternally - the god's, their worship and the "high priests" of material, spiritual, cultural or religious gods in any age

(any notes following in the text on the Powers Opposed to God are in RED)

A NOTE ON TIMES

"TIME, TIMES AND HALF A TIME" - "one year, two years and half a year" from Daniel 7:25, the 3 1/2 year period 168-165BC when the Jerusalem Temple was desecrated. Also equal to:

1,260 days or 42 months

THE FIFTH AND SIXTH TRUMPETS

THE FIFTH TRUMPET - A STAR FALLS WITH KEYS TO THE ABYSS; THE FIRST WOE STARTS

Revelation 9:1 - The fifth angel blew his trumpet. I saw a star (... the Angel of the Abyss, possibly Satan), that had fallen down from Heaven to earth, and he was given the key (of Death and Hades) to the fathomless pit (... the Abyss)

THE ABYSS IS OPENED, SMOKE ASCENDS, LOCUSTS APPEAR WITH THE POWER TO TORTURE THOSE WITHOUT GOD'S PROTECTION

Revelation 9:2-6 - Then he (the Angel of the Abyss) opened the pit and smoke like the smoke of a vast furnace rose out of it, so that the light of the sun and the air itself grew dark from the smoke of the pit.

Then out of the smoke emerged locusts (evil spirits or demons) to descend upon the earth. They were given powers like those of earthly scorpions. They had orders to do no harm to any grass, green thing or tree upon the earth, but to injure only those human beings who did not bear the seal of God('s protection) upon their foreheads. They were given no power to kill men, but only to torture them for five months. The torture they could inflict was like the pain of a scorpion's sting.

In those days men will seek death but they will never find it; they will long to die but death will elude them.

THE APPEARANCE OF THE LOCUSTS; THEIR KING, THE ANGEL NAMED "DESTROYER"; THE FIRST WOE ENDS

Revelation 9:7-12 - These locusts (possibly now symbolising mounted Parthian archers as instruments of Satan's purpose) looked to me in my vision like horses prepared for battle, On their heads were what appeared to be crowns like gold; their faces were like human faces, and they had long hair like women. Their teeth were like lion's teeth, their breasts were like iron-breastplates, and the noise of their wings was like the noise of a host of chariots and horses charging into battle. They have tails and stings like scorpions, and it is in their tails that they possess the power to injure men for five months. They have as their king the angel of the pit (possibly Satan), whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon and in Greek Apollyon, (meaning the destroyer).

The first disaster (or woe) is now past, but I see two more approaching.

THE SIXTH TRUMPET SOUNDS - FOUR ANGELS OF DEATH ARE RELEASED; THE SECOND WOE STARTS

Revelation 9:13-15 - Then the sixth angel blew his trumpet, and I heard a solitary voice speaking from the four corners of the golden altar that stands in the presence of God. And it said to the sixth angel who held the trumpet, "Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates (... the eastern boundary between Rome and her enemy, the Parthian Empire)!"

Then these four angels who had been held ready for the hour, the day, the month and the year, were set free to kill a third-part of all mankind.

A VISION OF 200 MILLION MOUNTED TROOPS; THE HORSE'S "BREATH" KILLS A THIRD OF MANKIND

Revelation 9:16-19 - The number of their horsemen (the possible Parthian invaders?) was two hundred million - I heard what their number was. In my vision I saw these horses and their riders, and their breastplates were fiery-red, blue and yellow. The horses' heads looked to me like the heads of lions, and out of their mouths poured fire and smoke and sulphur. A third of all mankind died from the fearful effects of these three, the fire, the smoke and the sulphur which pours out of their mouths. For the power of these horses lies in their mouths and in their tails. Indeed their tails are like serpents with heads, and with these they inflict injury.

THE REST OF MANKIND CONTINUES TO SIN

- With Six Trumpets sounded, and only one remaining, most of mankind still refuses to turn to the one God, and continues to worship the many gods of their own making:

Revelation 9:20-21 - The rest of mankind, who did not die in this fearful destruction, neither repented of the works of their own hands nor ceased to worship evil powers and idols of gold, silver, brass, stone or wood, which can neither see nor hear nor move. Neither did they repent of their murders, their sorceries, their sexual sins, nor of their thieving.

INTERLUDE - VISIONS OF THE POWERFUL ANGEL WITH THE LITTLE BOOK; THE TWO WITNESSES

ANOTHER ANGEL APPEARS, HOLDING A LITTLE BOOK; THE VOICES OF SEVEN THUNDERS SPEAK BUT ARE NOT REVEALED

Revelation 10:1-4 - Then I saw another mighty angel (like the "mighty angel" who called for someone to open the seven-sealed book, Revelation 5:2) descending from Heaven. He was clothed in a cloud, and there was a rainbow around his head. His face blazed like the sun, his legs like pillars of fire, and he had a little book ...

- Possibly the originally sealed scroll of Revelation 5:1 now open for all to see. Alternatively another scroll containing judgments specific to the "Roman Empire", rather than all mankind -

... lying open in his hand. He planted his right foot on the sea (Rome?), and his left foot on the land (the province of Asia where John is writing?), and then shouted with a loud voice like the roar of a lion. And when he shouted the seven thunders (perhaps another set of visions that John is told not to reveal) lifted their voices. When the seven thunders had rolled I was on the point of writing but I heard a voice from heaven, saying, "Seal up what the seven thunders said, but do not write it down!"

HIS WARNING; WHEN THE SEVENTH TRUMPET SOUNDS, GOD'S PURPOSE WILL BE COMPLETED

Revelation 10:5-7 - Then the angel whom I had seen bestriding the sea and the land raised his right hand to Heaven and swore by the living one of the timeless ages, who created Heaven, earth and sea and all that is in them: "There shall be no more delay! In the days which shall soon be announced by the trumpet-blast of the seventh angel the mysterious purpose of God shall be completed, as he assured his servants the prophets."

JOHN TAKES AND EATS THE ANGEL'S LITTLE BOOK; HIS DUTY TO PROPHESY

Revelation 10:8-11 - Then the voice which I had heard from Heaven was again in my ears, saying, "Go, and take the little book which lies open in the hand of the (mighty) angel whose feet are planted on both sea and land."

So I went off towards the angel, asking him to give me the little book.

"Take it," he said to me, "and eat it up (... absorb the "little book's" contents and message). It will be bitter to your stomach, but sweet as honey in your mouth (... the sweetness of God's words, but the bitterness of his judgments)."

Then I took the little book from the angel's hand and swallowed it. It was as sweet as honey to the taste but when I had eaten it up it was bitter to my stomach.

John is instructed to prophesy

Then they said to me, "It is again your duty (John's) to prophesy about many peoples, nations, languages and kings."

THE INNER TEMPLE OF GOD IS TO BE MEASURED; THE OUTER COURT IS FOR THE GENTILES

Revelation 11:1-2 - And I was given a measuring rod like a staff, and I was told, "Get up and measure the Temple of God, and the altar (... suggesting the Temple is to be preserved and protected), and count those who worship there. But leave out of your measurement the (Gentiles) courtyard outside the Temple - do not measure that at all. For it has been given over to the (pagan) nations, and they will trample over the holy city for forty-two months (or desecrate it for "time, times and half a time")."

