

THE NEW TESTAMENT

Matthew.

This Gospel presents Christ as the Fulfiller and Fulfillment of God's will disclosed in the Old Testament. Jesus is set forth as Israel's Messiah, by whose words and life His followers, the True Israel, may gain divine forgiveness and fellowship. Matthew presents Christ's deeds and words in a generally biographical order: Birth of Jesus (Ch. 1-2); Activity of John the Baptist (Ch. 3:1-12); Baptism and Temptation of Jesus (Ch. 3:13-4:11); Jesus' preaching and teaching in Galilee (Ch. 4:12-18:35); Journey to Jerusalem (Ch. 19-20); the last week, Jesus' Crucifixion and Burial (Ch. 21-27); the Resurrection and Jesus' commission to His disciples (Ch. 28).

Within this framework we can also see the grouping of Jesus' teachings on specific themes the Five Discourses: 1) The Sermon on the Mount (Ch. 5-7); 2) Instructions for Missionary Disciples (Ch. 10); 3) Parables of the Kingdom (Ch. 13); 4) On True Discipleship (Ch. 18); and 5) On the End of This Age (Ch. 24-25).

In Times of Anxiety

[From the Sermon on the Mount Matt. 6:25-34]

I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor about your body, what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air. They neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add one cubit to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O men of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, What shall we eat? or What shall we wear? For the Gentiles seek all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well.

Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Let the day's own trouble be sufficient for the day.

Mark.

This Gospel is generally believed to have been the first written of the Gospels. Ancient tradition ascribes it to John Mark (Acts 12:12; 15:37), who composed it at Rome as a summary of Peter's witness. This Gospel is primarily a collection of narratives depicting Jesus as being constantly active (Mark uses the word immediately about forty times in sixteen chapters), characterizing Him as the Son of God (1:1,11; 5:7; 9:7; 14:61-62; 15:39), whose ministry was signified by a succession of mighty works which, to those who had eyes to see, were signs of the presence of God's power and kingdom.

The Great Commandment

(Matt. 22:37-40)

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets.

The Gospel can be divided as follows: 1) Beginning of Jesus' public life John the Baptist; baptism and temptation of Jesus (Ch. 1:1-13); 2) Jesus' preaching, teaching and healing in Galilee (Ch. 1:14-9:50); 3) Journey to Jerusalem (Ch. 10); 4) The last week Jesus' crucifixion and burial (Ch. 11-15); 5) The Resurrection (Ch. 16:1-8); and 6) Epilogue on events after the Resurrection (Ch. 16:9-20).

Luke.

The author of this Gospel, St. Luke the Physician, a Gentile convert and friend of St. Paul, presents the words and works of Jesus as the divine-human Savior Whose compassion and tenderness extended to all who were needy. Jesus' universal mission is highlighted by a) tracing his genealogy back to Adam (3:38); b) references commending members of a despised people the Samaritans (10:30-37; 17:11-19); c) indication of the new place of importance of women among the followers of the Lord (7:36-50; 8:3; 10:38-42); and d) promising that the Gentile (of whom Luke was one) would have an opportunity to accept the Gospel (2:32; 3:6; 24:47).

When Downcast

(Matt. 11:28-30)

Come to Me all who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.

St. Luke presents more episodes of Jesus' last journey to Jerusalem than do the other Evangelists, and this section preserves many of the most beloved of His parables (Good Samaritan, Prodigal Son, the Unjust Judge, etc.). The Gospel can be divided as follows: 1) (Ch. 1-2) Births of John the Baptist and Jesus; 2) (Ch. 3:1-22) Activity of John the Baptist; Baptism of Jesus; 3) (Ch. 3:23-38) Genealogy of Jesus; 4) (Ch. 4:1-13) Temptation of Jesus; 5) (Ch. 4:14-9:50) Jesus in Galilee; 6) (Ch. 9:51-19:27) Journey to Jerusalem; 7) (Ch. 19:28-23:56) Crucifixion and Burial; and 8) (Ch. 24) The Resurrection and the Commissioning of the Disciples.

Self-Denial

(Luke 9:23-26)

If any man would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for My sake, he will save it. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself? For whoever is ashamed of Me and of My words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when He comes in His glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.

John.

