

## SECTIONS AND READINGS FOR TRAIL XII

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Section XII.56: Revelation 21:1-22:21.

HTB XII

THE LATER APOSTOLOLOGICAL PERIOD (59-100 A.D)

ACTS 21-27-28:31; PHILEMON; COLOSSIANS; EPHESIANS; PHILIPPIANS; 1 TIMOTHY;  
TITUS; 2 TIMOTHY; HEBREWS; 1 and 2 PETER; JUDE; 1 2 and 3 JOHN; REVELATION.

COMPREHENSIVE QUESTION:

According to the apostles, what all is involved in becoming and being a Christian? If you seek to follow in the apostles teaching, how should that impact your thinking and living?

## MODULE XII: LATER APOSTOLIC PERIOD (59 — 100 A.D.)

### INTRODUCTION TO THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

The Acts of the Apostles was probably written by Doctor Luke, St Paul's occasional travelling companion, as the continuation of his chronological account of the rise of Christianity from its beginnings in his Gospel, Luke (Ac 1:1f). Here he follows the spread of the gospel from the centre of the Jewish world, Jerusalem, to the center of the Roman Empire, Rome itself as it emerged from within the framework of the Jewish people to engage the Gentile world. Every stage of this development he attributes to the working of God's Holy Spirit. Luke's own personal involvement in the story is evident at the points where he narrates in the 1<sup>st</sup> person plural — the "we sections".

The book's theme is disclosed in the opening section (1:1-11), wherein Luke draws attention (a) to the continued activity of the risen and ascended Jesus, the Messiah, (b) to the apostolic leaders Jesus had chosen, (c) to the promised Holy Spirit as the source of the Christian's power, and (d) Jesus' plan for the spread of the gospel from Jerusalem to Rome.

The book's abrupt ending two years into Paul's Roman house arrest, suggests a date of about 64 A.D. for its completion. This second volume of Luke's history may well have been written to be a part of Paul's legal defense before the emperor. If so, then the "Theophilus" to whom both volumes are addressed (Lk 1:1; Ac 1:1), may well have been an honorary Greek title [= Lover of God] for a Roman official interested in a full account of the work of Jesus, the Messiah, and his apostles, especially as it engaged with the Roman empire. This would account for Luke's great care to tie his narrative into contemporary history at many points. Many of the details of Luke's account have been confirmed by modern historians so often, that the default tendency today is to take Luke's historical integrity for granted even where we still have doubts about some of the historical details. Such accuracy would have been necessary to bear the critical scrutiny of a Roman investigator who had much better access to first century records and customs than we could now have without a "time machine".

Luke, however, is far more than a mere historian of Christianity and an apologist for the Christian faith and for the apostle Paul, for he is in effect writing a fifth gospel, one about the continuing activities of the risen Messiah and of God's Holy Spirit. Without his account, we would know much less about how Jesus founded and built his church. We would also be missing most of the knowledge of the context of early Christian community that we need to interpret the many New Testament letters. Thus, in many ways the Acts of the Apostles is the central book of the New Testament, bridging between the gospels and the epistles, and providing the background for the latter.

## ANALYSIS OF THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

1:1-5:42	Birth of the Church:
1:1-26	Introduction:
1:1-14	Ascension of Jesus,
1:15-26	Replacement apostle for Judas chosen.
2:1-47	Happenings on the Day of Pentecost,
3:1-4:31	Healing at the temple and the apostles charged before the Sanhedrin,
4:32-5:11	Mutual sharing within the early community,
5:12-42	Apostles charged a second time before the Sanhedrin.
6:1-9:31	Persecution in Jerusalem leads to expansion in Syria:
6:1-7	Selection and appointment of first "deacons",
6:8-8:1a	Deacon Stephen's ministry and martyrdom,
8:1b-40	Deacon Philip's missionary activities,
9:1-31	Conversion and earliest ministry of Saul of Tarsus, the persecutor.
9:32-12:25	Apostle Peter's early ministries in Syria:
9:32-43	Peter's acts in western Palestine,
10:1-48	Conversion of the gentile centurion Cornelius,
11:1-18	Peter's defense of his response to Cornelius,
11:19-30	Jewish and Hellenistic Christian church in Syrian Antioch,
12:1-25	Herod Agrippa's attack on the church.
13:1-14:28	Apostle Paul (Saul)' s 1st missionary journey:
13:1-3	Apostles Barnabas and Saul called to a new ministry,
13:4-12	Ministry in Cyprus,
13:13-52	Ministry in Pisidian Antioch,
14:1-23	Ministry in Iconium, Lystra and Derbe (south Galatia),
14:24-28	Their return to report to the sending church in Syrian Antioch.
15:1-35	Council of Jerusalem:
15:1-5	Agitation by Judaizers in Syrian Antioch,
15:6-29	Meeting of the church council in Jerusalem,
15:30-35	Apostolic letter from the council received in Syrian Antioch.
15:36-18:23	Apostle Paul's 2nd missionary journey:
15:36-41	Separation of Barnabas and Paul,
16:1-5	Paul and Silas minister in south Galatia,
16:6-40	Crossing into Macedonia and ministry in Philippi,
17:1-34	Ministry from Thessalonica to Athens,
18:1-17	Ministry in Corinth,
18:18-23	Paul visits Jerusalem while returning to Syrian Antioch.
18:24-21:17	Apostle Paul's 3 <sup>rd</sup> missionary journey:
18:24-28	Apollos' ministries in Ephesus and Corinth,
19:1-41	Paul's ministry in Ephesus,
20:1-6	Paul's ministries in Macedonia and Greece,
20:7-21:17	Paul's return to Jerusalem.
21:18-26:32	Apostle Paul in Judea:
21:18-23:30	Paul arrested and tried in Jerusalem,
23:31-26:32	Paul imprisoned and tried in Caesarea.
27:1-28:31	Apostle Paul's voyage to Rome and house arrest there:
27:1-44	Paul's voyage and shipwreck,
28:1-10	Paul's winter on Malta,
28:11-28	Paul in Rome.

TRAIL XII      SECTION 1:      Acts 21:27-22:24.

1. Imagine that you were writing a TV script about Paul's arrest in Jerusalem in A. D. 59 (Ac 21:27-40; 22:1-29). In your outline of the sequence of events, what persons and groups were involved in each successive scene? How did misunderstandings and differing motivations play significant parts? How did Paul respond to his treatment at each stage? What might you have done in his place? What parallels can you see to Jesus' arrest and subsequent treatment? Under what circumstances could this happen to Christians in your country? What about in other countries? What can individual Christians and congregations there and elsewhere do about this
2. What aspects of Paul's defence to those antagonistic to him and his inclusive Christian gospel, helped to minimize the offence long enough to gain him a brief hearing? What did Paul have to say about God's involvement in his life through Jesus, the Messiah/ Christ? How might his practice of telling his own story and connecting it to its Christian meaning, become a model for your own evangelistic practice? What testimony could you give about Jesus' positive impact on your life? Might this be news to people who think they know you well? Might it even interest them? Might it even be relevant to their lives too?
3. How does Christian baptism seem to be connected to forgiveness of sins and to Jesus' name for Paul soon after his conversion (22:16) and generally elsewhere in the New Testament (Mt 28:19f; Ac 2:38; Ep 5:26; He 10:22)? What does this mean to you and to your congregation?
4. At what point did the Jewish mob reject what Paul was saying? Why? How did that accord with what God had said would happen if Paul returned to Jerusalem (Ac 9:26-30; 22:17-21)? Why do you think the commander [Greek = "*chiliarch*" = the commander of 1000 Roman troops] didn't understand why those Jews were so worked up about what Paul had just said? Why might he think that flogging Paul would help bring that reason to light? What parallels are there sometimes today in the treatment of those who are detained by the police'?
5. Why might God have decided to send Paul who was so highly qualified to evangelize Jews, to be a missionary to the gentiles (22:18)? Where have you seen God working this way today? Is what other ways dose God sometimes work (Mk 5:18-20)? How might these ways apply to your own Chr tian ministry? How, also, might it relate to the process your congregation uses to call a new clergy person?