THE POWER OF THE TWO WITNESSES UNTIL THEIR TESTIMONY IS FINISHED

Revelation 11:3-6 - "And I will give authority to my two witnesses (... the minimum legal requirement in Jewish law. There are various theories about their identity, but they bear some resemblance to Elijah and Moses who appeared with Jesus at his Transfiguration ...) to proclaim the message, clothed in sackcloth for twelve hundred and sixty days ("time, times and half a time")."

These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands (related to the message of Zechariah 4) which stand before the Lord of the earth. If anyone tries to harm them, fire issues from their mouths and consumes their enemies. Indeed, if anyone should try to hurt them, this is the way in which he will certainly meet his death. These (two) witnesses have power to shut up the sky and stop any rain from falling (as Elijah did, 1 Kings 17:1) during the time of their preaching. Moreover, they have power to turn the waters into blood, and to strike the earth with any plague as often as they wish (as Moses did with the plagues of Egypt, Exodus chapters 7-12).

THEY ARE KILLED BY THE BEAST OF THE ABYSS; MANKIND GLOATS OVER THEIR UNBURIED CORPSES

Revelation 11:7-10 - Then, when their work of witness is complete, the animal will come up out of the pit (... the first appearance of the Satanic Beast of the Abyss) and go to war with them. It will conquer and kill them, and their bodies will lie in the street of the great city, which is called by those with spiritual understanding, "Sodom" and "Egypt" - the very place where their Lord himself was crucified (... the great city is Jerusalem in this instance, but more likely Rome - "Babylon" in the rest of Revelation). For three and a half days (in return for three and a half years of preaching by the witnesses) men from all people and tribes and languages and nations will gaze upon their bodies and will not allow them to be buried. The inhabitants of the earth will gloat over them and will hold celebrations and send one another presents, because these two prophets had brought such misery to the inhabitants of the earth.

GOD BREATHES LIFE INTO THEM; THEY GO UP TO HEAVEN

Revelation 11:11-12 - But after three and a half days the Spirit of life from God entered them and they stood upright on their feet. This struck terror into the hearts of those who were watching them, and they heard a tremendous voice speaking to these two from Heaven, saying "Come up here!" And they went up to Heaven in a cloud in full view of their enemies.

AN EARTHQUAKE KILLS 7,000; THE SECOND WOE ENDS

Revelation 11:13-14 - And at that moment there was a great earthquake, a tenth-part of the city fell in ruins and seven thousand people were known to have been killed in the earthquake. The rest were terrified and acknowledged the glory of the God of Heaven.

The second disaster (or woe) is now past, and I see the third disaster following hard upon the heels of the second.

THE SEVENTH TRUMPET

THE SEVENTH TRUMPET SOUNDS - THE END TIMES HAVE COME; THE THIRD WOE STARTS

Revelation 11:15 - The seventh angel blew his trumpet. There arose loud voices in Heaven and they were saying, "The kingship of the world now belongs to our Lord and to his Christ, and he shall be king for timeless ages (... the end-times and the kingdom of Christ have come)!"

THE TWENTY FOUR ELDERS WORSHIP GOD, AND GIVE THANKS FOR HIS JUDGMENT

Revelation 11:16-18 - Then the twenty-four elders, who sit upon their thrones in the presence of God, prostrated themselves and, with bowed heads, worshipped God, saying: "We give you thanks, O Lord God Almighty, the one who is and who was and who is to come, because you have taken your great power and reigned. The nations were angry, and your wrath has come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that you should reward your servants the prophets and the saints, and those who fear your name, small and great, and should destroy those who destroy the earth!"

GOD'S TEMPLE IS OPENED AND THE ARK REVEALED; THE ELEMENTS RAGE

Revelation 11:19 - Then the Temple of God in Heaven was thrown open and the ark of his agreement (or covenant) within his Temple could be clearly seen (... the sacred and previously hidden ark of the covenant is revealed to all mankind with the coming of the Messiah). Accompanying this sight were flashes of lightning, loud noises, peals of thunder, an earthquake and a violent storm of hail.

VII - A SERIES OF SIGNS: THE WOMAN; THE DRAGON AND WAR IN HEAVEN; THE TWO BEASTS AND WAR ON EARTH

THE WOMAN AND THE DRAGON

A PREGNANT WOMAN APPEARS IN HEAVEN

Revelation 12:1-2 - Then a huge sign (or symbol) became visible in the sky - the figure of a woman (probably representing God's chosen people - both Jew and Christian, and the mother of the Messiah and the Church) clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars upon her head. She was pregnant, and cried out in her labour and in the pains of bringing forth her child (the Messiah who will defeat Satan)

A DRAGON APPEARS, READY TO DEVOUR HER NEWBORN

Revelation 12:3-4 - Then another sign (or symbol) became visible in the sky, and I saw that it was a huge red dragon (representing the primeval Serpent, the devil or Satan) with seven heads and ten horns (representing empires and rulers, the significance of which is outlined below), with a diadem upon each of his heads. His tail swept down a third of the stars in the sky and hurled them upon the earth (... perhaps the fallen angels who joined Satan). The dragon took his place in front of the woman who was about to give birth to a child, so that as soon as she did so he might devour it.

SHE BEARS A SON; HE IS TAKEN TO GOD'S THRONE, SHE FLEES TO A DESERT REFUGE

Revelation 12:5-6 - She gave birth to a male child (the Messiah and the Church) who is to shepherd all the nations "with a rod of iron". Her child was snatched up to God and to his throne, while the woman fled into the desert where she has a place prepared for her by God's command. There they will take care of her for twelve hundred and sixty days ("time, times and half a time").

A HEAVENLY WAR WITH THE DRAGON - SATAN, WHO IS THROWN TO EARTH

Revelation 12:7-9 - The war broke out in Heaven. Michael (one of the seven archangels of Judaism; the Protector, Defender, or guardian angel of Israel, Daniel 10:13,21; 12:1) and his angels battled with the dragon. The dragon and his angels (... Satan and the angels, soon to become "fallen") fought back, but they did not prevail and they were expelled from Heaven. So the huge dragon, the serpent of ancient times, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world, was hurled down upon the earth, and his angels were hurled down with him.

THE BLOOD OF THE LAMB OVERCOMES HIM; SATAN, IN FURY, THREATENS THE EARTH

Revelation 12:10-12 - Then I heard a great voice in Heaven cry: "Now the salvation and the power and kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ have come! For the accuser (Satan) of our brethren has been thrown down from this place (heaven), where he stood before our God accusing them day and night. Now they have conquered him through the blood of the Lamb, and through the Word to which they bore witness. They did not cherish life even in the face of death!

"Therefore, rejoice, O Heavens, and all you who live in the Heavens! But alas for the earth and the sea, for the devil has come down to you in great fury, knowing that his time is short (... Satan, thrown down from heaven to earth is determined to wreak vengeance)!"