This Gospel, by the Beloved Disciple, speaks of the Mystery of the Person of Jesus. He is like other men, yet quite unlike them, for He was the Son of God. He was eternally present with God, active in creating the world, and was the source of the moral and spiritual nature of man (life and light). When He became man, He made known the eternal God Whom no one has ever seen (John 1:14,18). St. John records real events, but goes beyond the other Evangelists in interpreting them. He uses symbols from common experience bread, water, light, life, shepherd, door, etc. as well as contrasts light and darkness, truth and lies, love and hatred, etc. to make the meaning of Christ clear. For this reason he is aptly called by the Church the Theologian.

The Gospel is divided in the following manner: Prologue (Ch. 1:1-18 In the beginning was the Word...); Jesus Christ as the object of Faith (Ch. 1:19-4:54); Conflicts with unbelievers (Ch. 5-12); Fellowship with believers (Ch. 13-17 (14-17 are generally known as the Farewell Discourses)); Death and Resurrection (Ch. 18-20); and (Ch. 21) An Epilogue.

In Sorrow for the Departed

(John 11:25-26)

I am the Resurrection and the Life, he who believes in Me; though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die.

Acts of the Apostles.

The book of Acts the early history of the Church is a continuation of the Gospel of Luke, by the same author, who had accompanied St. Paul on parts of his missionary journeys. The Acts trace the story of the Christian Movement from the Resurrection of Jesus to

the unhindered preaching of the Christian message in Rome by Paul. Most of the first part is dominated by events in Jerusalem, while the latter part is dominated by Paul himself. The Word spreads from Jerusalem to Samaria (8:5), to the seacoast (8:40), to Damascus (9:10), to Antioch and Cyprus (11:19), to Asia Minor (13:13), to Europe (16:11), and finally to Rome (28:16).

The Golden, Rule

(Luke 6:31)

As you wish that men would do to you, do so to them.

Romans.

The Epistles of St. Paul are arranged in the New Testament according to length, and this Epistle (or Letter) to the Romans is the longest and most weighty, theologically, thus giving it first place in the canonical order. This letter is probably the last written by St. Paul (that we possess) and, at the time of its writing (between 54 and 58 A.D.), he was at Corinth waiting to take a collection for the needy to Jerusalem (15:25-27), after which he wanted to stop at Rome on his way to Spain (15:28).

After the greeting and thanksgiving, Paul describes first the need for the world of redemption (1:18-3:20). Then he discusses God's saving act in Christ: its nature (3:21-4:25) and the new life which has been made available by this act (5:1-8:39). After detailing the role of Israel the Jewish nation in God's plan (Ch. 9-11), the letter closes with ethical teachings and a few personal remarks (Ch. 12-16).

First Corinthians.

The Gospel was first preached in Corinth by Paul on his second missionary journey (50 A.D.). While living and working there, he preached in the synagogue until opposition arose. He was accused by the Jews before the Roman Governor, Gallio, but the charges were dismissed and Paul remained in the city eighteen months (Acts 18:1-17; 1 Cor. 2:3). Paul's subsequent relations with this Church were disturbed from time to time by doubts and suspicions on both sides, but for no other Church did Paul feel a deeper affection. The whole letter is concerned directly or indirectly with doctrinal and ethical problems that were disturbing the Corinthian Church, including divisions in the Church (1:11), immorality (Ch. 5; 6:9-20), and questions concerning marriage, food, worship and the Resurrection.

SECOND CORINTHIANS.

Relations between Paul and the Corinthian Church had deteriorated, and having made a painful visit to the Church (2:1), he refrained from making a second trip, knowing that it too would be painful, for which cause he had written to that Church a severe and sorrowful letter out of much affliction and anguish of heart and with many tears (2:4) now lost to us sending it to Corinth by means of Titus, one of his fellow workers. Not able to wait for Titus' return, so anxious was he about the effects of this painful letter, Paul left Ephesus and went to Troas, hoping to meet Titus there. Disappointed there, he went on to Macedonia (2:12-13), where Titus rejoined him, bringing the good news that the Church in Corinth had repented of its rebelliousness against Paul (7:13-16). In relief and gratitude, Paul wrote this letter.

In the letter Paul speaks about the above problems and takes the opportunity to speak at length about the offering for the Church at Jerusalem (8:1-9:15), which was now almost complete. Chapters 10-13 contain a vigorous defense of Paul and his work and throughout the letter we are given many personal and autobiographical glimpses into Paul's life (4:8-18; 11:22-33).

