

## PAUL THE APOSTLE - A CHOSEN VESSEL UNTO GOD

Of the twenty seven books comprising the New Testament, Paul wrote fourteen of them – Romans through Hebrews. Not all bible scholars however agree that he wrote Hebrews as well, but it will be included in this study. Paul is first introduced in scripture as the young man Saul who was consenting to the stoning death of Stephen, the first Christian martyr, in the book of Acts (CP Ac 7:58- 8:1 with 13:9). Paul was born a Jew, but he also held Roman citizenship (CP Ro 11:1; Php 3:5 with Ac 16:37; 22:25). Paul's birthplace was Tarsus, in Cilicia, a Roman province in Asia Minor – modern day Turkey – but he was raised in Jerusalem, where he studied Old Testament law and Jewish orthodoxy under Gamaliel, a renowned teacher and high ranking member of the Sanhedrin – the Jewish leaders' council (CP Ac 22:3 with 5:34). Paul was himself a zealous Pharisee (CP Ac 23:6; 26:4-5; Php 3:3-6). As a zealous Pharisee Paul was given official authority by the chief priests to apprehend and persecute Christians – “*this way*” (CP Ac 22:4; 1Cor 15:9; Ga 1:13). When Christians were put on trial Paul voted for them to be put to death (CP Ac 26:10).

Paul was on the road to Damascus, where he was going to seek out and arrest Christians and bring them back bound to Jerusalem where they would be imprisoned and tried for being Christians, when he had an encounter with Jesus, and was himself converted to Christianity (CP Ac 9:1-19; 22:4-21; 26:9-23). Christ had chosen Paul to take the gospel to the Gentiles and to suffer many things for His name's sake. Paul was a chosen vessel unto Christ (CP Ac 9:15-16; 22:21; 26:19-23). After his conversion Paul spent some days with the Christians in Damascus. He preached in the synagogue there that Christ was the Son of God, and the Jews determined to kill him. He had to flee Damascus by night in a basket the local Christians lowered over the wall of the city (CP Ac 9:19-25; 26:19-21; 2Cor 11:32-33). After fleeing Damascus Paul went to Arabia (CP Ga 1:15-17). Scriptures do not say how long Paul was in Arabia, but it was undoubtedly while he was there at that time, that he was taken up to Heaven and taught the gospel by Jesus Himself (CP Ga 1:11-12 with 2Cor 12:1-10).

Paul's “thorn in the flesh” is clearly identified in 2Cor 12:7 as a demon – “*the messenger of Satan sent to buffet me*” – which God Himself instigated so that Paul would not be lifted up with pride because of what he had seen and heard in Heaven. *Buffet* means maltreat, treat with violence. It conveys the notion of punishment for the correction and betterment of Paul; to keep him in touch with his limitations. The outworking of the demon's buffeting of Paul is recorded in 2Cor 11:23-33 (CP 2Cor 11:23-33). Paul's thorn in the flesh was not sickness as so many believe. As 2Cor 12:7-10 clearly teaches, Paul never prayed for God to heal him of sickness, only to remove the demon. But of course God would not, because He had instigated its presence in the first place (CP 2Cor 12:7-10).

Paul returned to Damascus after he left Arabia and stayed there three years. He then went to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Peter. At that time the only other apostle he saw in Jerusalem was James, Jesus' half brother (CP Gal:17-19). The Christians in Jerusalem were wary of Paul because of how he had

treated them in the past, and it was not until Barnabas, who knew of Paul's conversion, and of his preaching in the name of Jesus in Damascus, introduced him to Peter and James, that they really accepted him. Paul boldly preached Jesus in Jerusalem also, which brought him into dispute with the Greek speaking Jews – the *Grecians* – who set about to kill him, so he had to flee Jerusalem. The brethren took him to Caesarea from where he went to Tarsus, his birthplace, where he stayed for the next ten years (CP Ac 9:26-30). Paul next went to Syria (CP Ga 1:20-24).

Paul went to Syria with Barnabas – to Antioch, where there was a flourishing Christian community. There were so many new converts that Barnabas needed Paul's help in discipling them. It was at Antioch that believers were first called Christians. Paul stayed for a year and then he and Barnabas together took the relief money to Jerusalem for the Christians there suffering a great famine which had been predicted by the prophet Agabus (CP Ac 11:19-30). Upon returning to Antioch from Jerusalem Paul and Barnabas brought John Mark back with them (CP Ac 12:25). John Mark, who also wrote the gospel of Mark was Barnabas' cousin (CP Col 4:10). *Sister's son* here means cousin. Shortly after returning to Antioch Paul and Barnabas both were commissioned apostles by God (CP Ac 13:1-2). Being ordained an apostle was the prelude to Paul's first missionary journey (CP Ac 13:3-5).

Accompanied by Barnabas and John Mark, Paul went to Cyprus, stopping first at Salamis where he preached the word of God in the synagogue of the Jews. Their next stop was Paphos, the capital of Cyprus. Here they encountered a sorcerer and false prophet – a Jew called Bar-Jesus or Elymas, who was with the Roman Governor of Cyprus, Sergius Paulus. The Governor, seeking to hear the gospel, sent for Paul and Barnabas, but Elymas opposed them, trying to turn the Governor away from the faith. Paul caused blindness to come upon Elymas for a time. What Paul did was a sign that the gospel he preached was true (CP Ac 13:6-12). Paul's purpose was to punish Elymas for a time for resisting the gospel, and what happened demonstrated the power of the gospel and that God confirms what is preached with signs following. The Governor got saved as a result of what happened. It should be noted here that prior to Ac 13:9 Paul was called Saul, but throughout the rest of the New Testament he is called Paul.

After Paphos Paul and Barnabas and John Mark went to Perga, a city in Pamphylia, another province of Asia Minor – modern Turkey. Here John Mark defected from the mission and returned to Jerusalem (CP Ac 13:13). Paul and Barnabas then went to Antioch in Pisidia – not to be confused with Antioch, their home base in Syria – a province adjoining Pamphylia (CP Ac 13:14-15). Paul went to the synagogue and addressed the congregation, composed of both Jews and God-fearing Gentiles, which is recorded at length in V 16-41 (CP V 16-41). Many Jews and Gentiles were receptive to Paul's message and were saved. Most of the Jews though rejected it. However, the Gentiles wanted to hear more and arranged for Paul to preach it again on the next Sabbath. Almost the whole of Antioch turned up to hear the message that day which filled the Jews with envy. They contradicted

and blasphemed the things spoken by Paul, but the Gentiles were glad and glorified God's word. A huge number were saved and the word of the Lord was published throughout all the region (CP V 42-49).