THE DRAGON PURSUES THE WOMAN; WITH EAGLE'S WINGS, SHE FLIES TOWARDS SAFETY

Revelation 12:13-14 - And when the dragon (Satan) saw that he had been cast down upon the earth, he began to pursue the woman (the mother of the Messiah and the Church) who had given birth to the male child (the Messiah). But she was given two great (symbolic) eagle's wings so that she could fly to her place in the desert, where she is kept safe from the serpent (Satan) for a time and times and half a time.

HE SPEWS OUT A RIVER TO SWEEP HER AWAY; SHE ESCAPES, HE MAKES WAR ON GOD'S SAINTS

Revelation 12:15-17 - Then the serpent (Satan) ejected water from his mouth, streaming like a river in pursuit of the woman, to drown her in its flood. But the earth came to the woman's rescue, opened its mouth and swallowed up the river which the dragon (Satan) had emitted from his mouth. Then the dragon raged with fury against the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her children (of the Church) - those who keep the commandments of God and bear their witness to Jesus.

THE FIRST BEAST - FROM THE SEA

THE BEAST IS GIVEN THE DRAGON'S THRONE AND POWER

Revelation 13:1-3 - Then, as I stood on the sand of the sea-shore, there rose out of the sea before my eyes an animal (the Beast from the Sea) with seven heads and ten horns (see below). There were diadems upon its horns and blasphemous names upon its heads. The animal which I saw had the appearance of a leopard, though it had the feet of a bear and a mouth like the mouth of a lion (... the description derives from Daniel 7:1-7). Then the dragon gave it his own power and throne and great authority (... Satan delegates his powers to the Beast from the Sea, the world empire, the Roman Empire?). One of its heads appeared to have been wounded to death but the mortal wound had healed (... possibly referring to the dead emperor Nero, who it was believed at that time would return from the dead).

THE WORLD WORSHIPS THE DRAGON AND THE BEAST, WHO IS THOUGHT INVINCIBLE

Revelation 13:4 - The whole earth followed the animal (the Beast from the Sea) with wonder, and they worshipped the dragon (Satan) because he had given authority to the animal (the Beast, the world empire, Rome?). Then they worshipped the animal, too, saying, "Who is like the animal? Who could make war against it?"

THE BEAST BLASPHEMES GOD; WITH AUTHORITY OVER ALL MANKIND, HE WARS AGAINST THE SAINTS; THEY ARE COUNSELLED TO ENDURE

Revelation 13:5-10 - It (the Beast, Rome?) was allowed to speak monstrous blasphemies (against God) and to exert its authority for forty-two months ("time, times and half a time").

So it poured out blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling place and those who live in Heaven. Moreover, it was permitted to make war upon the saints (the Christians) and to conquer them; the authority given to it extended over every tribe and people and language and nation. All the inhabitants of the earth will worship it (in the form of emperor-worship) - all those whose names have not been written in the book of life (for saved Christians) which belongs to the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

Parenthetical: a word to the reader

Let the listener hear this: If any man is destined for captivity he will go into captivity. If any man kills with the sword he must himself be killed with the sword. Amid all this stands the endurance and faith of the saints.

THE SECOND BEAST - FROM THE EARTH

HE FORCES MANKIND TO WORSHIP THE FIRST BEAST

Revelation 13:11-12 - Then I saw another animal rising out of the earth (the Beast of the Earth, the high priest of emperor-worship), and it had two horns like a lamb (representing the anti-christ) but it spoke in the voice of a dragon (like Satan). It uses the full authority of the first animal (the Beast from the Sea, Rome?) in its presence. It compels the earth and all its inhabitants to worship the first animal (the Beast from the Sea) - the one with the mortal wound which had healed.

HIS MIRACLES DECEIVE MANKIND; THEY MUST HONOUR THE FIRST BEAST'S IMAGE, OR DIE

Revelation 13:13-15 - It (... the Beast from the Earth, the high-priest of emperor-worship, the anti-christ) performs great signs: before men's eyes it makes fire fall down from heaven to earth. It deceives the inhabitants of the earth by the signs which it is allowed to perform in the presence of the animal (the Beast from the Sea, Rome), and it tells them to make a statue (of the emperor) in honour of the animal which received the sword-thrust and yet survived. Further, it was allowed to give the breath of life to the statue of the animal so that the statue could speak (through priestly trickery and mechanisms) and condemn to death all those who do not worship its statue.

UNLESS MANKIND IS "MARKED" NONE CAN BUY AND SELL; THE MARK OF THE BEAST IS "SIX SIX SIX"

Revelation 13:16-18 - Then it (the Beast from the Earth, the high priest) compels all, small and great, rich and poor, free men and slaves, to receive a mark on their right hands or on their foreheads (... possibly a real identification mark allowing economic control to be exercised). The purpose of this is that no one should be able to buy or sell unless he bears the mark of the name of the animal or the number of its name (... the mark of the Beast). Understanding is needed here: let every thinking man calculate the number of the animal. It is the number of a man, and its number is six hundred and sixty-six.

- Of the various interpretations of this ancient art of using numbers to symbolise names, the most frequently suggested is the emperor Nero and the Roman Empire's agents of control and persecution.

INTERLUDE - VISIONS OF THE SAVED IN HEAVEN AND DOOMED ON EARTH; THE SIX ANGELS

- Persecution and hostility may be the lot of Christians on earth, but they will know the very opposite in heaven:

THE LAMB ON MOUNT ZION; THE 144,000 MARKED BY GOD; THE HEAVENLY CHOIR

Revelation 14:1-5 - Then I looked again and before my eyes the Lamb (of God, Jesus Christ) was standing on Mount Sion (or Zion), and with him were a hundred and forty-four thousand who had his name and his Father's name written upon their foreheads (either the same group from Revelation 7:1-8, or saved Christians in general; the Mark of God contrasts with the mark of the Beast). Then I heard a sound coming from Heaven like the roar of a great waterfall and the heavy rolling of thunder. Yet the sound which I heard was also like the music of harpists sweeping their strings. And now they are singing a new song of praise before the throne, and before the four living creatures and the (twenty-four) elders. No one could learn that song except the one hundred and forty-four thousand who had been redeemed from the earth. These are the men who have never defiled themselves with women, for they are celibate (possibly a literal meaning. Alternatively, as celibacy is not considered more Godly than marriage in the Bible, it may mean those who have been obedient to God's commandments). These are the men who follow the Lamb wherever he may go; these men have been redeemed from among mankind as first-fruits to God and to the Lamb. They have never been guilty of any falsehood; they are beyond reproach.

- Six angelic pronouncements are now made, three on God's approaching judgment on the world, three on the execution of his verdict:

THE FIRST ANGEL PROCLAIMS THE GOSPEL; A LAST CALL TO EVERYONE TO WORSHIP GOD

Revelation 14:6-7 - Then I saw another angel flying in mid-heaven, holding the everlasting (eternal) Gospel to proclaim to the inhabitants of the earth - to every nation and tribe and language and people. He was crying in a loud voice, "Reverence God, and give glory to him; for the

hour of his judgment has come! Worship him who made Heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water."