The Way of Love

(1 Cor. 13)

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels; But have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal And if I have prophetic powers; and understand all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith; so as to remove mountains; But have not love; I am nothing. If I give away all I have; and if I deliver my body to be burned; but have not love; I gain nothing.

Love is patient and kind, love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong; but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things; believes all things; hopes all things; endures all things.

Love never ends; as for prophecies; they will pass away, as for tongues, they will cease, as for knowledge; it will pass away. For our knowledge is imperfect and our prophecy is imperfect, but when the perfect comes; the imperfect will pass away.

When I was a child; I spoke like a child; I thought like a child; I reasoned like a child; when I became a man, I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly; but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully; even as I have been fully understood.

So faith; hope; love abide; these three, but the greatest of these is love.

GALATIANS.

This letter was written about 55 A.D. during Paul's third missionary journey and gives many autobiographical details of the Apostle's earlier life and missionary activity. The letter dealt with the question whether a Gentile must become a Jew before he could become a Christian; for certain Judaizing teachers had infiltrated the Churches of Galatia in central Asia Minor which Paul had founded (Acts 16:6), declaring that in addition to having faith in Christ Jesus, a Christian was obligated to keep the Mosaic Law. On the contrary, Paul insisted, a man becomes right with God only by faith in Christ and not by the performance of good works, ritual observances and the like (2:16; 3:24-25; 5:1; 6:12-15). The letter can be divided into three parts: 1) defense of Paul's apostolic authority and the validity of his teachings (1:1-2:21); 2) an exposition of the doctrine of justification by faith alone (3:1-4:31); and 3) justification by faith applied practical applications (5:1-6:18).

EPHESIANS.

This letter was written while Paul was a prisoner (3:1; 4:1; 6:20) at about the same time as the Epistle to the Colossians, since it shares many of the same phrases and expressions as that Epistle. Because important early manuscripts and Church Fathers make no reference to Ephesus in 1:1 and because the letter contains no personal greetings, etc., most scholars see it as a sort of encyclical or circular letter of which copies were sent to several Churches in Asia Minor.

The theme of the letter is God's eternal purpose in establishing and completing the universal Church of Jesus Christ. Although of various backgrounds and nationalities, the members of this community have been called by God the Father, redeemed and forgiven through His Son, and incorporated into a fellowship, sealed and directed by the divine, indwelling Spirit (1:5,12,13; 2:18-20; 3:14,16,17; 4:4-6). In the letter the figures of the Church as the Body of Christ (1:23; 4:16), the Building or Temple of God (2:20-22) and the Bride of Christ (5:23-32) are developed.

Philippians.

This letter, one of the most cordial and affectionate we have from Paul's hand, was addressed to the Christians at Philippi in Macedonia, the first congregation established by him in Europe (Acts 16:11-15). Written about 61 A.D. while he was in prison, the occasion of this letter writing was the return to Philippi of Epaphroditus (2:25-29), who had been sent by the Church there with a gift for Paul (4:18). The Apostle took this opportunity to describe his own situation and state of mind to the Philippian congregation, thanking them for their gift and giving them certain needed instructions. The whole letter is permeated with Paul's joy and serene happiness in Christ, even while in prison and in danger of death (2:2; 3:8-14; 4:11-13).

Colossians.

This letter was written in the early 60's while Paul was in prison (4:3,10,18) at about the same time as the letter to the Ephesians (with which it has many similarities). The purpose was to correct erroneous speculations which had arisen because of the activities of certain false teachers (perhaps Gnostics), who claimed to possess superior knowledge of divine matters (2:18), advocated a mixture of ascetical and ritual practices (2:16,20-23) which had certain Jewish parallels, as well as connections with Greek philosophic speculation and oriental mysticism.

The letter is divided into two parts: 1) a doctrinal section in which the supremacy of Christ in the cosmos, in the Church and in the individual is stressed (1:1-3:4) and 2) practical exhortations (3:5-4:18) in which the ascetical and legalistic tendencies are counteracted by a spiritual morality and social ethic bound together by Christian love.

First Thessalonians.

This epistle is probably the first of St. Paul's letters, written from Corinth about 51 A.D. During his second missionary journey, after being driven out of Philippi, Paul, Silas and Timothy came to Thessalonica, the capital of Macedonia (Acts 17:1). Here he preached in the synagogue for three Sabbaths, proclaiming Jesus as the Messiah and attracting many followers, both Jews and Gentiles. The Jews, annoyed at these inroads, aroused such a disturbance, that Paul and his companions had to leave, going first to Beroea and thence to Athens and Corinth.