After so many Gentiles received Christ, the unbelieving Jews expelled Paul and Barnabas from Antioch, and they then went to Iconium in nearby Galatia (CP V 50-52). At Iconium, Paul and Barnabas went to the synagogue and preached the gospel of Christ. A *great multitude*, both Jews and Gentiles, got saved. Paul and Barnabas stayed at Iconium for a considerable time and God did many signs and wonders through them. But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the people and split the city. Part of the city sided with the Jews and part with Paul and Barnabas. Compelled to flee a threatened stoning, they crossed over into the neighbouring province, Lycaonia and went first to Lystra, and later, to Derbe. They preached the gospel of Jesus (CP Ac 14:1-7).

A congenital cripple got healed at Lystra when Paul prayed over him, causing the townspeople to proclaim him and Barnabas gods in the flesh. They tried to offer up sacrifices to Paul and Barnabas which greatly distressed them because it was idolatry. They tried to stop the people but they would not listen, and soon the Jews from Antioch in Pisidia and Iconium won them over, and they turned against Paul and stoned him to the point of death, then dragged him out of the city (CP V 8-19). Many in the contemporary church believe that Paul was dead here and was restored to life by the prayers of the local Christians gathered around him. Paul rose up and went back into Lystra and next day he and Barnabas went to Derbe (CP V 20). They preached the gospel of Jesus in Derbe, leading many of the people to Christ and teaching them the way of the Lord. After that they returned again to Lystra and Iconium and Antioch in Pisidia to strengthen and encourage the new converts in their faith, and to appoint elders in each of the local assemblies (CP Ac 14:21-23). From Antioch in Pisidia, Paul and Barnabas returned again to Perga, where John Mark defected. They preached the gospel there and also in nearby Attalia, after which they returned to their home church in Antioch Syria. This completed their first apostolic mission (CP V 24-28). This first missionary journey by Paul and Barnabas, which began in Ac 13:1, took approximately three years to complete.

Sometime after his return to Antioch, Paul faced his first great theological crisis. There was much dissension in the church because Jewish Christians were trying to impose their view on Gentile converts that they had to be circumcised like them and keep the law of Moses, as well as believe in Jesus, to be saved. After it was revealed to Paul by God that he should go, the church at Antioch decided to send him and Barnabas to Jerusalem and let the apostles and the council of elders in the church there adjudicate upon the matter. Paul also took Titus, an uncircumcised Gentile Christian with him (CP Ga 2:1-10). All that took place at Jerusalem is recorded in Ac 15:1-29 which we will examine in more detail shortly, but first, it should be noted here that the gospel Paul preached to the Gentiles which he communicated privately to the apostles in Ga 2:2, is the same gospel of grace that the apostles preached to the Jews. Ga 2:2

does not teach as some think, that there were two gospels then – one for the Jews and one for the Gentiles. It simply means as is explained in V 7-9, that God had delegated to Paul the gospel of grace to the Gentiles, and to Peter, the same gospel of grace to the Jews (CP V 7-9).

Now let us look at Ac 15:1-29 (CP Ac 15:1-29). One of the most vital doctrines of the Christian faith was resolved here; that is, that salvation is by grace through faith alone (CP Eph 2:8-9). In trying to impose circumcision and obedience to the law of Moses as a prerequisite for salvation upon the Gentiles, the Jewish Christians – Paul called them *false brethren* in Ga 2:4 – where teaching salvation by works, which Peter showed was wrong in Ac 15:7-9 (CP V 7-9). James summed up in the light of Old Testament prophecy now being fulfilled in the salvation of the Gentiles, that they should not be burdened with any requirements of the Old Testament law, but abstain from those things that are forbidden under the New Testament. James' recommendations were unanimously agreed to and acted upon, and Judas Barsabas and Silas were authorised to return to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas and report the findings (CP V 13-31). Any misgivings Paul may have had regarding his apostolic authority in his gospel to the Gentiles being recognised by the apostles in Jerusalem, were soon dispelled when James, Peter and John, perceiving the grace God had given him, extended to him and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship (CP Ga 2:7-9).

Sometime after Paul returned to Antioch from Jerusalem, Peter visited and openly fellowshiped with the Gentile Christians, but when some legalistic Jews – Judaisers – from the Jerusalem Church arrived, he ceased fellowshiping for fear of how they might react. The Jewish Christians also stopped fellowshiping, and it threatened to split the church, turning Jewish and Gentile Christians against each other. Barnabas even got involved (CP Ga 2:11-17). What Peter did was clearly wrong. It was such a contradiction of the gospel of grace and so hypocritical, that Paul had to publicly rebuke him, because it was Peter God used to settle the issue of Jews and Gentiles fellowshiping in the first place (CP Ac 10:28-35 and 11:1-8).

Soon after confronting Peter, Paul decided on a return journey with Barnabas to the places where they had previously been to see how the churches they founded were going. Barnabas wanted John Mark to go with them but Paul would not agree because of his defection on the first journey. There was sharp contention between them over the matter and so they split up. Paul chose Silas to go with him and Barnabas took John Mark. They went to Cyprus while Paul and Silas journeyed through Syria and Cilicia. This is the commencement of Paul's second missionary journey (CP Ac 15:36-41). It is important to note here that while Paul and Barnabas' parting may not have been amicable, all the parties were reconciled again later on (CP 1Cor 9:6; Col 4:10; 2Ti 4:11; Phm 23-24). We learn from this that while Christians may fall out with each other, they must never harbour grudges against each other, but be reconciled (CP Eph 4:26, 31-32).

When Paul returned to Lystra – where he had been left for dead after being stoned on his first missionary journey – he was joined by Timothy, a young convert from his first mission (CP Ac 16:1-3). Timothy was an uncircumcised Jew from a mixed marriage between a Gentile father and a Jewish mother, and so that the Jews would not reject the gospel being proclaimed by Timothy as an uncircumcised Gentile, he circumcised him. As an uncircumcised son of a mixed marriage, Timothy would be a stumbling block to winning Jews to Christ (CP 1Cor 9:19-23). As they called on the various churches in the region, Paul and his two helpers also delivered the decrees ordained by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem; that the Gentile converts would not be burdened with any requirements of the Old Covenant law – they only had to abstain from those things that were forbidden under the New Testament already. It helped the churches to become more established in the faith, and their numbers increased daily (CP Ac 16:4-5). Paul and his companions journeyed throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia where churches were already established, but when they tried to take the gospel further into Asia Minor, the Holy Spirit checked them at that time (CP V 6-8). The reason why the Holy Spirit checked Paul and the others from going further into Asia at that time was because they were desperately required to take the gospel into Greece (CP V 9-10).

Macedonia was the northern part of Greece and it was here that Paul and his companions founded the church at Philippi (CP Ac 16:12-15). The change from the third person pronoun *they* in Ac 16:8 to the second person *we* in V 10 indicates that Luke, the author of the book of Acts, was now a participant with Paul and Silas and Timothy on this missionary journey and was giving a first-hand report on the events taking place. It appears that he joined them at Troas (CP V 8-11). Later on, as Paul and the others went to prayer, a young demon-possessed girl followed them, calling out for all to hear that Paul and the others were servants of God come to save them all. This continued for some days until, grieved in the Spirit, Paul cast the demon out of her. This angered her masters because now they would no longer be able to earn any money out of her as a soothsayer – one able to foretell the future. They took hold of Paul and Silas and brought them before the magistrates who had them whipped and thrown into prison, where they were cast into the deepest dungeon and had their feet fastened in the stocks (CP V 16-24).