1. Why do you think that this time Paul reveals his Roman citizenship before being flogged (16:37; 22:25)? How valuable had this special citizenship been to Paul throughout his ministry? Why did that political status change his situation even without a trial (22:25)? What was the result (22:24f, 30)?
2. Does what Paul claimed at the beginning of his preliminary address to the Sanhedrin/ Jewish Council/ (23:1) suggest that he had never sinned (23:1; 22:19f; Ro 3:23)? How would his interaction with Ananias have disproved any such claim to perfection? Is Paul here ignoring the wisdom of Pr 16:18 and Jesus himself (Mt 5:22, 39)? What would you have done?
3. How is Paul's treatment by the Sanhedrin similar to that of Jesus during his preliminary hearing before the ex-High Priest Arns (Jn 18:22)? What prompted such blows? How did Paul's and Jesus' responses differ (Jn 18:23; Ac 23:3)? How would you evaluate Paul's response (Ac 23:5) in light of Peter's descriptions of Jesus' example in 1 P2:21-23 and 4:14?
4. If Paul's identification of the real issue at stake ("the hope of the resurrection") was just a clever manoeuvre to divide and conquer his accusers (23:6-8), why does he repeat his claim later in his Roman trial in Caesarea (24:15, 21) and also in his hearing before king Herod Agrippa II (24:6-8)? According to Paul, how essential is the resurrection from the dead to the truth of the Christian gospel (1 Co 15:13, 17, 19; Ro 1:4)? How true is this for your faith in Jesus Christ? What Christian doctrines tend to divide Christianity's opponents in your culture today? Which of these are really essential to any Christianity claiming to follow in the teaching tradition of the NT apostles? How so? How many of these "essential" doctrines also tend to divide those claiming to be Christians today? How much do they matter? To whom?
5. Did the Pharisees' response (23:9f) really admit that Paul's encounter on the Damascus Road might well have been a valid spiritual experience? As orthodox Jews, could they also have gone even farther and accept Paul's explanation that it was a real encounter with the risen Messiah (22:71; 1 Co 15:3-5, 8)? How so? Why had some Pharisees much earlier on become Christians (Jn 12:42; 19:38f; Ac 11:2, 18; 15:5)? What made it much harder for Sadducees to come to follow the Way of the Messiah (5:17f; Jn 12:10f)? Can you recall any New Testament reference to any Sadducee becoming a Christian? The priests in Ac 6:7 were probably much lower level priests than the ruling Sadducees. What religious groups today, do you think, would find it the hardest to acknowledge and celebrate Jesus as God's Messiah? How so? Would it be possible for members of such groups to follow Jesus truly without completely abandoning their former religious customs and practices? In this respect, what can we learn from the earliest 1<sup>st</sup> century church in Jerusalem under the leadership of James (21:17-26)? Could there be Christian congregations within Judaism today? What about within other religions like Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, etc.? How might such possible Christian congregations be similar and different from your own gentile Christian congregation? Should you and your congregation have fellowship with them (Jn 10:16; 17:21-23)? How could you without disrupting their other religious connection?

1. What sort of experience do you think Paul's was in 23:11? Have you had such an experience? How so? How did the Lord encourage Paul then both about his present and his future? How has he encouraged and guided you? What encouragement and guidance do you feel that you need right now? From whom do you seek it? In what formats are you willing to receive it? How would you recognize that it was from God?
2. Do people today make similar compacts against Christians? For what reasons? Have you ever encountered such a movement? With what outcome? Do modern conspirators also swear oaths? How seriously should such oaths be taken? What happens if they fail to fulfill their oath? Where in your society are oaths taken very seriously? How are consequences associated with breaking them? How is God involved even in a secular society's oaths?
3. Have you ever been in a similar position to that of Paul's young nephew in being able to help someone in grave danger? How did that opportunity unfold? How was God himself involved in each case? Have you ever been helped by someone at a critical time? How grateful were you to God and to his agent of deliverance? What might this suggest about how God partners with humanity accomplish his good purposes? What, also, does the proximity of Paul's nephew suggest about where-some of Paul's extended family now resided?
4. Why do you think the *chiliarch* employed such a large military contingent to protect one lone Roman citizen from a relatively small group of assassins (21:30-35; 22:22f; 23:23)? Why wouldn't the entire force have had to go all the way to Caesarea? Where else might they now have been needed?
5. How does the *chiliarch's* summary account to the governor of what had happened to Paul (23:26-30) compare with Luke's more detailed account (21:30-39; 22:22-23:24)? What might the differences and the recording of both accounts indicate about how careful Luke was both as a historian and as an apologist for Paul? Do you ever shape your account of a situation to suit your purposes and the new circumstances? How so? How does this relate to truth-telling?

1. How would you compare the approaches of Tertullus and Paul to the governor, Felix Antonius? Why might Tertullus' favourable description of Felix here be in sharp contrast to the negative assessment of him by the contemporary Jewish historian Flavius Josephus? Should this discrepancy reflect negatively upon the historicity of Luke's account here? What charges did the Jews bring against Paul? How well were they supported? How well are they answered by Paul? What could you learn from Paul's way of dealing with these charges? How might that help you deal better with personal attacks?
2. According to what Paul says here, how did he view the relationship between Christianity and both to 1<sup>st</sup> century Judaism and to the Old Testament people of God? How true is this also with respect to the Judaism and Christianity of today? How is your understanding of the Christian hope connected with that of God's people in the Old Testament (Ro 11)? How significant is this continuity or discontinuity?
3. How does Paul's belief in the resurrection of all the dead (24:21) provide an important ground for his discussion of-the importance of-personal ethics (24:25)? How relevant is that same connection to you (2 Co 5:9f; Rv 20:12f)? How is hope for a resurrection a hope in the character God himself? Is it for you to? How so?
4. Why do you think Paul included personal questions about morals, self-control and coming judgement (24:25) in his presentation of the Christian faith to Felix and Drusilla, his beautiful Jewish wife? Might her membership in the notorious Herodian clan as well as her public desertion of her abusive first royal husband at Felix's instigation, have influenced Paul's tactics? Why might Felix himself be frightened? Nevertheless, could the youngest sister of Herod Agrippa II and daughter of Herod Agrippa I have been one of the important sources for Felix's accurate/ close knowledge of the (Christian) Way (24:22; 13:1; Lk 8:3)?
5. Judging from Luke's account of each man's actions, how do Felix Antonius and Portico Festus compare as men and as governors of Judea? Why might Paul fear that he was in real danger if he were to be handed over to the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem (25:3), even though he were just as innocent as Jesus had been (Mk 15:15; Jn 19:4-7, 12, 15f)? What was the variety of Felix's motives at play in his treatment of Paul for two years after the trial? Could this happen today in the justice system that you know best? How so? How was Festus' treatment of Paul much different than Felix's? How wise and right was Paul to appeal from governor Festus to emperor Nero Claudius Caesar Germanicus (25:10-12)? How much might the Lord's prediction (23:11), have motivated Paul's legal manoeuvre just as much as the threats in Festus' final question and motivation (25:9)?