Paul, anxious about the new congregation at Thessalonica, deprived of his leadership and persecuted, sent Timothy to strengthen and encourage the young congregation. When Timothy returned with the good news of their faith and loyalty, Paul wrote the first letter to the Thessalonians to express his joy and gratitude at their perseverance, to urge them to Christian conduct, and to answer two questions: 1) Is a Christian deprived of the blessings of the Kingdom if he dies before Christ's second Advent; and 2) When will Christ come in glory? The first is answered in 4:13-18 and the second in 5:1-11.

Second Thessalonians.

This letter was sent by Paul to the Thessalonians shortly after the first letter, as a result of continued persecutions by the Jews at Thessalonica. In addition, there were some misunderstandings concerning the Second Coming of Christ and the view was held by some that the Day of the Lord had already come (2:2). Some thought that its judgments had already begun; yet they understood Paul to have taught that they would be exempt from these judgments. As a result, some, thinking the end of the world was at hand, had stopped working and were creating an embarrassing situation (3:6,11). Paul corrected the teaching in this letter and reprimanded the idlers, If any one will not work, let him not eat (3:10).

First Timothy.

The first letter to Timothy (the son of a Greek Gentile Father and a Jewish Mother, Eunice, and closely associated with Paul from the time of the second missionary journey) had a dual purpose: to provide guidance in the problems of Church administration, and to oppose false teachings of a speculative and moralistic nature. Thus it offers suggestions for the regulation of worship (2:1-15), sets out the qualifications for bishops (3:1-7) and deacons (3:8-13), and gives instructions as to the attitude of Church leaders towards false asceticism (4:1-16) and toward individual members (5:1-12), especially widows (5:13-16), presbyters (5:17) and slaves (6:1-2).

Second Timothy.

The second letter to Timothy is an earnest pastoral letter from a veteran missionary to a younger colleague, urging endurance as the main quality of a preacher of the Gospel. Here we encounter the theme of a good soldier of Christ (2:3) as well as words concerning the apostasy of the last days (3:1-9), the inspiration of the Scriptures (3:16), and the crown of righteousness (4:8). The letter was written when Paul was probably facing certain martyrdom.

Titus.

This letter, sent to Titus (an oft-mentioned companion of Paul in the Acts) has three main topics, corresponding to the three chapters of this epistle: 1) sets forth what is required of elders or bishops in the face of various false teachers and local problems; 2) the proper approach to different groups in the Church (older men, older women, younger men and slaves), concluding with a summary of what is expected of believers in view of God's grace; and 3) Christians are advised to avoid hatred and quarrels and to manifest the meekness, gentleness, obedience and courtesy made possible by God's mercy in Christ.

Philemon.

While Paul was under house arrest in Rome (ca. 61-63 A.D. (Acts 28:30)), Onesimus, a runaway slave, came under his influence and was converted to Christianity. Paul persuaded him to return to his master, Philemon, a resident of Colossae in Phrygia, who himself had previously become a Christian as a result of Paul's earlier preaching in Asia Minor (vs. 19) and whose home was now a meeting place of a Christian congregation.

Paul, in this letter, while not outwardly condemning the institution of slavery and respectful of Philemon's rights, sets forth a principle which would soften the harshness of slavery (vs. 16) and ultimately banish it altogether.

Hebrews.

This anonymous letter, written prior to the Fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D., is an elaborate argument showing the pre-eminence of Christianity over Judaism. The letter is evidently addressed to those who were on the verge of giving up their Christian faith and returning to the Jewish beliefs and practices of their ancestors. The author emphasizes three main points: 1) the superiority of the Person of Christ to the Prophets (1:1-3), Angels (1:5-2:18) and Moses himself (3:1-6); 2) the superiority of the Priesthood of Christ to the Levitical Priesthood (4:14-7:28); and 3) the superiority of Christ's sacrifice offered in the heavenly sanctuary to the many animal sacrifices offered on earth by the Levitical Priests (8:1-10:39). Christians of all ages have also been inspired by Chapter 11, the great Chapter of Faith.

James.