Although they were in the deepest dungeon and could not move, Paul and Silas rejoiced. They prayed and sang praises unto God. Their spirits rose superior to the difficulty and limitations of their situation and God delivered them from it. He was then glorified in the jailer and his family's salvation (CP V 25-34). The lesson to be learned from this is that while it may seem impossible for Christians to rejoice under the circumstances, if they will rejoice notwithstanding, God will nullify the circumstances (CP Psalms 146-150). If Christians allow themselves to be overwhelmed by their circumstances, they are not able to be used of God for His glory (CP Ac 5:40-42; 2Cor 7:4; 8:1-4; Jas 1:2-4; 1Pe 4:13).

The next morning Paul and Silas refused to leave the prison like they were common criminals. Paul

demanded that the magistrates come themselves and release them, which they did after Paul and Silas claimed their Roman citizens' rights. After much pleading by the magistrates, Paul and Silas eventually left and went to Lydia's house, and after encouraging the brethren there they left Philippi (CP Ac 16:35-40). Paul and Silas and Timothy then went to Thessalonica – Luke stayed at Philippi – where there was a synagogue of the Jews, and as was his custom, Paul went there and preached Jesus as the Son of God. A great many Gentiles believed, as did a few Jews and some of the women from the leading families, but the majority of Jews did not. Some of them got a mob together and went looking for Paul and the others but could not find them, so they attacked the house of Jason, Paul's host, and brought him and some local Christians before the rulers of the city charging them with harbouring seditious agitators, but they were let go after paying a good behaviour bond (CP Ac 17:1-9).

That same night the Thessalonian Christians sent Paul and Silas and Timothy to Berea, where they went to the synagogue and Paul preached the gospel of Jesus. The Berean Jews were more courteous and of a better disposition than those in Thessalonica. They searched the scriptures and proved Paul's gospel to be true. As a result many of them believed, as also did many prominent Greek women and men. But when the unbelieving Jews in Thessalonica found out, they came and created so much trouble for Paul among the people that he had to flee to Athens, leaving Silas and Timothy in Berea. When he got to Athens he sent for them (CP Ac 17: 10-15). While waiting for Silas and Timothy, Paul became grieved in the Spirit at the extent of idolatry in Athens – the city was wholly given over to the worship of idols. Paul reasoned and argued about it every day to all who would listen. One day some philosophers engaged him in discussion concerning his preaching about Jesus and the resurrection. They thought Jesus was a strange God and wanted to hear Paul's doctrine. They took Paul to Areopagus and Mars Hill to hear him (CP V 16-22).

Areopagus and Mars Hill both refer to the same place – an elevated open space in Athens where the great council of the Athenians sat. In Bible times it was the supreme tribunal of justice. *In the midst of Mars Hill* in V 22 simply means that Paul stood in the midst of the judges in court there. He was not on trial, only being asked to explain his doctrine, and he made full use of this opportunity to proclaim the living God, in contrast to all the lifeless pagan deities the Athenians worshipped, and how God purposed His plan of salvation for mankind through His Son, Jesus. A few believed in what Paul said and were saved. Even one of the judges, Dionysius, became a Christian (CP Ac 17:23-34). Paul then left Athens and went to Corinth where he met Aquila and Priscilla, a Jewish couple who had been forced to leave Rome. Aquila was a tentmaker by occupation, the same as Paul, so they stayed together and worked at their trade.

Paul preached in the synagogue every Sabbath and won both Jews and Greeks to Christ. But after Silas and Timothy joined him, the Jews vehemently opposed his preaching that Jesus was Christ, so Paul wiped his hands of them (CP Ac 18:1-6). Paul no longer held himself responsible for the Corinthian

Jews getting saved. It was their own responsibility from then. He had done everything in his power that they might inherit eternal life, but they completely rejected Christ. He then preached to the Gentiles in Corinth (CP V 7). Paul had been preaching to the Gentiles for a year and a half when the Jews brought him before the Governor and charged him with trying to make them worship God against Roman law, but the Governor would have nothing to do with it and let Paul go. Paul stayed in Corinth for some time after this before deciding to return to his home church at Antioch, Syria (CP V 8-22). This completes Paul's second missionary journey which lasted about four years. Churches were founded at Troas, Philippi, Amphipolis, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, Corinth and Cenchrea, where Paul shaved his head and made a vow to God. It is not known what the vow was.

After an extended stay back at Antioch, Paul set out with Timothy and others on his third missionary journey, first visiting the regions of Galatia and Phrygia, calling on the churches there and strengthening the Christians (CP Ac 18:23). Paul then went to Ephesus where he encountered about twelve men who had received John's baptism but knew nothing about the baptism Jesus instituted or the baptism in the Holy Spirit. After baptising them in the name of Jesus and laying hands on them they received the baptism in the Holy Spirit, the evidence of which was that they spoke in tongues (CP Ac 19:1-7). Paul preached the Kingdom of God for three months in the synagogue in Ephesus until the Jews hardened their hearts and began to agitate the people against the Christians. Paul then moved them from the synagogue to a Gentile school run by Tyrannus, where he taught them for two years. From there God's word went out into the whole of Asia, to both Jews and Gentiles (CP V 8-10).

After the seven sons of Sceva, the chief priest at Ephesus, were badly beaten, wounded, and stripped naked by a demon-possessed man they tried to exorcise, the church in Ephesus experienced a great revival (CP V 13-20). What happened in V 17-20 should be carefully noted because sadly, many Christians in the contemporary church are still involved in black magic, sorcery and idolatry in some form or another. They are simply called by other names: astrology, signs of the zodiac, horoscopes, fortune telling, etc. But they are strictly forbidden in scripture (CP Lev 19:26; De 18:10; 2Ki 21:1-2, 6; Isa 47:1, 13; Jer 10:1-2). Those involved in these practices need to be warned against them, for if they continue in them, they will forfeit their place in God's eternal Kingdom. This warning also applies to those Christians who have not yet destroyed the idols they worshipped before becoming Christians. They must be destroyed, or those Christians too will forfeit their place in the eternal Kingdom, for linked with the command in scripture not to worship idols, is also the command to destroy them (CP Ex 23:24; 34:12-13; De 7:4-6, 25-26; 12:1-3). Idols in the contemporary church can also take the form of wealth and material possessions, fashion trends, celebrities, sports, occupations, even one's spouse or ministry in the church, etc.