1. Why might it be natural for a recently arrived Roman governor to consult with two of his new Jewish wife's other royal siblings, King Herod Agrippa II and Bernice, about religious issues associated with the Jewish sect of The Way? Does 26:2f suggest that Paul appreciated Festus' decision to consult Agrippa II? Would Paul have any reason to believe that the Herods would really be interested in knowing personally even more about The Way (13:1; Lk 8:3)? Why, then, did Paul approach them the way he did?
2. How do Luke's (25:1-12) and Festus' (25:14-21) accounts of how Festus had handled Paul's case compare? What more is involved here that merely a difference of perspective? How significant is this? For whom?
3. In your own words, how would you summarize Paul's new account of his early life, his conversion to Christianity and his commission to serve Jesus, the Messiah? How did Paul see what changed his life connected to the issue for which he claimed that he was on trial? How central is this same issue to your Christian life, understanding and hope? How so?
4. How does Paul's account of his being singled out by God for special attention and his then being commissioned by God for a special role in accomplishing God's good purposes (26:14-17), provide a particularly clear example of the general picture presented in Ps 8:4-6 of all humanity's special relationship and vocation from and with Yahweh God? How does this special relationship and vocation apply to you in particular? If you don't yet know, why not ask God about his view of your identity now? How open are you to what his answer might be? How so?
5. According to 26:16-18, what was to be the basic function Paul's whole ministry/ service? What was this to accomplish for people? What role would the hearer's trusting in Jesus, God's Messiah, play in this being appropriated and experienced personally? What was Paul's own role? How does he connect (a) a person's enlightenment, (b) turning around/ repentance from Satan to God and (c) his doing appropriate deeds, with (d) his trusting in Jesus (26:18 and 20)? Why (Ep 2:8-10)?

1. According to 26:20f, what does Paul claim to be the reason he was seized by the Jewish mob? How does this accord with Luke's earlier account of the event in 21:21-30 and 22:21f? Do you think the main issue has shifted for Paul? Does what Paul himself adds in 26:23 clarify things? How so?
2. What range of help from God is Paul referring to in 26:17 and 22? How did this apply to his present circumstances? Would you, like Paul, be able to view such a situation not as yet another trial, but (a) as a golden opportunity to exercise his special ministerial calling (9:15) to evangelize both Roman and Jewish authorities in the Roman empire's most eastern outpost, and (b) perhaps even as a possible giant step with God towards fulfilling his divinely-promised future ministry at the centre of the empire itself (23:11)? How do you view unforeseen possibilities in your life? Do you expect to find God involved both for your good and for his good purposes (Ro 8:28)?
3. Would you agree with Paul's claim in 26:22f about the continuity of message between the Old and New Testaments? Why do some Christians not see this continuity clearly? How could it be illuminated for them? In what sense is the New Testament, then, really new?
4. What prompted the gentile Felix to interrupt, shouting that Paul was out of his mind (26:24; 1;2;12)? Nevertheless, why could Paul truthfully insist that he was simply speaking the sober truth (26:25; 17:31; Ro 1:5; 1 Co 15:1-24)? Who today might agree with Festus? Why might Paul expect the Jewish king Agrippa II to appreciate his reasoning (26:3, 25f) much more readily than the newly-arrived gentile governor could? Why might Paul's appeal to Agrippa's trust in the prophets (26:27), have prompted Agrippa to think that Paul was beginning to try to persuade him to become a follower of Jesus as God's Messiah [Hebrew==Greek "Christ", i.e., "Anointed One"]? Would Agrippa probably have been quite correct (Lk 24:25-27, 45-47; Jn 5:39; Ac 2:22-36; 7:51-53; 13:22-41)? For whom would this line of argument be cogent today? What other rational arguments are viable for other mentalities (17:19-34; Ro 1:18-21; 2:14-16)? Who do you know of who has been persuaded to become a Christian through rational arguments? Would the Holy Spirit be just as involved in such a conversion process as in any other one? How and why do people become Christians today in your culture? What does the apostle Peter suggest is the best general approach to personal evangelism (1 P 3:15-17)? Does this leave room for rational arguments? How does Paul's attempted persuasion of Agrippa exemplify this pattern?
5. How significant is it that the Jewish king Agrippa II uses the nickname "Christian" to designate the followers of Jesus of Nazareth in this semi-official setting in A.D. 59 less than fifteen years after the term was coined by outsiders in Syrian Antioch (11:26)? What connotation might Agrippa have been attaching to the name? Could his usage indicate that even in government circles it was true, as Paul claimed, that the emergence of the messianic Jewish sect of The Way had not been a marginal phenomenon occurring only "in a corner" (26:26)? How might this fit with the Roman historian Suetonius' reference to the emperor Claudius' temporary expulsion of Jews from Rome about 50-A.D. because of an uproar caused by someone called "Chrestus" (Ac 18:2), and with the Roman historian Tacitus' record that the designation "Christian" [or the similar sounding "Chrestian"] was current among the populace of Rome during the persecution there under emperor Nero in 64 A.D.?
6. Does 26:32 suggest that Paul's appeal to Caesar (25:11) was really a mistake (23:11; Gn 45:5-8; 50:20)? Can you think of any similar apparent mistakes in your Christian life? How did they pan out? What might God have had to do with that? Why would you think so (Ro 8:28,32)?

1. Have you ever personally experienced experts being as wrong as were the ones that claimed that it was safe to sail the north-eastern Mediterranean Sea after the Jewish Day of Atonement late in September or early October? What were the consequences for you and others with you? What have you learned from that experience? Was the decision of the majority on the ship any more reliable (27:12)? What does God think about the opinions of experts or even of majorities (Mt 7:13f; Nu 13:25-14:10a; 1 K 22:1-38)?
2. Although Luke only indirectly indicates (through his frequent "we"s) that he as well as Aristarchus of Thessalonica accompanied Paul on this difficult voyage to Rome (27:1ff), why does he go into such minute detail about the events of the voyage itself? What point(s) might he be trying to make here?
3. How do Paul's and the sailors' reactions to all of the dangers of the voyage compare? What made the difference for Paul (23:11; 27:23f)? What spiritual resources do you have to help you weather crises (Mt 18:10; Jn 14:16)? How do you draw upon them? How might other people's safety be linked by God with yours as a Christian (27:24)? Did Paul and his companions escape all the bad consequences of their poor decisions (27:11, 21)? In spite of your or others' wrong choices, might you expect your gracious God to do better for you and your associates than he seems to have done for Paul and company? How so? Yet, given his own experience of many difficulties and sufferings (2 Co 11 :23-27), does Paul view them as simply the due consequences of his or others bad decisions (2 Co 6:5-10; 4:7-18; Ph 1:12-21)? Should you either?
4. When have you experienced those that are officially responsible for others welfare today, sometimes behaving more like the ship's sailors (27:30-32)? Would police, guards or soldiers today think about treating their prisoners much like those on the ship did then (27:42)? Why do you think the centurion was an exception? What exceptions to the general patterns of official thinking and behaviour have you witnessed? What has that meant to you? How might God have been involved?
5. What might encourage some commentators to believe that in 27:35 Paul was celebrating Communion/ the Eucharist? What do you think he was doing?
6. Do people today in a scientifically sophisticated culture still sometimes jump to the sorts of wild conclusions that the Maltese people did about Paul at the beginning of his visit (28:3-6)? How so? What does this betray about their mentality?
7. What insight into the Paul's regular Christian ministry pattern is given in the brief account of his short stay on the island of Malta (28:11f)? How much should that pattern of ministry be a regular part of Christian congregational ministry today? How is it expressed in your congregation?