THE SECOND ANGEL ANNOUNCES THE FALL OF WICKED BABYLON

Revelation 14:8 - Then another, a second angel, followed him crying, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great (pagan Rome?)! She who made all nations drink the wine of her passionate unfaithfulness (or adultery - idolatry in Old Testament terms)!"

THE THIRD ANGEL DECLARES THAT ALL WHO WORSHIP THE BEAST WILL KNOW GOD'S WRATH; THE SAINTS MUST STILL ENDURE

Revelation 14:9-13 - Then a third angel followed these two, crying in a loud voice, "If any man worships the animal (the Beast from the Sea, Rome?) and its statue (raised by the Beast from the Earth, the high priest of emperor-worship) and bears its mark ("666") upon his forehead or upon his hand, then that man shall drink the wine of God's passion, poured undiluted into the cup of his wrath. He shall be tortured by fire and sulphur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb (of God). The smoke of such men's torture ascends for timeless ages, and there is no respite from it day or night. Such are the worshippers of the animal and its statue and among their number are all who bear the mark of its name ("666")."

The call to stand fast

In all this stands the endurance of the saints - those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.

The security of the saints

Then I heard a voice from Heaven, saying, "Write this! From henceforth happy are the dead who die in the Lord!"

"Happy indeed," says the Spirit, "for they rest from their labours and their deeds go with them!"

- Like the Gospel parables on the final separation of good from evil, such as "the wheat and weeds in the field" (Matthew 13:24-30,36-43), the final harvest now takes place. This may be in two parts - Christ harvesting the wheat, the "saved"; then an angel harvesting the grapes, the "wicked":

THE "SON OF MAN" SEATED ON A CLOUD, HOLDING A SICKLE

Revelation 14:14 - Once again I looked, and a white cloud appeared before me with someone sitting upon the cloud with the appearance of

'the Son of Man' (Daniel 7:13).

He (presumably Christ) had a golden crown on his head, and held a sharp sickle in his hand.

THE FOURTH ANGEL CALLS FOR THE "SON" TO HARVEST THE EARTH

Revelation 14:15-16 - Then another angel came out from the Temple, calling in a loud voice to the one sitting on the cloud, "Thrust in your sickle and reap, for the time of reaping has come and the harvest of the earth is fully ripe!"

Then the one sitting upon the cloud swung his sickle upon the earth, and the reaping of the earth was done (Christ has harvested the "saved"?).

THE FIFTH ANGEL APPEARS, ALSO WITH A SICKLE

Revelation 14:18 - Then another angel came out from the Temple in Heaven, and he also had a sharp sickle.

A SIXTH ANGEL ORDERS THE EARTH'S GRAPES TO BE HARVESTED, AND THROWN INTO GOD'S WINEPRESS; BLOOD FLOWS DEEP AND FAR

Revelation 14:18-20 - Yet another angel came out from the altar where he had command over the fire, and called out in a loud voice to the angel with the sharp sickle, "Thrust in your sharp sickle and harvest the clusters from the vineyard of the earth for the grapes are fully ripe!"

Then the angel swung his sickle upon the earth and gathered the harvest of the earth's vineyard (the wicked?), and threw it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. The grapes were trodden outside the city (probably Jerusalem), and out of the winepress flowed blood for two hundred miles (or 1600 stadia, possibly another symbolic number - 4 x 4 x 100, representing the destruction of all evil) in a stream as high as the horses' bridles.

- Although chapter 14 has seen the final harvest or at least its description, there is a final set of sevenfold judgments to be endured:

VIII - SEVEN ANGELS POUR OUT THE LAST SEVEN PLAGUES OF GOD'S WRATH

JOHN SEES THE ANGELS AND THOSE WHO ENDURED PERSECUTION; THEIR SONG GLORIFIES GOD

Revelation 15:1-4 - Then I saw another sign (or symbol) in Heaven, vast and awe-inspiring: seven angels are holding the seven last plagues, and with these the wrath of God is brought to an end.

The hymn of the redeemed

And I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass shot through with fire, and upon this glassy sea were standing those (the Christians who had endured persecution) who had emerged victorious from the fight with the animal (the Beast from the Sea, Rome?), its statue (erected by the Beast from the Land) and the number ("666") which denotes its name. In their hands they hold harps which God has given them, and they are singing the song of Moses the servant of God (sung after the crossing of the Red Sea, Exodus 15:1-21), and the song of the Lamb (of God), and these are the words they sing: 'Great and marvellous are your works, Lord God Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O king of the saints! Who shall not fear you, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. For all nations shall come and worship before you, for your judgments have been manifested!" (The Song of Moses may represent the 144,000 saved of Israel, and the Song of the Lamb, the great Multitude of Gentiles, Revelation 7).

SEVEN ANGELS LEAVE THE TEMPLE WITH THE PLAGUES; THEY RECEIVE THE BOWLS OF GOD'S WRATH

Revelation 15:5-16:1 - Later in my vision I saw the Temple of the tabernacle of testimony in Heaven wide open, and out of the Temple came forth the seven angels who hold the seven plagues. They were dressed (as priests) in spotless shining linen, and they were girded round their breasts with golden girdles.

Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls filled with the wrath of God who lives for timeless ages. The Temple was filled with smoke from the glory and power of God, and no one could enter the Temple (to plead with God for further mercy) until the seven plagues of the seven angels were past and over (and the doom of the wicked complete).

(Chapter 16 ....) Then I heard a loud voice from the Temple saying to the seven angels, "Go and pour out upon the earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God!"

- Now the Beast has appeared (Revelation 13), the Seven Bowls of wrath, unlike the the judgments of the Seven Seals and Seven Trumpets, are poured out on him and his followers, and with a far greater intensity and completeness. Some of the plagues are like those visited on Egypt by Moses before the Exodus:

THE FIRST ANGEL ON THE LAND - SORES BREAK OUT ON THE WORSHIPPERS OF THE BEAST

Revelation 16:2 - The first angel went off and emptied his bowl upon the earth. Whereupon loathsome and malignant ulcers (similar to those of Exodus 9:8-12) attacked all those who bore the mark ("666") of the animal (the Beast from the Sea) and worshipped its statue.

THE SECOND ANGEL ON THE SEA - EVERYTHING IN IT DIES

Revelation 16:3 - The second angel emptied his bowl into the sea, which turned into a fluid like the blood of a corpse, and every living thing in it died.

THE THIRD ANGEL ON THE FRESH WATERS - HE SPEAKS OF GOD'S JUDGMENT

Revelation 16:4-7 - Then the third angel emptied his bowl into the rivers and springs of water, and they turned into blood (the last two judgments are similar to those of Exodus 7:17-21). And I heard the angel of the waters say, "You are righteous, O Lord, the one who is and who was and who is to be, because you have judged these things. For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink. For it is their just due."

And I heard the altar say, "Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are your judgments."

THE FOURTH ANGEL ON THE SUN - THE PEOPLE ARE SCORCHED

Revelation 16:8-9 - The fourth angel emptied his bowl over the sun, and the sun was given power to scorch men in its fiery blaze. Then men were terribly burned in the heat, and they blasphemed the name of God who has control over these afflictions; but they neither repented nor gave him glory.