When the revival at Ephesus ended, Paul purposed in the Spirit that after he had been to Macedonia and Achaia, he would go back to Jerusalem, and then on to

Rome. He sent Timothy and Erastus before him into Macedonia, while he stayed on a bit longer in Asia (CP Ac 19:21-22). Paul's ministry in Ephesus was so powerful it caused a recession among the idol-makers. They no longer had a ready market for their wares. Paul had led so many idol worshippers to Jesus, that the silversmiths in their anger would have undoubtedly killed him had they been able to lay hold of him. Paul made his way to Macedonia, where he visited the churches they had founded at Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea and other places, greatly encouraging them, before going to Macedonia and then to Greece (CP Ac 19:23-20:2).

Paul stayed in Achaia for three months ministering at Athens, Corinth and Cenchrea. During his time in Macedonia and Achaia, Paul arranged for every church in the region to take up a collection for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem, which would be taken to them when he returned to Jerusalem. This is not recorded in the book of Acts, but it is recorded in Paul's epistle to the Romans, and both of his epistles to the Corinthians (CP Ro 15:25-31; 1Cor 16:1-4; 2Cor 8:1-9; 15). Paul was so aware of what could happen to him at Jerusalem that he asked the church in Rome to pray for his safety, and also that the Jewish Christians accept the Gentile offerings. As Paul was about to sail from Corinth to Syria, the Jews laid in wait for him, so he went back to Philippi and sailed from there to Troas where Timothy and others were waiting for him. He stayed seven days in Troas. On the day before he left, the local Christians were gathered together in an upper room to have communion, and Paul preached to them. It went on for hours – until daybreak the next day. At midnight, a young man, Eutychus, who was sitting in the alcove of a window, dozed off and fell three floors to the ground. He was pronounced dead but Paul went down and embraced him and his life was restored (CP Ac 20:3-12). Paul then journeyed to Miletus. He was hastening to get to Jerusalem for the Day of Pentecost, although he knew through the Holy Spirit that bonds and afflictions awaited him there (CP V 13-16 with 22-24).

From Miletus Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church to come to him (CP V 17). Paul's farewell speech to the elders and his final parting from them is recorded in V 18-38 (CP V 18-38). After leaving Miletus, Paul and his companions set sail for Syria, landing at Tyre, where they met some Christians and stayed there for seven days. Knowing through the Spirit what Paul would suffer in Jerusalem, they urged him not to go, but when the seven days were up Paul proceeded to leave. All the brethren at Tyre, together with their wives and children, accompanied Paul and his companions to the beach outside the city, where they held a prayer meeting before Paul and the others boarded ship and went first to Ptolemais, and then to Caesarea, where they stayed with Philip the evangelist, and his four daughters (CP Ac 21:1-9). While there, Agabus the prophet came from Judaea, and taking Paul's belt, he bound his own hands and feet with it, the while saying that the Holy Spirit was showing how Paul would be bound like that by the Jews at Jerusalem, who would then deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles. Paul's companions together with the local Christians begged him not to go, but Paul responded that he was ready to die for Jesus'

name. Obviously, he interpreted the warnings not as prohibitions, but as tests of his willingness to suffer for Jesus' name. They then continued on to Jerusalem, where they were warmly greeted by the brethren (CP V 10-17). This signifies the completion of Paul's third missionary journey which began in Ac 18:23 and lasted about five years.

The next day Paul reported his ministry to the Gentiles to James and the elders of the church at Jerusalem (CP V 18-19). They informed him of the tension his presence created among the Jews because of reports that he was teaching his Jewish converts to forsake the law of Moses, not to have their children circumcised, nor follow Jewish customs (CP V 20-22). In the hope of placating the Jews, and without compromising Paul, they proposed that he should join with four others, take a Jewish vow, purify himself with them, and pay their expenses in having their heads shaved (CP V 23-24). Paul did so, but his attempt to pacify the Jews proved futile. When the unbelieving Jews from Asia saw him in the temple, they incited a riot, accusing him among other things of polluting the temple by taking a Gentile into it. The mob dragged Paul out of the temple and were about to kill him when he was rescued by Roman soldiers (CP V 26-36). Paul was bound hands and feet with chains, fulfilling Agabus' prophecy in V 10-11 (CP V 10-11). As he was being led away Paul got permission to talk to the mob (CP V 37-40). Paul then gave his testimony of how he first persecuted Christians, and was then converted to Christ after encountering Him on the road to Damascus. The Jews listened in silence until he spoke of his commission to the Gentiles, then they rioted again (CP Ac 22:1-23).

The captain of the Roman guard ordered that Paul be interrogated by scourging to find out why the Jews were so hostile toward him but he was afraid to proceed when Paul declared his Roman citizenship (CP V 24-29). The next day Paul was set before the Sanhedrin (CP V 30). Great dissension arose among the Jews after Paul proclaimed his belief in the resurrection, and fearing that the mob would tear him apart, the Roman captain sent the soldiers in to rescue him and take him to their quarters (CP Ac 23:1-10). The following night Jesus appeared to Paul and praised him for his faithful witness in Jerusalem and told him that he would also be his witness in Rome (CP V 11). The Jews were so intent on killing Paul that more than forty bound themselves under a curse and conspired with the chief priests and elders to have him brought before the council, where they would attack and kill him. When the captain of the guard was informed of the plan, he sent Paul to Felix, the Roman Governor, in Caesarea (CP V 12-35). It was clear to Felix that the charges against Paul were spurious, but not wanting to antagonise the Jews he postponed a decision, and because Paul made no offer of a bribe for his release, kept him in custody for two years, until the new Governor, Festus, took office (CP Ac 24:1-27).

After talking to the Jewish leaders, Festus indicated that he might send Paul to Jerusalem to be tried by the Jews. But Paul, knowing the outcome of such a trial, exercised his Roman citizenship rights and appealed to Caesar. After a moving interview before King Agrippa and his wife Bernice, Paul was sent under

guard to Rome (CP Ac 25:1 – 26:32). Paul was put on a ship bound for Rome with other prisoners. He was accompanied by Luke and Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica (CP Ac 27:1-2). After changing ships on the way, they were caught in cyclonic weather which they battled for fourteen days before the boat was wrecked on the island of Melita – present day Malta. Although the boat was totally wrecked, not one life was lost (CP Ac 27:3-44). The centurion in charge of Paul overruled the soldiers who wanted to kill the prisoners lest any should swim away and escape. This fulfilled God's purpose for Paul to be his witness in Rome.