## INTRODUCTION TO PHILEMON

The Letter to Philemon contains no systematic presentation of the gospel or doctrine, yet it may well be one of the most important pages in the whole New Testament. It has only one avowed purpose — to ask the Christian slave owner Philemon to receive back as a Christian brother his runaway slave Onesimus [a common slave name, meaning “profitable”/ “useful”]. Onesimus had somehow encountered Paul in Rome and had become converted and transformed into a new person. While Paul found it very hard to let him go and to send him back to his master, it was likely just as hard for Onesimus to return to the master that he had abandoned and probably robbed. In that 1<sup>st</sup> century Roman society with a history of master-slave socioeconomic strife, it must have been difficult socially for Philemon to welcome him back as a slave, let alone as a brother Christian. The fact that all three of the men were now Christians made the reconciliation possible.

The letter is a model of great charm, tact, graciousness, love and persuasion. It reveals the personal dimension of Paul's pastoral ministry and provides an unforgettable example of practical Christianity in action. It, therefore, challenges Christians in every age to practice the godly ministry of reconciliation (Mt 5:9; 2 Co 5:18-21) in their own social setting, however challenging and conflicted that may be.

Although no place names or dates are specified, it seems clear, from a comparison with Cl 4:7-9l 16f, that the two letters were written at the same time, 62-64 A.D., while Paul was under house-arrest in Rome awaiting his trial in Nero's court. Philemon seems to have lived in Laodicea (Rv 3:14-22), a city near Colossae in the Lycus Valley of Asia Minor.

### ANALYSIS OF PHILEMON:

- 1-3 Address and greeting.
- 4-7 Thanksgiving: introducing themes to be developed later.
- 8-21 Appeal for Onesimus.
- 22 Request for hospitality.
- 23f Greetings from Paul's friends.

1. Paul had long planned to visit Rome (Ro 1:13; 25:22; Ac 19:21; 23:11), but not in this particular way! Have you also ever found God helping you to achieve your goals in quite unexpected, or even undesirable ways? How did you feel about God's chosen means? How did Paul seem to feel about the route he had to take to reach Rome? What can you learn from him here?
2. What do the references to "friends" (27:3) and "brethren" (28:14f) indicate about the earlier spread of Christianity to many places prior to Paul's first visit there (2:10; 8:11; 18:2)? How aware do Christians then seem to be of where fellow Christians can be found when they travel? Is that the case for you today? When have you, like Paul, experienced the encouragement of Christian fellowship when arriving in a new place?
3. In light of Luke's earlier account of what happened in Judea (21:17-26:32), how accurate is Paul's brief general summary report to the Jewish leaders in Rome (28:17-20)? What significance can you see in the fact that those leaders had not been informed about Paul and his exploits by Jews in Judea or elsewhere where Paul had ministered? How does this compare with what they had heard about the new Christian sect (28:22)? Why the difference?
4. What are the main themes of Paul's initial teaching about the Christian sect to the Jewish leaders in Rome? How are these themes related in your mind? Do they omit anything that is basic to the Christian gospel? What? Could any of these themes be subordinated to one of the others without significant loss? How so?
5. What light does the little letter to Philemon throw upon some of the practical human dynamics of Paul's Christian pastoral ministry? How might he be considered here to be putting into practice his teaching in Cl 3:11-15? How does your own Christian practice express your thinking and speaking about what is practically involved in being a Christian?
6. Try reading the letter to Philemon through three times: first as if you were Philemon, then as Onesimus and finally as Paul. Each time ask: (a) what is involved for that party in this mediation to facilitate the reconciliation? (b) What issues faced by that party's role make the reconciliation difficult? (c) How important are that party's attitudes and behaviours to making a full reconciliation? (d) In what ways does being each of you being a Christian help motivate and complete the reconciliation process?
7. Furthermore, why is reconciliation so fundamental and necessary for Christians (Mt 5:9, 23f; 6:12, 14f; Jn 13:34f; 17:21,23; Cl 3:12-15)? When have you seen this happening in your own congregation, family, or community? How can you begin to be a facilitator of reconciliation? How does this interpersonal reconciliation ministry flow from the ministry of reconciliation spoken of in 2 Co 5:18-21 (2 Co 1:3f)?
8. How effective do you think the approach of Paul to Philemon would be as a general Christian strategy, for attacking the fundamental evils of the socio-economic institution of slavery? Can you think of a better Christian approach to the issue? How prevalent is this institution today? What forms does it take? How effective are national and international laws in changing things? Why? What have Christians today been doing to fight this evil? How can you and your congregation become involved?

## INTRODUCTION TO COLOSSIANS

Colossae was one of a cluster of three cities [including Laodicea and Hierapolis (C1 4:13)] in the Lycius Valley of Asia Minor about 100 miles east of the port of Ephesus. Although Paul had never visited these cities (2:1), he had been fully briefed on the Christian situation in Colossae by Epaphras, who had founded the churches in the valley (1:7; 4:12f; Phm 23) probably as a result of Paul's long ministry in Ephesus.

While there was cause for rejoicing and thanksgiving for what God was doing in Colossae, there was also reason for deep concern. A plausible false teaching was being disseminated in the garb of an enlightened philosophy (2:8) claiming to be a higher form of Christianity. If Christians really wanted complete emancipation from evil, they must practice Jewish circumcision and strict bodily discipline. If they sought access into the divine presence, they must worship the angelic beings who could mediate their gradual approach towards God's highly exalted throne. Jesus no doubt had a high place in God's economy, but far from being the most exalted.

Paul's reply to such teaching was to present Jesus as God's unique Messiah, both pre-eminent in every sphere of God's creation and economy, and all-sufficient for a Christian's every need. This main theme of the letter makes it stand out in the N.T. for its revelation of the person and work of Jesus as God's Messiah. Christian readers late in mid-1<sup>st</sup> century would no doubt also have read this letter as a radical challenge to the grandiose, public, cosmic lordship claims of Caesar and the Roman Imperium. It would encourage them and Christians of all ages and regimes to serve God's Messiah and kingdom in spite of the prevailing claims and pressures of the government, economy and/ or culture of their own society.

The letter also contains in brief compass a wealth of practical instruction for Christian living primarily as citizens of God's kingdom. Since similar instructions are presented in quite similar terms in the letter to the Ephesians, many biblical scholars see them as having been written at the same time, also during Paul's house-arrest in Rome (62-64 A.D.)