This letter is purported to have been written by James, the brother of the Lord and head of the Church at Jerusalem, to Jewish Christians in the diaspora. He assumes knowledge of the Gospel on the part of his readers and is concerned to remind them how Christians ought to live. In this letter, James makes the famous assertion that faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead (2:15). In addition, he speaks eloquently concerning the use of the tongue for good and evil (3:1-12), as well as prayer for the sick (5:13-16). This text is used by the Orthodox Church concerning the Mystery of Holy Unction or the Anointing of the Sick.

FIRST PETER.

The first letter of Peter was written to give encouragement and hope to Christians in the northern part of Asia Minor, who were undergoing persecution (ca. 64 A.D.). The congregations, mainly of Gentile converts (1:14; 2:10; 4:3), are urged not to be surprised at the fiery ordeal which has come upon them. They are to rejoice in their trials, knowing that they share them with their brotherhood throughout the world (5:9). By participating in the sufferings of Christ (4:13), they will demonstrate the genuineness of their faith (1:6,7). This letter was written from Babylon (Rome 5:13) during the time of the persecutions of Nero.

Second Peter.

This brief letter is a reminder (1:12; 3:1) of the truth of Christianity as opposed to the heresies of false teachers. The author recalls the apostolic witness as the basis of the Church's proclamation (1:16), points to the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament which have been confirmed by the coming of Christ (1:19-21) and explains that the delay of the Second Coming is due to the patience and forbearance of God, Who desires that all should reach repentance (3:9). Because of the text concerning the Transfiguration (1:16-18), the Orthodox Church uses portions of 2nd Peter as one of the readings for that Feast.

First John.

This letter, written toward the end of the 1st Century A.D., has traditionally been attributed by the Church to St. John the Evangelist. The letter has a two-fold purpose: 1) to deepen the spiritual life of its readers (1:3-4), and 2) to correct the heretical views of certain Gnostic teachers who denied that God had really become man in Jesus (4:2). The theme of love runs throughout and the book is full of contrasts: light and darkness (1:6-7; 2:8-11); love of world and love of God (2:15-17); children of God and children of the Devil (3:4-10); the Spirit of God and the spirit of Antichrist (4:1-3); love and hate (4:7-12, 16-21).

SECOND JOHN.

This letter was written to one specific Church, the elect lady (vs. 1), probably one of the Churches of Asia Minor. Like the first letter

of John, it too was written by St. John the Evangelist late in the 1st Century. Here he repeats in briefer form the main teachings of 1st John and adds a warning against showing hospitality to false teachers, lest this further the spread of error (vs. 7-11).

Third John.

This is a personal letter of John to Gaius, focusing on an ecclesiastical problem regarding traveling teachers. Gaius had extended to them hospitality, while Diotrephes, who liked to put himself first (vs. 9), had refused to receive them, challenging the spiritual authority of the Elder (John) (vs. 10). John rebukes Diotrephes, while encouraging Gaius in his practice.

Jude.

This letter, written about 80 A.D., by Jude, the brother of James and the Lord, was set forth to warn against false teachers (Gnostics) who had made their way into the Church, characterized here as being immoral (vs. 4, 7,16) and covetous (vs. 11,16), and rejecting authority (vs. 8,11). They are grumblers, malcontents, and loud-mouthed boosters (vs. 16), worldly people, devoid of the Spirit (vs. 19). Because of their lack of brotherly love (vs. 12), it is not surprising that they create division in the congregations (vs. 19). For their actions, they will experience God's judgment (vs. 5-7).

Revelation (The Apocalypse).

This revelation was extended to St. John the Evangelist at the end of the 1st Century while he was in exile on the isle of Patmos during the reign of the Emperor Domitian (81-96 A.D.). This is a revelation of Jesus Christ and He is the center of the entire book (1:1). In His risen glory (Ch. 1) He directs His Churches on earth (Ch. 2-3). He is the slain and risen Lamb to Whom all worship is directed (Ch. 4-5). The judgments of the coming seven-year period of tribulation on this earth are the display of the wrath of the Lamb (Ch. 6-19), and the return to Christ to this earth is described in 19:11-21. The thousand-year reign of Christ is described in Chapter 20 and the new heavens and new earth in Chapters 21-22. The Orthodox Church also sees in Chapter 12:1-6 a portrayal of the Most-holy Theotokos. One of the least understood books of the New Testament, The Apocalypse is the one book of the Bible most distorted by various Protestant sects.

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