THE FIFTH ANGEL ON THE BEAST'S THRONE - IT'S KINGDOM IS IN DARKNESS, MEN ARE IN AGONY; BUT STILL THEY WILL NOT REPENT

Revelation 16:10-11 - Then the fifth angel emptied his bowl upon the throne of the animal (the Beast from the Sea, the City of Rome?). Its kingdom was plunged into darkness; men gnawed their tongues in agony, cursed the God of Heaven for their pain and their ulcers, but refused to repent of what they had done.

THE SIXTH ANGEL ON THE RIVER EUPHRATES - ITS WATERS DRY UP

Revelation 16:12 - Then the sixth angel emptied his bowl upon the great River Euphrates (separating the Roman and Parthian empires). The waters of that river were dried up to prepare a road for the kings from the east (Either to allow the Parthians or these kings to invade the west at their leisure, or for them to join with the Beast in his attack on the Lamb).

THREE SPIRITS GATHER THE KINGS OF THE EARTH FOR THE BATTLE OF ARMAGEDDON

Revelation 16:13-16 - And then I noticed three foul spirits, looking like frogs (mythological miracle-working demons or agents of Satan; also related to the plague of frogs in Exodus 8:2-6) emerging from the mouths of ...

the dragon (Satan),

the animal (the Beast from the Sea, Rome?) and

the false prophet (the Beast from the Earth, the high priest of emperor-worship). ...

... They are diabolical spirits performing wonders and they set out to muster all the kings of the world for battle on the great day of God, the Almighty (drawing together all the nations and forces of evil to resist God's judgment).

So they brought them together to the place called, in Hebrew, Armageddon (Har-Magedon, the "Mount" or "Mountain of Megiddo", an ancient city on the coastal road through Israel from Egypt to the North, the scene of many battles in Old Testament times and later, including 1918. It is used as a symbol of all battles and the final battle).

The words in the background

- An insertion into these cataclysmic events allowing Christ to comfort faithful Christians:

"See, I am coming like a thief! Happy is the man who stays awake and keeps his clothes at his side, so that he will not have to walk naked and men see his shame."

THE SEVENTH ANGEL INTO THE AIR - NATURAL CATASTROPHES STRIKE MEN AND CITIES, ESPECIALLY BABYLON

Revelation 16:17-21 - The seventh angel emptied his bowl into the air. A loud voice came out of the Temple, from the throne, saying, "The end has come!" (The final judgment, this time not poured out on the earth, but in the air.)

Then followed flashes of lightning, noises and peals of thunder. There was a terrific earthquake, the like of which no man has ever seen since mankind began to live upon the earth - so great and tremendous was this earthquake. The great city (usually considered to be "Babylon" - Rome) was split into three

parts, and the (remaining) cities of all the nations fell in ruins. And God called to mind Babylon the great and made her drink the cup of the wine of his furious wrath. Every island fled and the mountains vanished. Great hailstones (as in Exodus 9:18-26) like heavy weights fell from the sky and men blasphemed God for the curse of the hail, for it fell upon them with savage and fearful blows.

- So ends the series of Seven Seals, Seven Trumpets, and Seven Bowls of Wrath. Whether these follow each other in time, overlap, or more likely take place simultaneously is not known. The end of the age, the end-times, have now come when the forces of Heaven and of Satan will do final battle.

IX - THE FALL OF BABYLON

THE PROSTITUTE BABYLON SITTING ON THE BEAST

- Babylon, the ancient city on the River Euphrates, had become an emblem of a godless culture at the heights (or depths) of its powers, and was often pictured as a prostitute dominating her clients. By

New Testament times, Rome and the Roman Empire with its corruption, emperor worship, torture and persecution had become equated with the Babylon of old:

AN ANGEL ANNOUNCES THE PUNISHMENT OF THE GREAT WORLD PROSTITUTE, BABYLON

Revelation 17:1-2 - Then came one of the seven angels who held the seven bowls, and said to me, "Come, and I will show you the judgment passed upon the great harlot ("Babylon", Rome?) who is seated upon many waters. It is with her that the kings of the earth have debauched themselves and the inhabitants of the earth have become drunk on the wine of her filthiness (Old Testament imagery for accepting the overlordship of "Babylon", the worship of Rome and its paganism)."

JOHN SEES THE WOMAN SITTING ON A SCARLET BEAST, DRUNK WITH THE SAINT'S BLOOD

Revelation 17:3-6a - Then he carried me away in spirit into the desert. There I saw a woman ("Babylon", Rome) riding upon a scarlet animal (the great political and military power of the Roman Empire. Scarlet represents the pomp and splendour of that power), covered with blasphemous titles (imperial titles claiming divinity) and having seven heads and ten horns (see below). The woman herself was dressed in purple and scarlet, glittering with gold, jewels and pearls (symbols of her incredible wealth). In her hand she held a golden cup full of the earth's filthiness and her own foul impurity. On her forehead is written a name with a secret meaning - BABYLON THE GREAT, MOTHER OF ALL HARLOTS AND OF THE EARTH'S ABOMINATIONS.

Then I noticed that the woman was drunk with the blood of the saints and of the martyrs for Jesus.

THE MYSTERY EXPLAINED; THE BEAST OF THE ABYSS WILL BE DESTROYED

Revelation 17:6b-8 - As I watched her, I was filled with utter amazement, but the angel said to me, "Why are you amazed? I will explain to you the mystery of the woman (Rome) and of the animal (the Roman Empire, perhaps now personified as the dead emperor Nero) with seven heads and ten horns which carries her. The animal, which you saw, once lived but now is no more ("Nero"?) - it will come up out of the pit (or Abyss of the dead) only to meet with destruction. The inhabitants of the earth, whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, will be utterly astonished when they see that the animal was, and is not, and yet is to come (Nero supposedly returning from the dead?).

THE BEAST'S SEVEN HEADS REPRESENT THE RISE AND FALL OF KINGS; THE BEAST IS THE EIGHTH KING

Revelation 17:9-11 - (Here we need a mind with understanding.)

"The seven heads are seven hills on which the woman takes her seat (Rome, the city on seven hills). There are also seven kings (emperors or empires);

five have been dethroned (if these are Roman emperors, possibly Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula or Gaius Caesar, Claudius and Nero who reigned from 30BC to AD68, then all are by now dead. Three more emperors then appeared in quick succession AD68-69),

one reigns (possibly the emperor Vespasian, AD69-79. If so suggesting an earlier date for the Book of Revelation)

and the other has not yet appeared (this would then be the emperor Titus, AD79-81) - when he comes he must remain only for a short time. ...

... As for the animal which once lived but now lives no longer, it is an eighth king (possibly the returning dead "Nero"? Domitian AD81-96 who was nicknamed "Nero", actually succeeded Titus) which belongs to the seven, but it goes to utter destruction.

THE TEN HORNS ARE TEN MORE KINGS WHO WILL WAR UNSUCCESSFULLY AGAINST THE LAMB

Revelation 17:12-14 - The ten horns which you saw are ten kings (perhaps Roman emperors or province governors, or minor kings of Parthia who will ally themselves with "Nero") who have not yet received their power to reign, but they will receive authority to be kings for one hour (a short period equivalent to the short reign of "Nero") in company with the animal ("Nero"?). They are of one mind, and they will hand over their power and authority to the animal. They will all go to war with the Lamb (of God), and the Lamb, with his called, chosen and faithful followers, will conquer them. For he is Lord of lords and King of kings."