Paul and the other victims of the shipwreck had to stay on Melita for three months until winter ended before they were able to resume their journey to Rome. During this time Paul was bitten by a highly venomous viper without being affected in any way, confirming Christ's promise in scripture to every believer (CP Ac 28:1-10 with Mk 16:17-18; Lu 10:19). Paul healed many who were sick and diseased, including the father of the chief of the island, Publius. At the end of the three months they resumed their journey to Rome. On the way Paul and Luke and Aristarchus fellowshipped with some Christian brethren for seven days, and then were met in Rome by other brethren (CP Ac 28:11-15). Paul lived in his own rented house in Rome with only one soldier to keep guard over him (CP V 16). After three days Paul called the leaders of the Jews together and outlined his reason for being there. They had heard nothing detrimental against Paul and listened to his preaching. Some believed, others did not (CP V 17-29). Paul spent the next two years openly preaching the Kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ. No one forbade him (CP V 30-31).

This now brings the book of Acts, or Acts of the apostles, to a close. It leaves the question of Paul's trial and release unanswered. The abrupt ending points to Luke completing his work on Acts while Paul was still under house-arrest awaiting his trial. There is no record of the trial or its outcome anywhere in scripture. Nothing certain is known of what happened to Paul after this. It is generally thought that he was released after his two years of house-arrest was completed, and then spent the next few years preaching in various places. It was during that time he wrote his first epistle to Timothy and his epistle to Titus (CP 1Ti 1:1-3; Tit 1:4-5). Some time after this Paul was re-arrested and taken back to Rome from where he wrote his second epistle to Timothy (CP 2Ti 1:16-17; 2:9). Tradition says that after he wrote this epistle Paul was martyred by beheading, under the emperor Nero. During the two years he was under house-arrest Paul wrote his epistles to the Ephesians (CP Eph 3:1; 4:1; 6:20-21), Philippians (CP Php 1:7, 12-16; 4:22), Colossians (CP Col 4:3, 10, 18), and his epistle to Philemon regarding Onesimus, his runaway slave (CP Phm 1:1, 9-10, 23-25). Paul's epistles together with the gospel, became the foundation of the Christian movement. They are a study of the Christian faith. Time and space does not permit their inclusion here in all their detail, but a summary of the subject matter of each is included.

**Romans.** After introducing himself, Paul sets out his

qualifications and explains his reason for writing. He makes God's righteousness the theme of the epistle and then shows that all humanity is in need of salvation. The only way anyone can be saved is by believing in Jesus and the redemption He has purchased for them with His blood. Paul explains the impact and implication of what God does in Christ for Christians, and how the result of salvation is a victorious new life which results in Christians' ability to overcome sin, because Christ's obedience to God has reversed the results of Adam's disobedience. At the heart of salvation is the Christian's continuous but victorious battle with sin under the empowering of the Holy Spirit.

Paul emphasises the fact that the righteousness of God is demonstrated in His faithfulness to all His promises, even to Israel, notwithstanding that they rejected Christ. Their rejection of the gospel and antagonism toward God did not cause God to totally reject them however. He has merely set Israel aside temporarily and given the gospel to the Gentiles until His purpose is fulfilled in the Gentiles. Paul admonishes Christians to live transformed lives in practical obedience to God. Transformed lives will be demonstrated by good stewardship of Spiritual gifts, in fulfilling obligations to the state, in making love supreme, not engaging in sin and fulfilling fleshly desires and in nurturing, bearing with and building up Christians weaker in the faith. Paul then speaks of his ministry and of his plans to visit both Spain and Rome. In closing, Paul commends Phoebe to the brethren in Rome – she delivered the epistle for him – and sends greetings to many Christians there who he personally knew, he concludes by lifting up God in praise (CP 1:1 – 16:27).

**1 Corinthians.** After his salutation, Paul reminds the Corinthians that they were not saved by persuasive doctrines of human wisdom, but by the foolishness of preaching the gospel, not with enticing words, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that their faith would not be in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. Paul's purpose for writing this epistle was to instruct them how to mend the divisions in the church caused by factionalism and a party spirit. Paul spends the first four chapters addressing this issue. The Corinthians were spiritually immature and carnal, and Paul warns them against a party spirit factionalising the church and defiling it. He outlines the role of apostles in the Divine order in the form of a rebuke for the Corinthians, not to shame, but to admonish them.

Paul commands the members to excommunicate one in the church committing incest with his stepmother. He reproves them for prosecuting one another in civil courts before unbelieving judges, when others in the assembly were quite capable of judging the matters. He stresses the need for moral purity in the church. He deals with various phases of the subject of marriage, advising unmarried Christians to marry rather than engage in illicit sex, and married Christians on how they are to treat each other. Paul commends his own celibate state, but advises anyone unable to contain themselves to marry. He forbids divorce except by unbelieving spouses. He forbids Christians altering their status in life to try to improve their standing with God – the Christian calling is not

defined by status, but by obedience to God's word. Paul advises virgins and single men not to marry but assures them they are not in sin if they do. His main concern is that once Christians marry they can no longer give their undivided attention to the things of God – the compelling necessity for married Christians to look after each other restricts their capacity to devote all their attention to God.

Paul stresses the fact that mature Christians demonstrate their love for those weaker in the faith by exercising self control and not participating in the things their faith allows, but which the weaker Christian's faith does not, and which would cause them to sin if they participated. Paul exercised the same self control in his apostolic office. He had the right to be financially supported by the Corinthian church, but he chose not to, lest it hindered the gospel. Paul used the Old Testament example of Israel failing God's grace to warn Christians that they can be redeemed, partake of Divine grace and yet later be rejected by God because of evil conduct. He warns Christians to flee from idolatry, because whatever its form, it involves the worship of demons. Christians must always consider the conscience of other Christians and observe the law of love. Freedom to do anything must be waived if it could damage the conscience of a weaker Christian.

Paul sets the record straight concerning head coverings for women in the church. A woman's long hair is her head covering. In this part of his teaching Paul also reveals that angels are always present in the church, which is why women's heads should be covered with long hair. Also in this section Paul draws out the implications of the nature of the Lord's Supper – it must never be treated as though it was meaningless. Whoever treats it as such is guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord and eat and drink judgement upon themselves. Before they partake, Christians need to examine themselves for any sins they may have committed, and judge themselves by God's word. This is how God chastens His children. Paul next outlines the gifts of the Spirit and their diversity among Christians – not all have the same gifts. He teaches that they must all be exercised in love. Love is the only context in which Spiritual gifts can fulfil God's purpose in the church and it must be the governing principle of all the manifestations of the Spirit. Paul also deals with abuses of Spiritual gifts here.

He then declares Christ's resurrection as an essential element of the gospel. It underlines the certainty of the resurrection of every believer in Christ, in view of which, Paul exhorts Christians to righteousness. He explains the method of their resurrection, the nature of resurrected bodies, and the necessity for a resurrection. He outlines the time and manner and urges Christians to abound in the work of the Lord until it happens (CP 1:1 – 16:24).