### ANALYSIS OF COLOSSIANS:

1:1f	Address.
1:3-8	Thanksgiving for the Colossian Christians.
1:9-14	Prayer for their growth in understanding and good works.
1:15-23	Pre-eminence of the Messiah.
1:24-2:5	Paul's ministry.
2:6-15	Their new life compared with their old life.
2:16-3:17	Practical general advice for living in unison with the Messiah.
3:18-4:1	Christian living in basic human relationships.
4:2-6	Exhortations to Christian prayer and witness.
4:7-18	Personal messages.

1. Is the source of your Christian faith, love and hope the same as for the Colossian Christians (1:3-8)? To what degree has the good news of Jesus the Messiah made similar progress in your life as it seems to have made in the Colossian Christians' lives? Is the gospel still growing quantitatively and qualitatively in the world today as much as it was in the Roman world then? What examples can you give?
2. What role had Epaphras played in the relationship between Paul and the Colossian Christians (4:12; Phm 23; 2 Ti 2:2)? How does this ministry paradigm function in other ages and societies including your own? How are you involved in this? How so?
3. What specific areas for further growth are listed in 1:9-14 in Paul's prayer for the Colossian believers? In each area what progress does he have in mind? What results are envisioned? What is the ultimate goal of the whole process? How do you feel about this applying to you as a Christian? Where do you need the most growth? What resources are mentioned to help you thus grow? What role does prayer itself play?
4. Do you think 1:15-20 is quoting an early Christian hymn about the nature and supremacy of Christ? How important are hymns and songs for communicating and remembering basic Christian theology? Which ones have you found most helpful? In your own words, how does this particular hymn delineate the Messiah's special relationship to God, the world, and the church? What do 1:12-14; 2:3 and 9f add? How much of this was taught earlier by Paul in 1 Co 1:3; 2:6-10; 8:6 and Ro 8:19-22?
5. How much of all this informs your own worldview? How well does any of it fit with the worldview of your society today? How well did it even fit with the 1<sup>st</sup> century Roman world increasingly dominated by Caesar's/lordship? Did Paul, then, expect Christians to be counter-cultural? How so? Should that be the case today? Why? How is that possible on a sustained basis against the prevailing economic, political and social crosswinds of your culture?
6. According to 1:21-23, what are some of the very practical implications of the Messiah's unique identity and work for Christians? How conditional are they? Have you entered fully into them? How so?

1. What is the great mystery (1:26f, 2:2; 4:3) that Paul's ministry was helping to reveal/ make known? Who is it for? What is its goal? Do you know this mystery personally (2:2)? What methods (1:28; 2:4) and responses (2:5-7) help realize this goal for individuals and for congregations?
2. What does it mean to call Christian service an assignment/ commission/stewardship given by God (1:25)? Who is it for? Why might it involve suffering? How does that suffering relate to the Messiah's afflictions? What implications might this have for you personally? Who is your co-worker in this ministry (1:29; 1 Co 3:19; 1 Th 3:2)? How encouraging is this? How awesome is it for you in this relationship? Does it continue to inspire you to worship?
3. What traditional Jewish legal and Greek/ Hellenistic philosophical elements seem to have been cobbled together by the local popular teachers seeking to lead the Colossian Christians beyond the basic Christian gospel to a higher level of spiritual knowledge [*gnosis*] and maturity (2:8-19)? How does a better understanding of who God's Messiah really is (1:15-20; 2:3, 9) and of what he has already accomplished (2:11-15, 20), provide the best antidote to such false teaching? For what false teachings today might the same understandings also be the perfect foil? How practical, then, can correct theology prove to be for ordinary Christians?
4. What is the true circumcision that Christians have (2:11-14; Ro 2:25-29)? What are the consequences of this (a) for you and (b) for the powers of evil arrayed against you (2:15)? How much does Christian baptism symbolize what this true circumcision means (2:12-14, 20; Ro 6:1-14)? Does your baptism mean this to you? Does Paul's close comparison here between Christian baptism and Jewish circumcision, suggest that they both play a similar role in initiating people into God's covenant people? Therefore, should both sacraments/ ordinances be equally applicable to the young children of covenant members who are trusting in God's graciousness for their inclusion within his people (Ac 10:47f; 16:15; 33)? How important is it that one's personal understanding of and trust in what these sacraments mean, be both confirmed and regularly reaffirmed?
5. According to the beginning to the practical section of the letter in 2:16-19, what variety of popular teachings about religious routes to greater spirituality were being offered to the Colossian Christians? How prevalent today are similar teachings? What makes them so appealing (2:23)? However, why are they quite inadequate (2:17f; 22f)? What better routes to spiritual maturity does Paul suggest in 2:6f and in 2:19 (Ep 4:11-16)? According to 3:1, has Paul more to say about growing spiritually?

1. What common human religious approach to spirituality is criticized by Paul in 2:20-23? What forms does it take today? How would you phrase Paul's several pithy criticisms? How are his points particularly meaningful to Christians? What makes self-sufficient self-denial quite useless for curbing self-indulgence? How true have you found this to be? Yet what makes asceticism seem so wise and attractive even to Christians? How could remembering the spiritual implications of your Christian baptism (2:20, 12-16; 3:3; Ro 6:1-14) help to deliver you from such futile human religiosity?
2. Is desiring a higher way of life wrong for Christians? What makes it possible for Christians, even though we are weak embodied human beings (3:1-3)? How does this relate to the future goal to which all Christians are heading (3:4; Ro 8:19-25 Ph 3:20f; 1 Jn 3:1-3; 1 P 1:13)? Therefore, what practical negative and positive steps should Christians take in the present to live spiritually now (3:5, 8-10, 12)? In light of Paul's critique of religious asceticism is it either appropriate or helpful to dub this approach to spirituality as simply "mortifying the flesh"? How well do the steps here fit with the negative and positive strategies for appropriate Christian worship and living that Paul had given to the Christians in Rome (Ro 12:1f)? Are you pursuing this spiritual strategy? What makes spiritual growth progressively possible by God's way (1:27; 3:10; 2 Co 4:16; Ro 5:3-5; 6:4-14; 8:5, 9-14)? For whom is it possible (3:11)? Does that include you? How so? Therefore?
3. Which of the earthly behaviours common to the Greco-Roman culture of the century A.D. (3:5) are also prevalent in your culture today? What about them incites God's wrath (3:6)? Which of them should be considered as idolatry (Ep 5:5; Mt 6:24; Lk 16:13)? Why? Do they entice you as much as they seem to have the Christians of Colossae? How are the attitudinal and spoken vices of 3:8f associated with these practices? Have you witnessed this connection? Does the past tense in 3:7 suggest that the Colossian Christians, not only no longer behaved in these ways but also that they no longer felt compelled to do so either (1 Co 6:11; Ro 6:11-14)? What might this imply about fundamental character change? How much about this new Christian nature/ self/ humanity [Greek = "*anthropos*"] do you hear included in the Christian good news proclaimed in your congregation. Why?
4. Which of the Christian characteristics catalogued in 3:12-15 still need to be developed further in your life? How might your practicing the strategies that Paul recommends in 3:9f and 16f help continue to foster them? Why do you think psalms, hymns (e.g., 1:15-20) and spiritual songs are recommended as suitable means of Christians teaching and admonishing/ warning one another peacefully and lovingly, just as well as for expressing gratitude to God (3:15-17)? What does the three-fold repetition of "thanksgiving" here indicate about the vital role it plays in a mature Christian's life? How should even appropriate Christian speaking and acting be intimately connected with thanksgiving? Why might some Christians employ 3:17 as a motto for their Christian life?
5. On the basis of what Paul says in 1:18, 24; 2:19 and 3:15, how has his thinking about the church as the body of the Messiah developed since he first discovered the body metaphor for the church in 1 Co 12:12f? How do his updates on the body metaphor's meaning inform your view of the church? Why do you think he continues to remind Christians of the inclusiveness of Christ's body (3:11; Ga 3:27f; 1 Co 12:13)? How much does your congregation need this reminder? Why?