GOD WILL ALLOW THE BEAST AND TEN KINGS TO DESTROY BABYLON

Revelation 17:15-18 - Then he said to me, "As for the waters which you saw, on which the woman took her seat, they are peoples and vast crowds, nations and languages. The ten horns (minor Parthian kings?) and the animal ("Nero"?) which you saw will loathe the harlot (Rome?), and leave her deserted and naked ("Nero" will take his revenge on Rome for his enforced suicide in AD68). Moreover, they will devour her flesh, and then consume her with fire. For God has put it into their hearts to carry out his purpose by making them of one mind, and by handing over their authority to the animal, until the words of God have been fulfilled.

"The woman that you saw is the great city ("Babylon", Rome) which dominates the kings of the earth."

THE FALL, EARTHLY LAMENT FOR, AND DESTRUCTION OF BABYLON

AN ANGEL ANNOUNCES THE FALL OF WICKED BABYLON

Revelation 18:1-3 - Later I saw another angel coming down from Heaven, armed with great authority. The earth shone with the splendour of his presence, and he cried in a mighty voice, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great (Rome?)! She has become a haunt of devils, a prison for every unclean spirit, and a cage for every foul and hateful bird. For all nations have drunk the wine of her passionate unfaithfulness and have fallen thereby. The kings of the earth have debauched themselves with her, and the merchants of the earth have grown rich from the extravagance of her dissipation (reflecting Rome's vast wealth and power)!"

GOD'S PEOPLE ARE TOLD TO LEAVE AND ESCAPE THE JUDGMENT ON BABYLON

Revelation 18:4-8 - Then I heard another voice from Heaven, crying, "Come out from her, O my people, lest you become accomplices in her sins and must share in her punishment. For her sins have mounted up to the sky, and God has remembered the tale of her wickedness. Pay her back in her own coin - yes, pay her back double for all that she has done! In the cup which she mixed for others mix her a drink of double strength! For the pride in which she flaunted herself give her torture and misery! Because she says to herself, 'Here I sit a queen on a throne; I am no woman who lacks a man and I shall never know sorrow!' So in a single day her punishments shall strike her - death, sorrow and famine and she shall be burned in the fire. For mighty is the Lord God who judges her!"

- Three groups now lament the fall of Babylon (Rome?) - the kings who relied on her support and power, and the merchants and seafaring traders who grew rich on her vast consumption and commerce:

THE WORLD'S RULERS AND MERCHANTS LAMENT HER DESTRUCTION

Revelation 18:9-17a - Then the kings of the earth, who debauched and indulged themselves with her, will wail and lament over her. Standing at a safe distance through very fear of her torment, they will watch the smoke of her burning and cry, "Alas, alas for the great city, Babylon the mighty city, that your judgment should come in a single hour."

The merchants of the earth shall also wail and lament over her, for there is no one left to buy their goods - cargoes of gold and silver, jewels and pearls, fine linen, purple, silk and scarlet, all kinds of scented wood, every sort of ivory vessel, every kind of vessel of precious wood, of bronze, iron and marble; cinnamon, spice, incense, myrrh, frankincense, wine, oil, fine flour and corn; cattle, sheep and horses; chariots, slaves (and gladiators to die for public entertainment), the very souls of men.

Those who bought and sold these things, who had gained their wealth from her, will stand afar off through fear of her punishment, weeping and lamenting and saying, "Alas, alas for the great city that was dressed in fine linen, purple and scarlet, and was bedecked with gold and jewels and pearls - alas that in a single hour all that wealth should be destroyed!"

THE SEAFARING TRADERS OF THE WORLD JOIN IN THE LAMENT

Revelation 18:17b-19 - Then every shipmaster and seafarer - sailors and all whose business is upon the sea - stood and watched the smoke of her burning from afar, and cried out, "What city was ever like the great city?"

They even threw dust on their heads and cried aloud as they wept, saying, "Alas, alas for the great city where all who had ships on the sea grew wealthy through the richness of her treasure! Alas that in a single hour she should be ruined!"

AN ANGEL DESCRIBES THE VIOLENT END OF BABYLON AND ITS PEOPLE

Revelation 18:20-24 - Rejoicing in heaven is now heard:

"Rejoice over her fate, O Heaven, and all you saints, apostles and prophets! For God has pronounced his judgment for you against her!"

The words of Babylon's doom

Then a mighty angel lifted up a stone like a huge mill-stone and hurled it into the sea, saying, "So shall Babylon the great city (Rome?) be sent hurtling down to disappear for ever (never to rise again)! Never more shall the sound of harpists and musicians, flute-players and trumpeters be heard in you again! Never again shall a craftsman of any craft be found in you; never again will the sound of the mill-stone's grinding be heard in you! No light of a lamp shall ever shine in you again, and the voices of bridegroom and bride shall be heard in you no more! The fruit of your soul's desire is lost to you for ever. All your luxuries and brilliance are lost to you and men will never find them in you again!

"For your merchants were the great ones of the earth, and all nations were seduced by your witchery!"

For in her was discovered the blood of prophets and saints, indeed the blood of all who were ever slaughtered upon the earth (possibly both Jews and Christians, but only during Rome's period of power).

HEAVEN'S JOYFUL RESPONSE TO THE FALL OF BABYLON

- Heaven now rings out with four Alleluia's or Hallelujah's - from the Hebrew for "praise the Lord". This is the only time the term appears in the New Testament.

Joy over the destruction of the city and its people, and the avenging of Christian martyrs is not easy to accept. Yet the Bible is full of warnings about the fate of those who fail to worship and obey God, and in the New Testament to do so through Jesus Christ. We can accept or reject this in the light of our own views on fairness, humanity, love and so on, but we cannot with any sincerity, soften or explain away these and similar divine warnings:

A HEAVENLY CHOIR SINGS OF GOD'S JUDGMENT ON BABYLON

Revelation 19:1-3 - Afterwards I heard what sounded like the mighty roar of a vast crowd in Heaven, crying, "Alleluia! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for his judgments are true and just.

He has judged the great harlot (Babylon, Rome?) who corrupted the earth with her wickedness, and he has avenged upon her the blood of his servants!" Then they cried a second time, "Alleluia! The smoke of her destruction ascends for timeless ages!"

THE ELDERS AND LIVING CREATURES WORSHIP GOD; THERE ARE MORE CALLS TO WORSHIP

Revelation 19:4-5 - Then the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures prostrated themselves and worshipped God who is seated upon the throne, saying, "Amen, alleluia!"

Then out of the throne came a voice, saying, "Praise our God, all you who serve him, all you who reverence him, both small and great!"