**2 Corinthians.** After relaying his and Timothy's greetings to the Corinthians, Paul explains the nature of his apostolic ministry defined in terms of his relations with them. He advises them to forgive the offending member of the church who he had instructed them to excommunicate in 1Cor for committing incest with his stepmother. He had repented, and if not

restored to fellowship immediately, could be so overwhelmed by sorrow that he might never recover, and be lost to Christianity forever. Satan would have the advantage then. Paul highlights the glorious character of the New Covenant in contrast to the Old. He reveals that in God's eternal purpose the Old Covenant was being abolished even as Moses brought down the Ten Commandments from Mt Sinai. He wore a veil so that the Israelites could not see the fading glory of the Old Covenant reflected on his face. Paul refers to the gospel entrusted to weak and fragile human beings as *this treasure in earthen vessels*, which teaches that by entrusting human beings with the gospel, God makes it clear that the power to save is from him, not men. Paul notes things he has had to contend with in his apostleship, but declares that if Christians are to minister life to others, they must be prepared to share the sufferings of Christ, and experience the working of death in their lives. The afflictions and persecutions he suffered only strengthened his faith in the future eternal glory he would experience at the resurrection. The Christian walk is a walk of faith. Christians do not have to personally see God to know what they believe. Every Christian is an ambassador for Christ. God has committed the responsibility to them to preach the gospel and win souls to Christ, who He has made the sin bearer for all mankind.

Paul warns the Corinthians against receiving the grace of God in vain. This is a warning to all Christians in all ages that they can forfeit their salvation if they abandon the faith and life of the gospel. After summarising his ministry, Paul exhorts believers not to be involved in any relationship with unbelievers that could compromise their Christian witness. He distinguishes between Godly sorrow and the sorrow of the world. Next, Paul centres on the collection for the Jerusalem church. He encourages Christians to give willingly, cheerfully, and liberally to the cause of others in need, but only out of what they have, not what they do not have. He explains how God's law of sowing and reaping is connected to giving – Christians who cheerfully and willingly give what they can to help others in need will always find that the grace of God furnishes a sufficiency for their own need and even more, in order that they may abound in good works to others.

In the course of vindicating his apostolic office and defending his ministry against the attacks of his enemies, Paul declares that although Christians live in human bodies, their war is spiritual, and they have spiritual weapons to fight with, which nothing can withstand. In vindicating his apostolic office Paul lists his sufferings for Christ, which again confirms his apostleship. These sufferings are the outworking of his thorn in the flesh, which we examined soon after this study commenced. Paul then speaks to all believers in Christ when he tells the Corinthians to constantly test the genuineness of their faith. In closing the epistle, Paul prayed a benediction over the church, witnessing to the three-in-one Godhead of Christianity – God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost (CP 1:1 – 13:14).

**Galatians.** The purpose of Paul's letter to the churches in Galatia was because the Galatians, who had begun their Christian walk by faith, were now

attempting to complete the walk by works of the law. Paul sets forth the true character of salvation as justification by faith in Christ alone, not by works. Paul shows throughout the epistle that works of the law are not a condition of salvation. The law was only ever a schoolmaster to train those under it until Christ came, that they might be justified by faith. Once Christ came there was no longer any need for the law, and there is no longer any gulf between Jews and Gentiles, masters and slaves, and males and females. In spiritual terms they are all one in Christ. To distinguish between the law and grace Paul uses the two sons of Abraham as an analogy. The son of the bondwoman, Hagar, symbolises the law, and Isaac, the son of the freewoman – Sarah, Abraham's wife – symbolises grace. As the son of the bondwoman – Ishmael – had to give place to Isaac, the son of the freewoman, so too the law has to give place to grace. They cannot co-exist. This teaches that the Old Covenant has been fulfilled in Christ and completely abolished. Paul warns Christians against backstabbing each other. He reminds them that they are to love one another. He lists both the works of the flesh, which will damn them to hell, and the fruit of the Spirit, which assures them of their place in Heaven. If Christians walk in the Spirit, they will not fulfil the lusts of the flesh (CP 1:1 – 6:18).

**Ephesians.** The theme of Paul's epistle to the Ephesians is the relationship between Christ and His church. It declares the eternal purpose of God in Christ wrought out in the church and the practical consequences of that purpose. Paul opens the epistle with a greeting and then praises God for all the spiritual blessings with which He has blessed believers in Christ in Heavenly places. He thanks the Ephesians for their faith, and informs them that he prays for them to know God's will for their lives, and experience His power. He explains how God raises men to life from the death of sin to new life in Christ. God's purpose is to reconcile both Jews and Gentiles not only to Himself, but to one another; to make them into one body – the church – by the cross of Christ. Paul portrays the Christian as a holy temple unto the Lord, built as a habitation of God through the Holy Spirit. Paul prays for the church to know the nature of God's love through Christ and be filled with all the fullness of God. He exhorts Christians to walk worthily and build up the one body of Christ.

Paul outlines the ministries Christ gave to the church. He admonishes Christians to put off their old evil nature and put on the new nature of God created in righteousness and true holiness. He lists the sins in which Christians are to no longer be involved then sets out responsibilities at home and at work – the mutual duties of both wives and husbands based on the analogy of the relationship between Christ and the church; the mutual duties of both children and their parents, and servants and masters. Paul then instructs Christians generally on preparing themselves for the spiritual conflict of life by being clothed with the full armour of God and praying for boldness. He concludes the epistle with a benediction (CP 1:1 – 6:24).

**Philippians.** Paul's purpose in writing this epistle was to thank the Philippians for the gift they had sent to him while he was under house-arrest in Rome, and

their care for him. After his salutation, Paul offered up a prayer for them. He tells them that his being in bonds has advanced the gospel in Rome, albeit some preach insincerely, hoping to add to his afflictions. The others however, do it in love. Paul does not care though whether insincerely or in love, providing Christ is preached. Death was obviously a possibility for Paul in his situation and although he had a desire to die and be with the Lord, he was confident that he would be free to continue his ministry. He exhorts the Philippians to stand true in suffering for Christ, and appeals to them to live like Christ in true humility and selfless service, without murmurings and disputes. Paul commends Timothy and Epaphroditus to the Philippians, and urges them to rejoice in the Lord. He warns them to beware of Judaizers, but to do all things to be found in Christ.

Paul admonishes the Philippians – and by extension every Christian throughout the church age – to show a forbearing attitude for all to see. They are not to be anxious for anything. They merely let God know what they want and His peace settles their hearts and minds in Christ. Christians should think only on things that harmonise with eternal truth and they will experience the peace of God. Paul then shares how he has learned to be content in whatever his circumstances are; he can do all things through Christ who strengthens him. He commends the Philippians for their care for him and their financial support of his ministry, and promises in return that God will meet all their needs. He concludes the epistle with greetings to the church and a benediction (CP 1:1 – 4:23).