1. How can you see the general prescription for Christian living given in 3:17 underlying the practical instructions both for living at home (3:18-21) and at work (3:22-4:1)? What adjustments might you want to make to apply these 1<sup>st</sup> century guidelines to your own Christian life in your 21<sup>st</sup> century context? How does a Christian husband-father's loving (3:19) moderate his wife's subjection (3:18) and their children's obedience (3:20), especially when Paul specifies what Christian loving clearly excludes (3:19 and 21)? What might you also want to see excluded in proper Christian motherly love? Why?
2. Given that most of the labour in the home and in business in the 1<sup>st</sup> century Roman world was done by slaves for masters, how might the spirit of what Paul says to slaves be applied by Christian employees today? Who do you really work for anyway (3:17; Ro 6:22)? Why (3:24)? Does 3:25 suggest that all workplace injustices should be left up to the heavenly Master to deal with? If, however, you are a Christian employer, what implications might 4:1 have for your relationships with your employees (e.g., Lv 19:13; Ja 5:4)? Who do you really serve (Mt 6:24; Lk 16:13; Ja 4:4, 7f)? What does this imply for the character and accountability of "your" business enterprise? How might God intend you and it to serve his kingdom's purposes (4:11)? What are those purposes?
3. What can you learn from Paul's brief instructions about praying in 4:2-4? Why do you think he makes the first command a continuous one, "Continue applying yourself to prayer" (1 Th 5:17)? What vital role does Paul see an attitude of thanksgiving playing in your praying (4:2)? How do you manage to keep awake/ alert/ focused while praying? Why do ministers and other Christian leaders especially need your prayers? What do you pray about for your own ministers? Do you also need other Christians' prayers for the very same thing Paul claims that he does (4:3f)? What happens when you pray that even for yourself?
4. Why is Christ-like (3:10; 1:15, 19, 2:9) behaviour/ conduct so important for Christian witness to non-Christians (4:5)? How might your conduct possibly lead to evangelistic opportunities (1 P 2:18-23; 3:15-17)? How important also is how we speak when given the opportunity (4:6f, 1 P 3:16f)? What might Jesus' salt metaphor symbolize here (Mt 5:13)? How does all this apply to your witness as a Christian?
5. What does the concluding greetings of the letter (4:7-18) reveal about Paul's ministry and his working relationships? In what ways are his many partners important to him? How do his words reveal his feelings towards them? Do both Paul's and Jesus' (Mk 2:14; 5:7, 12f; Lk 9:1f 10; 10:1f, 17) similar ministry pattern suggest that Christian ministry is intended by God to be a team activity rather than a solo one (Gn 2:18; I Co 12:8-10, 14-26; Ro 12:4f; C1 3:19; Ep 4:16)? How is this expressed in your congregation? What important role did house churches play in the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. (4:15; Phm 2; Ro 16:3-5)? Are there still some today? How do they relate Christian congregations? How does 4:16 suggest Paul intended his letters were used? How much does it matter that there may have been other Pauline letters in circulation that are no longer extant? Should your congregation read and discuss Paul's extant letters, as if they were still being circulated to them to be applied to their present circumstances? Why?

## INTRODUCTION TO EPHESIANS

This is the third of the four letters known as the Prison Epistles of Paul, because they were traditionally thought to have been written by him during his house-arrest in Rome, 62-64 A.D., as described briefly in Ac 28:16, 30f. Because the words "in Ephesus" in 1:1 are omitted in a number of important early manuscripts, many scholars suppose that this letter was not intended for the church in Ephesus alone, but was intended to be circulated to all of the churches in the Lycus Valley of Asia Minor, where Ephesus was the chief city, located near the mouth of the river at the Mediterranean Sea. Perhaps it was even the letter referred to in Cl 4:16f as "Laodicea". Their common content and language suggest that this letter was written at about the same time as Colossians but slightly afterwards, because it is a little more systematic and extensive, as well as written in better Greek and with a wider vocabulary than Paul usually employed. These formal differences have prompted some scholars to reject Paul's personal authorship, but they may be partially accounted for by the different foci and purposes of the letters, even if they had the same author (Paul) and scribe (possibly Tychicus, their courier Cl 4:7, 18; Ep 6:21)

God's eternal purpose was to form a people for himself. With the coming of God's Messiah, it was revealed that God's purpose would be accomplished through the creation of one renewed humanity in union with his Messiah. It would include both Jews and Gentiles, reconciled to one another through the blood of the Messiah's cross and indwelt by God's Spirit. This whole redeemed community is like a body headed by the Messiah. As such, it stands in stark contrast to the "old humanity" which was united under the headship of Adam and was under the dominion of the world, the devil and the flesh, and thus subject to God's condemnation.

Since this renewed humanity is the general theme of the letter, Paul focuses here more on salvation's corporate aspects than on its individual aspects, which are much more in focus in his earlier letters to the Galatians and the Romans. Nevertheless, one of his clearest and most succinct general statements about what is involved in individual salvation is presented in passing in Ep 2:5 and articulated memorably in 2:8-10, because individuals' salvation is never far from Paul's concern, even when he is talking about the functioning of the church as the body of God's Messiah

### ANALYSIS OF EPHESIANS:

1:1f	Greetings.
1:3-3:21	God's purpose for a renewed humanity in union with his Messiah:
1:3-14	Praise for all the many spiritual blessings in union with his Messiah,
1:15-23	Thanksgiving and intercession for his Christian readers,
2:1-10	God's regenerating purpose in his Messiah,
2:11-22	God's reconciling purpose in his Messiah,
3:1-13	Therefore, Paul's ministry to the Gentiles,
3:14-21	A second prayer for his Christian readers.
4:1-6:18	Conduct befitting Christians:
4:1-16	Christian ministries for building up the body of God's Messiah,
4:17-32	Christians exchanging their old life for a new one in union with God's Messiah,
5:1-21	Christians living as children of the light,
5:22-6:9	Christian family and business relationships,
6:10-18	Christian warfare with the forces of evil.
6:19-22	Final personal prayer request.
6:23f	Benediction.