REJOICING THAT THE LAMB IS TO MARRY THE BRIDE; BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO ARE INVITED

Revelation 19:6-10 - And then I heard a sound (from heaven) like the voices of a vast crowd, the roar of a great waterfall and the rolling of heavy thunder, and they were saying, "Alleluia! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, has come into his kingdom! Let us rejoice, let us be glad with all our hearts. Let us give him the glory, for the wedding-day of the Lamb (Christ) has come, and his bride (the beloved Church, Ephesians 5:25) has made herself ready. She may be seen dressed in linen, gleaming and spotless - for such linen is the righteous living of the saints (the simplicity of the bridal Church is contrasted with the gaudiness of the prostitute Babylon)!"

Instruction to John

Then he said to me, "Write this down: Happy are those who are invited to the wedding-feast of the Lamb!"

Then he added, "These are true words of God."

At that I fell at his feet to worship him, but he said to me, "No! I am your fellow-servant and fellow-servant with your brothers who are holding fast their witness to Jesus. Give your worship to God!"

(This witness to Jesus inspires all prophecy.)

THE CONCLUSION OF GOD'S JUDGMENT ON THE UNIVERSE
Chapters 19:11-22:21

The Book of Revelation concludes with:

- God's final victory over Satan and his Final Judgment (19:11-20:15),

- Followed by the descent from heaven of the new Jerusalem where He will live with the saved (21:1-22:5).

An epilogue is Christ's final appeal to all mankind to be saved by God's grace (22:6-21).

X - FINAL VICTORY AND JUDGMENT

CHRIST'S VICTORY OVER THE TWO BEASTS

THE RIDER, CHRIST, ON THE WHITE HORSE, AND HIS ARMIES

Revelation 19:11-16 - Then I saw Heaven wide open, and before my eyes appeared a white horse, whose rider (Christ) is called faithful and true, for his judgment and his warfare are just. His eyes are a flame of fire and there are many diadems upon his head. There is a name written upon him, known only to himself. He is dressed in a cloak dipped in blood, and the name by which he is known is the Word of God.

The armies of Heaven follow him, riding upon white horses and clad in white and spotless linen. Out of his mouth there comes a sharp sword with which to strike the nations.

'He will rule them with a rod of iron' (Psalm 2:9),

and alone he will tread the winepress of the furious wrath of God the Almighty. Written upon his cloak and upon his thigh is the name, KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

THE BEAST AND THE FALSE PROPHET ARE DESTROYED

Revelation 19:17-21 - Then I saw an angel standing alone in the blazing light of the sun, and he shouted in a loud voice, calling to all the birds flying in mid-air, "Come, flock together to God's great feast! Here you may eat the flesh of kings and captains, the flesh of strong men, of horses and their riders - the flesh of all men, free men and slaves, small and great!"

And I saw the animal (the Beast from the Sea, Rome now personified as "Nero"?) with the kings of the earth (the Parthian kings?) and their armies massed together for battle against the rider upon the horse and his army. The animal was captured and with it the false prophet (still the Beast from the Earth, the high priest of emperor-worship?) who had performed marvels in its presence, which he had used to deceive those who accepted the mark of the animal ("666") and worshipped its statue. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with sulphur (fire and brimstone).

The rest were killed by the sword which issues from the mouth of the rider upon the horse; and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh.

SATAN IS OVERTHROWN; GOD MAKES HIS FINAL JUDGMENT

SATAN, THE DECEIVER, IS BOUND AND IMPRISONED FOR A THOUSAND YEARS

Revelation 20:1-3 - Then I saw an angel coming down from Heaven with the key of the pit (Abyss) and a huge chain in his hand. He seized the dragon (Satan), the serpent of ancient days, who is both the devil and Satan, and bound him fast for a thousand years (a millennium). Then he (the angel) hurled him (Satan) into the pit (the Abyss), and locked and sealed it over his head, so that he could deceive the nations no more until the thousand years were past. But then he must be set free for a little while.

- The period of a thousand years and sequence of events has led to endless speculation and theorising over the centuries. It is possibly a length of time symbolic of the Church's life on earth, during which time the Gospel is preached to all mankind while Satan is restrained by God. At the end-time, the second coming of Christ and the destruction of Satan finally takes place.

THE FIRST RESURRECTION - CHRIST AND THE SAINTS REIGN FOR A THOUSAND YEARS

Revelation 20:4-6 - And I saw thrones, with appointed judges seated upon them. Then I saw the souls of those who had been executed for their witness to Jesus and for proclaiming the Word of God - those who never worshipped the animal (Beast from the Sea, Rome?) or its statue, and had not accepted its mark upon their foreheads or their hands. They (the Christian saints and martyrs only) came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years (the millennial kingdom. The rest of the dead - all the other Christians - did not come to life until the thousand years were over.) This is the first resurrection. Happy and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! The second death (after the Last Judgment) cannot touch such men; they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him for the thousand years.

SATAN IS RELEASED; THE FINAL BATTLE; HIS DESTRUCTION

Revelation 20:7-10 - Then, when the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison, and will set out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog (... representing all who oppose God in the last great battle by Satan at the end of time, Ezekiel 38), and to lead them into battle. They will be as numerous as the sand of the seashore.

They came up and spread over the breadth of the earth; they encircled the army of the saints defending the beloved city (Jerusalem). But fire came down from the sky and consumed them. The devil(Satan, the first of the "trinity" of evil) who deceived them was hurled into the lake of fire and sulphur to join the animal and the false prophet (the second and third parts of this same "trinity"). And there they shall be tortured day and night for timeless ages.

THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD; THE LAST JUDGMENT

Revelation 20:11-15 - And then I saw a great white throne, and one seated upon it from whose presence both earth and sky fled and vanished (heaven and earth have perhaps disappeared).

Then I saw the dead (who had not shared in the first resurrection), great and small, standing (risen and embodied) before the throne and the books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books concerning what they had done. The sea gave up its dead, and death and the grave gave up the dead which were in them. And men were judged, each according to what he had done.

Then death and the grave (Hades) were themselves hurled into the lake of fire, which is the second death (following the Last Judgment). If anyone's name (the wicked) was not found written in the book of life he was thrown into the (eternal) lake of fire.

XI - GOD'S NEW WORLD

THE NEW JERUSALEM - A NEW HEAVEN AND A NEW EARTH

GOD PROCLAIMS THE NEW HEAVEN AND THE NEW EARTH

- Satan and all his evil works are no more; the Last Judgment has taken place; God now provides a new dwelling for all who have been saved:

Revelation 21:1-5 - Then I saw a new Heaven and a new earth (the new Jerusalem), for the first Heaven and the first earth had disappeared and the sea was no more (they are no longer fit for God's people). I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, descending from God out of Heaven, prepared as a bride (the Church) dressed in beauty for her husband (Christ). Then I heard a great voice from the throne crying, "See! The home of God is with men, and he will live among them ...

- The "Shekinah" glory, a Hebrew term expressing the majesty of God living among his people. Also "Immanuel" or "Emmanuel" meaning "God with us" - the prophecy about Jesus in Matthew 1:23:

... They shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death shall be no more, and never again shall there be sorrow or crying or pain. For all those former things are past and gone (suffering, pain, death, and all the results of the fall of man are no more)."

Then he who is seated upon the throne said, "See, I am making all thing new!"