**Colossians.** This epistle focuses on the Person and the Work of Jesus Christ. It reminds Christians in every age of His all-sufficiency. Following his salutation, Paul expresses his thankfulness for the Colossians' deep faith and their propagation of the gospel. He prays that they might receive all the fullness of spiritual understanding and increase in their knowledge of God. Paul declares the pre-eminence of Christ in creation, in redemption, and in the church. He denounces philosophies which involve the observance of legalistic rituals and traditions and the worship of angels, none of which could save anyone. Only Jesus can do that. Paul admonishes the Colossians to “put to death” their old vices and “put on” the character of Christ. He then sets out responsibilities here too as he did in Ephesians – the mutual duties of both husbands and wives, children and their parents, and servants and their masters. Paul exhorts the Colossians to always speak wholesome words preserved from corruption, to always act wisely before unbelievers, and to redeem the time. This means that by the sweetness and courtesy of their conversation Christians are to favourably impress unbelievers, and make the most of every evangelistic opportunity. Paul closes the epistle with greetings and commendations for his co-workers including Onesimus, the subject of his epistle to Philemon, which we will look at shortly (CP 1:1 – 4:18).

**1 Thessalonians.** Paul wrote this epistle to address some ethical problems among the Thessalonians, and to allay their fears that those who have died in Christ will not take part in the first resurrection – when Christ comes again to take all the saints of God back to Heaven with Him. That is the main theme of the

epistle. Paul begins the letter on behalf of Silas, Timothy and himself by thanking God for the faith, hope and love of the Thessalonians, their dedication to God, and propagation of the gospel. He recalls his own and their suffering for the cause of Christ, he reminds them that in sexual matters believers must conduct themselves differently from unbelievers. He gently urges them to be diligent in their work to gain the respect of unbelievers. After allaying their fears that those who have died in Christ will be left behind, Paul describes the fact and manner of the first resurrection. The dead in Christ will rise first, and the living will then be caught up with them to meet Christ in the air, who will then take them all to Heaven with Him. Paul explains that although Christ's coming for the saints might be likened to how a thief comes at night, it will not overtake believers like that. They live in anticipation of it and thus can comfort and build each other up in that knowledge. In closing, Paul exhorts the Thessalonians to respect and honour those in ministry over them, to be at peace with each other, to warn idlers, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with all, see that none takes revenge on another, and be kind to everyone. He then admonishes them to rejoice evermore, pray without ceasing, give thanks in everything, not to quench the Spirit, not to despise prophecies, to prove all things, and lastly to abstain from all appearance of evil. Paul concludes the epistle with final greetings and a benediction (CP 1:1 – 5:28).

**2 Thessalonians.** The purpose of this second epistle to the Thessalonians was to assure them that the *day of the Lord* – the second coming of Christ – had not yet come, as they were led to believe. The Thessalonian Christians were undergoing such tribulation at that time they thought it had come. They had also received a letter purporting to be from Paul, which he had not authorised, claiming that it had already come. Paul exhorted them not to be alarmed by what they hear. He assured them that he had not changed his doctrine and he had nothing to do with the forged letter. They were not to allow themselves to be deceived, because the second coming of Christ could not occur until after the church was taken up to Heaven and Antichrist had been revealed. Paul reminded the Thessalonians that they already knew this for he had told them when he was with them. They knew that it was the church holding back the revelation of Antichrist, and that once it was “taken out of the way” – removed from the earth – Antichrist will be revealed and the tribulation will come upon the earth. Antichrist will be empowered to work miracles during that time by Satan. Paul teaches further that after the church is taken up from the earth, salvation will no longer be available to those still living who have already heard the gospel and rejected it. Paul asks the Thessalonians to pray that God is glorified in his and Silas' and Timothy's ministry, and then commands them not to keep company with those who are disorderly in the church, that they might be ashamed. The Thessalonian Christians though are not to count them as enemies, but admonish them as brothers. Paul then closes with a salutation and a benediction (CP 1:1 – 3:18).

**1 Timothy.** Paul's primary purpose for writing this epistle was to impart guidance to Timothy for the administration of the church at Ephesus where Paul



had left him in charge. Timothy had been converted to Christianity by Paul, who refers to him as “my own son in the faith”. After greeting Timothy, Paul charges him to refute the false doctrines being promoted in the church. He reminds Timothy of God’s mercy, illustrated by his own salvation. He instructs Timothy on the position of men and women in the church in accordance with the original order of creation, and in the circumstances of the fall of man. He also instructs Timothy on the qualifications for bishops and deacons. Paul warns Timothy of the need for sound doctrine, for the Holy Spirit has explicitly said that some will defect from the faith in the last days. He highlights Timothy’s personal responsibilities in this regard, and encourages him to assert the dignity of his office and not let anyone despise his youth. Nor is he to neglect the Spiritual gifts with which he has been endued for service. Paul directs Timothy on the treatment of older men in the church as well as widows, and particular elders. He rules that no Christian can accuse another of sinning without two or three witnesses to categorically support the accusation. But those who do sin must be rebuked before all the church members as a warning to others. He also rules against church leaders hastily ordaining anyone to public ministry in the church or hastily restoring sinning members to fellowship. Paul exhorts Christian servants to honour their masters, particularly if they are believers. He then warns Christians against coveting wealth, and directs Timothy to instruct those who are rich, to be rich in doing good for God, and so lay up eternal life for themselves (CP 1:1 – 6:21).

**2 Timothy.** Paul wrote this second epistle to Timothy to further instruct and encourage him in his ministry in Ephesus. He greatly desires to see Timothy, recalling the sincere faith of both his grandmother and mother. He urges Timothy to stir up the Spiritual gift with which he was endued for service by the laying on of Paul’s hands, and not operate in a spirit of fear, but of the power of God. Timothy is not to be ashamed of the gospel nor of Paul as a prisoner for Christ. He is to guard the gospel truth which has been entrusted to him. Paul exhorts Timothy to be a good soldier for Christ, and not get involved in worldly pursuits. He is to work diligently to show himself approved to God – and by extension this applies to every New Testament Christian. Paul stresses the truth of God’s word as a sure foundation regardless of how many in the church have taught error and shipwrecked their faith, as well as cause others to abandon theirs. Not all in the church are sincere Christians, but God knows those who are His. Christians must not quarrel with those who have wandered out of the way of God’s truth, but be patient and gently instruct them in the ways of God in the hope that He will give them the opportunity to repent and escape the snare of the Devil, who has taken them captive, so that they then can do God’s will.

Paul describes characteristics of some people in the last days – the time immediately preceding Christ’s second coming. Christians are to turn away from them and continue steadfast in the scriptures, which are the inspired word of God. Paul commands Timothy – and by extension every New Testament Christian – to be in a constant state of readiness to preach God’s word. The need is paramount, for people will not always adhere to sound doctrine. Paul

declares his readiness to die for the gospel, and anticipates the “crown of righteousness” that awaits him in glory, as it does all who await Christ’s coming. Paul closes the epistle with greetings and a benediction (CP 1:1 – 4:22).