1. What significance do you see in the differences between the two proximate phrases relating God and Jesus in 1:2 and 3:17? How are each of the spiritual blessings with which God has blessed those who are in union with Christ (1:3-6) relational? What does each relational blessing mean for you personally? What freely motivated God to bless you so abundantly? In doing so, what was his range of goals for you and for himself? How appropriate, then, was God's chosen agent for blessing you? Does this prompt you to respond (1 Jn 4:19) by blessing/ praising Yahweh as your and Jesus' God and Father? What might this indicate about the internal dynamics of the Trinity?
2. As the longest sentence in the Bible (1:3-14) continues to unfold in 1:7-14, what are the specific benefits God has wisely and graciously provided for you through his Son? How do they impact and connect your present and future lives? How many of them also involve an ongoing relationship with God and his Messiah? How does God's plan for your ultimate future fit with God with his inclusive future cosmic plans through his Messiah (1:10; Ro 8:18-23)? Does the latter's inclusiveness (Cl 1:20) imply universal human salvation (Mt 7:13f; 1 Ti 2:4; 2 P 3:9; Rv 20:20)? How is each person of the divine Trinity distinctively involved in your being blessed? How are humans able to discover and freely access such amazing benefits? How well are the prevailing stresses on God's sovereignty (choosing, willing, purposing, planning, designing, destining, accomplishing) and graciousness (love, overflowing grace, good will, blessing) balanced and connected throughout this gigantic sentence? Which theological way of thinking about summarily connecting these two emphases is most appropriate: God's sovereign grace or God's gracious sovereignty? Does this great sentence in and of itself warrant some Christians concluding that the chief purpose/ end of human beings is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever? How could this purpose focus your life?
3. At the beginning of the next very long sentence, comprising the rest of the chapter (1:15-23), what does Paul continually give thanks to God for in his readers? Would he give thanks for them in you too? Could Paul's first prayer request be a reference to another vital role of the Holy Spirit within Christians (1:17; Ro 8:15-17)? How aware are you of each of the aspects of knowing God that Paul wants revealed to you (1:18f)? What great hope does God's calling you engender (1:18)? How is your own inheritance in union with Christ (1:11, 14) related to God's own inheritance in his own people/ the saints (1:14, 18)? How aware are you of how great the power of God is that you are involved with as a Christian believer? How do Paul's illustrations of this power (1:19) enliven your imagination?
4. What insight can be gained from 1:19-23 into the significance of the Messiah's (a) resurrection, (b) ascension, (c) glorification, and (d) role in the church? Does the drawing in the church here (1:23) signal to you that God's new people (1:14) will become one of his letter's primary themes? What do you make of the tantalizing glimpse into God's amazing view of the church as Christ's body in 1:23? How do you imagine how your own congregation expresses the fullness of Christ who himself "fills everything in every way" (ESV)?

1. In your own words, what are the details of the many contrasts between your former spiritual condition and your present one as Christians (2:1-10)? What makes such great transformations possible? How does this fit your Christian experience? What do you seem to be missing that Paul says is available to you as a Christian? How can you appropriate that too?
2. According to Paul's parenthetical remarks in 2:6 and 8-10, what are the basic positive and negative relationships between grace [God's loving initiative (1:5f; 2:5; 3:17ff)], faith

[trusting(1:13, 15, 19; 3:12, 17)] and good [loving (1:15, 4:2, 15f; 5:2; 6:23f)] works? How much does this fundamental gospel pattern inform all of your Christian thinking and acting? What makes the order of these three elements so important for a proper relationship to the gracious God? What happens to the elements if you change their order? What is the "gift of God" referred to in 2:8 (1:6; Ro 5:15)? How significant is it for you that the Greek word [*poiema*, which gives rise to the English word "poem"] for "workmanship" in 2:10 means the "work of one's hands" [i.e., the handicraft that one is willing to link one's good name and reputation with as its creator] is used both of God's recreating your life in union with Christ (2:10) and to his wonderful creation of the world (Ro 1:20; Ps 8:3, 6)? How are the good works that Christians should, and now also can, "walk in" related to God's original purposes for human beings (Gn 1:27f; 2:15, 18; Ep 4:1; 1 Th 2:11f; Cl 1:10) and to the essence of the Mosaic law (Dt 6:5; Lv 19:18; Mt 22:36-40)?

3. What is the mystery/ secret plan that Paul refers to in 3:2f 6, and 9? What does the Messiah's bloody crucifixion have to do to with it (2:13, 15f, 19f; 3:6)? How well did God's new humanity (2:15) express itself in the Christian communities we have met in the literature of the early and later apostolic periods? Which of the descriptive metaphors used by Paul in 2:15-22 and 3:6, are most meaningful to you for understanding the church today? How well does each of them fit your Christian congregation? In what ways should Jewish and gentile Christians relate to one another today? How well do we do so? Could there really be a network of Christian congregations as a Messianic sect within 21<sup>st</sup> century Judaism, just as there was throughout at least the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D.? If so, how could they remain in full fellowship both with gentile Christians and with Jewish Christians who are somewhat separated from contemporary Judaism?
4. How is your own calling to Christian ministry similar to or different from Paul's as described in 3:1-13? If his description of his ministry is too daunting for comparison to yours, how might the many open-ended lists of Christian gifts and ministries (e.g. 1 Co 12:4-11; Ro 12:4-8) and other common New Testament. ministries [e.g. encouragement, hospitality, reconciliation, (2 Co 1:4 Ro 12:13; 1 Ti 3:2; Tt 1:8; 1 P 4:9; 2 Co 15:18ff)] broaden your perspective on Christian ministry possibilities? What makes each of them "a stewardship of God's grace" given to you (3:4-7; 1 P 4:10f)? Can you identify how your particular Christian ministry can make known through the church "the wisdom of God in its infinite variety" (3:10 REB)?
5. How is Paul's new prayer in 3:14-21 for his readers different from his earlier one in 1:17-19? What are the prominent themes of each prayer? Which request do you feel is most needed to be fulfilled for you and your congregation? Why? What might be the implications of affirming the inclusive view of God's fatherhood in 3:14f and 4:6(Ac 17:28f)?
6. How familiar to you is the great Trinitarian doxology of 3:20f? What does each of its details mean to you? How does it aptly reveal the character, dynamics, and purpose of God's amazing partnership-with humanity, especially in union with the church and his Messiah?

TRAIL XII -- SECTION 15: Ephesians 4:1-16.

1. How does 4:1 indicate a shift from Paul's proclamation of the Christian gospel to his teaching about its intended practical applications? What fundamental aspect of the gospel and its general application is singled out here and elsewhere (Cl 1:10; 1 Th 2:12)? What general applications of it do these texts and 2:10 suggest are appropriate? What vital, specific application does he choose to focus upon first in Ep 4? How does that fit with much of his theoretical discussion in the first half of the letter? Why are the attitudes of 4:2 and actions of 4:3 so essential to achieving this practical goal? Why do each of them need to be continually developing, as Paul's present participles in Greek suggest? How important is it to remember that attitudes precede actions? How can they be transfigured continually (Ro 12:2)?
2. How do each of the unities cited in 4:4-6 make it possible for Christians to maintain the Spirit's unity peacefully (4:3) and hope (1:18) to live worthy of God's high calling (4:1, 4)? How are the specific unities associated very appropriately with a particular person of the triune God, Yahweh, who was celebrated in the immediately preceding doxology in relation to the church (3:20f)?
3. Why do you think Paul's first application of his general call to pursue Christian unity focuses upon God's Messiah's gracious gifting every Christian for some sort of practical ministry (4:7, 12, 16) within his body, the church (4:12-16)? What is their primary purpose (4:12f, 16)? What common vital role does the ministries cited in 4:11 play in helping all of the saint's ministries [Geek="works of service/ ministry"] be able to pursue this goal together (4:12)? In and through whom (4:16)? How well are these two distinct types of ministry working out together in your own Christian fellowship? What further equipping do you feel you need to function more effectively as a practical minister of Christ?
4. How would you describe how the church becomes built up as the Messiah's body (4:13-16)? What metaphors from your own life might help illustrate this growth process? What is that growth's goal and standard? What is the practical importance of "dealing truly [Greek = "aletheuo" = to truth] in love" (4:14f; 20-22, 24f, 29; 5:9; Ga 4:16) for this growth process? For this development to occur and to continue, what role(s) are to be played (a) by the Messiah himself, (b) by the special ministers of 4:11, and (c) by each of the members of the church's body (1 Co 12:4-7; Ro 12:3-6; 1 P 4:10)? What ministry role(s) should you, therefore, be playing in the development of your Christian congregation? What is needed to facilitate this happening?
5. How does Paul's teaching here (4:12f, 15f) about the functioning of the church as the Messiah's body fit with what he has said previously about it (1 Co 10:17; 11:29f; 12-14, Ro 12:3-8; Cl 1:18,24; 2:19; Ep 1:22f)? As you meditate on this brilliant, multi-faceted metaphor (1 P 4:10), what does it say to you about your role in the church and in its mission in the world?