And he added, "Write this down for my words are true and to be trusted!"

THE GLORIOUS REWARDS OF THE BELIEVER; THE DEATH OF THE WICKED

Revelation 21:6-8 - Then he said to me, "It is done! I am Alpha and Omega (a description of God in Revelation 1:8, and of Christ shortly in 22:13), the beginning and the end. I will give to the thirsty water without price (as in John 7:37-38) from the fountain of life. The victorious (referred to in the third part of each of the covering letters to the seven churches of Asia) shall inherit these things, and I will be God to him and he will be son to me. But as for the cowards, the faithless and the corrupt, the murderers, the traffickers in sex and sorcery, the worshippers of idols and all liars - their inheritance is in the lake which burns with fire and sulphur (fire and brimstone), which is the second death (following the Last Judgment)."

THE NEW JERUSALEM REVEALED, MEASURED, AND DESCRIBED

Revelation 21:9-21 - Then one of the seven angels who hold the seven bowls which were filled with the seven last plagues, came to me and said, "Come, and I will show you the bride (the Church), the wife of the Lamb (of God - Christ)."

Then he carried me away in spirit to the top of a vast mountain, and pointed out to me the city, the holy Jerusalem, descending from God out of Heaven, radiant with the glory of God. ...

- John describes the New Jerusalem in terms of the most beautiful objects he can imagine. To some modern readers, these might even conjure up visions of the colossal, magnificent structures of some science fiction galactic city:

... Her brilliance sparkled like a very precious jewel with the clear light of crystal. ...

Around her she had a vast and lofty wall in which were twelve gateways with twelve angels at the gates.

There were twelve names inscribed over the twelve gateways, and they are the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel.

On the east there were three gateways, on the north three gateways, on the south three gateways and on the west three gateways.

The wall of the city had twelve foundation stones, and on these were engraved the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

The measurement of the city

The one (an angel) who was talking to me had a golden rod in his hand with which to measure the city, its gateways and its wall. ...

The city lies foursquare, its length equal to its breadth.

He measured the city with his rod and it was twelve thousand furlongs (or stadia, about 1,400 miles or 2,200 km. Again presumably a symbolic number, 12 x 1,000) in each direction, for its length, breadth and height are all equal (a cube 1,400 miles on each side). Then he measured its wall, and found that to be one hundred and forty-four half-yards (or cubits, about 200 feet or 65 metres) high by human measurement, (which the angel was using).

The splendour of the city's building

The wall itself was built of translucent stone, while ...

... the city was of purest gold, with the brilliance of glass.

The foundation stones of the wall of the city were fashioned out of every kind of precious stone (similar to the stones in the breastpiece of the high priest, Exodus 28:17-20).

The first foundation-stone was jasper,

the second sapphire,

the third agate,

the fourth emerald,

the fifth onyx,

the sixth cornelian,

the seventh goldstone,

the eighth beryl,

the ninth topaz,

the tenth green goldstone,

the eleventh zircon, and

the twelfth amethyst

(the identification of some of these stones is uncertain).

The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl (the "pearly gates" of popular culture).

The street of the city was purest gold gleaming like glass.

NEW LIFE WITH GOD AND THE LAMB

Revelation 21:22-27 - I could see no Temple in the city, for the Lord, the Almighty God, and the Lamb are themselves its Temple (the city is the Temple, and God lives directly with his people). The city has no need for the light of sun or moon, for the splendour of God fills it with light and its radiance is the Lamb (who provide all the illumination required). The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. The city's gates shall stand open day after day (as there is nothing

more for the saved of mankind to fear) - and there will be no night there. Into the city they will bring the splendours and honours of the nations.

But nothing unclean, no one who deals in filthiness and lies, shall ever at any time enter it - only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

XI - PARADISE REGAINED

THE GARDEN OF EDEN RESTORED

Revelation 22:1-5 - Then he (the angel) showed me the river (suggesting the river of the Garden of Eden, Genesis 2:10) of the water of life, sparkling like crystal as it flowed from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of the street of the city and on either bank of the river grew the tree of life (no longer denied to mankind as it was so long before to Adam in Genesis 3:22-24), bearing twelve fruits, a different kind for each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

Nothing that has cursed mankind shall exist any longer; the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be within the city. His servants shall worship him; they shall see his face, and his name will be upon their foreheads. Night (and all the natural and symbolic darkness implied) shall be no more; they have no more need for either lamplight or sunlight, for the Lord God will shed his light upon them and they shall reign as kings for timeless ages.

XII - EPILOGUE: CHRIST'S FINAL APPEAL

A CALL TO OBEDIENCE

Revelation 22:6-11 - (The angel to John ....) Then the angel said to me, "These words are true and to be trusted, for the Lord God, who inspired the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants (such as John) what must shortly happen."

(The voice of Christ is now heard .....) "See, I come quickly! Happy is the man who pays heed to (obeys) the words of the prophecy in this book."

John's personal endorsement

(It is now John's turn to speak as his visions come to an end ...) It is I, John, who have heard and seen these things. At the time when I heard and saw them I fell at the feet of the angel who showed them to me and I was about to worship him. but he said to me, "No! I am fellow-servant to you and to your brother, to the prophets and to those who keep the words of this book. give your worship to God!"

Then he added, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy in this book, for the time of their fulfilment is near. Let the wicked man continue his wickedness and the filthy man his filthiness; let the good man continue his good deeds, and the holy man continue in holiness.

JESUS CHRIST IS COMING AGAIN

Revelation 22:12-15 - "See, I (Christ) come quickly! I carry my reward with me, and repay every man according to his deeds (we are saved by God's grace or goodness, but rewarded according to how we use this priceless gift). I am Alpha and Omega (first applied to God the Father in Revelation 1:8, and now to Christ the Son), the first and the last, the Beginning and the End. Happy are those who wash their robes, for they have the right to the tree of life and the freedom of the gates of the city (the new Jerusalem). Shut out from the city shall be the depraved, the sorcerers, the impure, the murderers and the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practises a lie!

THE FINAL INVITATION

Revelation 22:16-17 - "I, Jesus, have sent my angel to you (John) with this testimony for the Churches. I am both the root and stock of David (Revelation 5:5), and the bright star of the morning!"

The invitation of the Church and the Spirit

The (Holy) Spirit and the bride (the Church) say, "Come!"

Let everyone who hears this also say, "Come (either the Christian's response to Christ, or their cry to the unsaved in the world to hear and respond to the Gospel)!"

Let the thirsty man come, and let everyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift.

THE FINAL WARNING; A FINAL BLESSING

Revelation 22:18-21 - Now I (presumably John) bear solemn witness to every man (and woman) who hears the words of prophecy in this book: If anyone adds to these words God will add to him the disasters described in this book; if anyone takes away from the words of prophecy in this book, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city (the new Jerusalem, Paradise regained) which are described in this book.

He, who is witness to all this, says, "Yes, I (Jesus Christ) am coming very quickly!"

"Amen, come Lord Jesus (in Aramaic, "Maranatha" - "come, Lord" or "the Lord is coming". Return again Lord, the Christians cry out in response)!"

The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all his people.