**Titus.** Paul had left Titus in Crete to consolidate the work they had begun there earlier, and to appoint elders “in every city”. The occasion of the epistle is to give instruction to Titus concerning church order, doctrine and discipline for Christians. It has much in common with 1 Timothy. Following an extended greeting, Paul directs Titus on the qualifications for elders, or bishops, and warns against false teachers. He lists ideal characteristics of older men and women in the church, as well as younger men and slaves. Paul admonishes Titus to be an example to the younger men by not engaging in jocularity or flippancy while preaching God’s word. The occasion to preach must be treated with the utmost respect and reverence. It must be free from anything to which exception might be taken. God’s grace as it is shown in Jesus Christ provides the foundation for Christian living. Paul describes the Christian’s new birth – being born again – as “*the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost which he shed on us abundantly through Christ*”. He charges Titus to remind the Cretian Christians that they must obey civil authorities and be kind to all men. Titus must shun foolish questions and reject persistently argumentative men. Paul closes the epistle with some practical instructions for Titus (CP 1:1-3:16).

**Philemon.** The subject of this epistle is Onesimus, a runaway slave owned by Philemon, a Gentile Christian living in Colossae, who had been converted to Christianity under Paul’s ministry. Paul was in prison in Rome when he met Onesimus and converted him to Christianity too. Paul is sending Onesimus, accompanied by Tychicus, back to Philemon with this epistle, the dominant theme of which is forgiveness. Paul’s instruction to Philemon in the epistle provides the biblical definition of forgiveness, without ever using the word. The epistle also illustrates how Paul dealt with slavery. He set forth Christian principles which undermine the evils of slavery by changing the hearts of both slaves and masters. The epistle also illustrates the message of the gospel. Once a slave to sin, Onesimus is now a beloved brother in the Lord and Philemon is challenged to show Onesimus the same forgiveness, and pardon him, as Christ also forgave and pardoned Philemon. Paul closes with greetings and a benediction (CP V 1-25).

**Hebrews.** While it is not known precisely who wrote this epistle, the thoughts and the reasonings throughout are Paul’s, and the conclusion is like other epistles Paul wrote. Further, in 2Pe 3:15-16, Peter confirms the fact that Paul wrote a letter to the Jews. As well, He 10:34 (KJV) and 13:24 show that the author had been in prison in Italy, and Paul is the only one who wrote any epistles from prison in Italy. As was noted earlier in this study, Paul was under house-arrest in Rome for two years when he wrote the epistles to the Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon, and he was later in prison in Rome when he wrote his second epistle to Timothy.

The theme of the epistle to the Hebrews is to present

the superiority of Christ as God over men and angels; the superiority of the New Covenant in Christ over the Old Covenant under the law of Moses; to prove that the Old Covenant was fulfilled in Christ and completely abolished; to confirm Jewish Christians in the faith, and to set forth New Covenant doctrines for all men. The backbone of the epistle is the finality of Christ for salvation. Because of the perfect sacrifice of Himself, He is the only mediator between God and man. The epistle begins by showing that Christ is the Son of God and is therefore superior to angels. Christ is the author of salvation, and angels minister to the needs of those He saves, in light of which Christians are warned against ignoring the salvation He provides. Christ is superior to Moses. Moses was a servant in the house of God, whereas Christ is the Son over God's house, who Christians are. It would be tragic for Christians to cease trusting Him, and they are warned against unbelief. They must labour to enter into God's rest which He has provided for them in Christ. Scripture will determine who enters in. It lays bare any insincerity or lack of diligence on the part of all who profess to be Christians.

Next, the writer contrasts the Old Testament high priest with Jesus, the high priest of the New Testament, who has gone to Heaven. The difference between them is that the Old Testament high priest was a sinner himself, and had to offer up sacrifices for himself and his household as well as for the people, whereas Jesus, although He was tempted on all points, was sinless. Therefore Christians in need of mercy and grace can come confidently to the throne of God knowing that they will obtain mercy and find grace. After another warning to Christians against defecting from the faith, the writer then compares Christ's eternal priesthood under the New Covenant with the temporary Levitical priesthood under the Old Covenant. God has made Christ a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek, an Old Testament type of the eternal priesthood of Christ. Because he lives for ever, Christ is able to save all who come to God through Him, and He continually intercedes on their behalf with God.

The New Covenant in Christ is far superior to the Old Covenant, and as a consequence it was completely abolished. Everything the Old Covenant involved – the law, the gifts and sacrifices for sin were but a shadow of things to come. Even the earthly tabernacle – it too was simply an example of the Heavenly reality. It typified God's dwelling place in Heaven into which Jesus entered bearing His own blood after His death on the cross. The Old Testament priests could not provide direct access to God for his people through the blood of animal sacrifices. It is only through the blood of Jesus that one can have direct access to God. The teaching here is very clear – the Old Covenant had failed, and so it was completely abolished and replaced with the New Covenant in Christ.

It was only Christ's sacrifice of Himself that satisfied God's justice and provided permanent sanctification of believers. His sacrifice calls for Christians to live faithfully, even under persecution. The writer urges Christians not to stop fellowshiping with each other – not to stop going to church. As the coming again of Jesus to take all the saints of God back to Heaven with Him draws closer, Christians are to stir each other up in love and exhort each other to fulfil their function in the church.

If Christians fall into sin and apostatise they will forfeit their salvation. They must retain their faith to be saved. Faith lays claim to the unseen realities of God and His Person; it presses on even if some of God's promises have not yet manifested; it risks everything for God and His purposes, and endures even in the face of death. The writer urges Christians to walk in the way God has prescribed for them, putting off everything that hinders their walk and any specific sin they have clung to. Jesus is the perfect example of faith to inspire them to persevere. Next, the writer admonishes Christians to keep on loving one another, to welcome strangers into their home – they might be angels, to remember those in prison for their faith as though in prison with them, and those suffering for their faith as though suffering with them. He explains that marriage is honourable – the emotional pleasure of sexual intimacy within marriage is ordained by God. Christians are to be content with such as they have and not covet more, so that they can testify to God, who will never leave them nor forsake them, as being their source of supply.

The writer further admonishes Christians to appreciate those who instruct them in the word of God, and to copy their faith. He exhorts them to reject the corrupt world system and its practices, and be prepared to bear the contempt and abuse and shame that Jesus bore. Christians are to maintain a yielding disposition, and remain open to the persuasion of their leaders to make their work a joy and not a burden. The writer concludes the epistle with prayer and greetings and a benediction. He asks the recipients of the epistle to bear with it (CP 1:1 – 13:25).

This section of our study on the epistles of Paul is now completed, as too is the overall study. It is interesting to note here in closing the study that Peter includes Paul's epistles as part of the inspired sacred scriptures (CP 2Pe 3:16). Paul's epistles, formulating, interpreting, and applying the essence of Christianity, are vital to Christian theology and practice. Paul was the most influential teacher of Christianity, and his achievements proclaim him as an unexcelled missionary statesman. He was truly a chosen vessel unto God.