1. How would you characterize the main difference between the gentile and Christian ways of life as contrasted by Paul in 4:17-5:2? What challenges you most here? How does this lifestyle contrast flow naturally from the theoretical contrast described in 2:1-7? What seems to drive the pagan understanding of life (2:2f; 4:17-19)? What general negative and positive actions facilitate following a Christ-like lifestyle (4:22-24, 32-5:1f)? How do these instructions fit with those of Ro 12:2 and Cl 3:5-14? How applicable to your living as a Christian are each of the specific pagan behaviours that Paul first singles out as needing transformation (4:25-32)?
2. How do you feel about being called to follow the example of God himself (4:32-5:1; Mt 5:44f, 48; Ro 12:1)? Who models God's example for us (4:13,32; 5:2; 1 Co 11:1; 1 Th 1:6; Ro 8:29)? Does that make the imitation easier for you? What particular aspects of that imitation are specified for us here? What makes such divine imitation possible for finite and sinful humans (4:24, 30, 32; 1 Jn 4:19)? What progress have you made in this?
3. What further negative behaviours are quite inappropriate for Christians (5:3-21)? Why not (5:2, 5, 6, 8, 10, 15, 17)? In contrast, what positive behaviour patterns should characterize a Christian's life (5:4, 8f, 11, 18-21)? How much do their practice depend upon your being filled with the Holy Spirit (5:18)? In what ways could your age/ times also truly be characterized as evil (5:16)? How important to you, then, is the advice of 5:15-17
4. How well do the Christian marriages that you know best measure up to Paul's ideal set forth in 5:21-33? How does this work out differently (a) for the wife and (b) for the husband? Which Christ-related role do you think is more difficult, the husband's or the wife's? How well does the analogy drawn between human marriage and Christ's relationship to his church, help you as a Christian more deeply understand and appreciate the human marriage relationship? What does 5:22-30 add? How should the mutuality of the general command of 5:21 inform the attitudes of both husband and wife? Should such a marriage relationship be any easier for Christians than for others? What should help (4:1-3; 32-5:2; 18-21)?
5. How does the marriage metaphor of the Messiah and his church in 5:21-33 fit with the body view of the church presented in 4:11-16? What are their common factors? How are they related to the general guideline for Christian living given in 5:11? What have the instructions of 4:15 and 4:25 to do with putting this into practice within a Christian congregation and between congregations? What does this mean for your relationships with your fellow Christians? How is your own personal relationship to Christ, directly involved in all of this?

1. As Paul continues to unpack his general mutual command of 4:21, how does he see it applying to family relationships between parents and children (6:1-4)? What scriptural basis does he cite? How apt is its promise to children and parents even today? How well has 6:4 been practiced in your family? How revolutionary might Paul's application of the principle of mutual submission have been to the master-slave relationships so common in the 1<sup>st</sup> century Roman empire? In what ways could these general and specific instructions be applied to contemporary employment situations in your society? What does it mean to you to be a slave of Christ (6:6-9; Ro 6:22)? How might following this Christian behavioral pattern in your workplace, prompt people there to ask about your unusual value system/hope (1 P 3:15)? How important might your answers to such questions be for the extension of the church today?
2. What is the perennial war in which Christians are still inevitably involved? (6:10-12; I:21; 2:2; 3:10; 5:27; 2 Co 11:14; I P 5:8; Mt 6:13; Jn 17:15)? How often do you keep this in mind? Should your enlistment into this cosmic battle have been mentioned in your baptismal induction into God's family and its unique enterprise? Was it? What is the whole range of armour of God ultimately provided for (6:11-13)? How does each piece of the armour suit its particular function? How helpful have you found this descriptive metaphor in your Christian life? Which piece has helped you most? Which other pieces have you yet to learn to deploy well? What Christian hymns develop this theme? How could your fellow Christians help you become a better soldier for God?
3. Why did Paul himself say he needed his readers' prayers (6:19)? Do you also need such prayers? For what do your Christian leaders regularly need your prayers? How often are you praying that for them? Are they all ambassadors for God and his Messiah? Are you too (6:20; 2 Co 5:5:20)?
4. Who is in a position to play for you a role similar to that which Paul expected Tychicus to play for him (6:21; Cl 4:7-9)? How does this person facilitate prayer for and by you? What is your role in such a partnership? What is needed to make this partnership more effective?
5. How could a Christian's love become corrupt (6:24; 1 Co 13:8; Ro 12:9, 11; 2 Co 6:6; 1 Ti 1:5; Mt 24:12; Rv 3:15f)? How relevant is this possibility for you? What might be the most appropriate remedy (1 Jn 4:19; Ro 12:1, 9-13)?

## INTRODUCTION TO PHILIPPIANS

Paul seemed to have a special affection for the Christians in Philippi (1:8; 4:1), which he had visited earlier on his 2<sup>nd</sup> missionary journey when he moved into Europe from Asia Minor (Ac 16:12-40) and probably again on his 3<sup>rd</sup> journey while awaiting Titus's return (2 Co 7:5f) on his way back to Jerusalem (Ac 20:3, 6). Even now he hoped to see them again (1:27) when he would be released from his present imprisonment in Rome. From the very beginning they had entered into his labours and sufferings with financial support and prayerful personal interest (1:5, 19; 4:15f; 2 Co 11:9). Shortly before this letter was written, they had encouraged him again with further gift and message of concern (2:25, 30; 4:10, 14, 18). The letter, accordingly, is marked to an unusual degree by personal affection for his readers and consists largely of an account of his personal experience of the Messiah, especially as a prisoner for him.

The church in the Roman colony and garrison city of Philippi in south-eastern Macedonia seems to have been singularly free of major doctrinal errors and moral lapses. Yet there were threatening dangers according to Epaphroditus' report (2:25, 30). Friction had arisen between certain members of the church there. Even as he was writing the letter, Paul heard that they were being tempted both by Jewish legalism and by worldly motivations. It is in connection with these dangers that the letter's main doctrinal sections are written (2:5-11; 3:1-21).

The letter is permeated by a spirit of joy and peace which stands out as a witness to the power of the Messiah at work in a prisoner near the end of his second year of house-arrest in Rome (64 A.D.) after two previous years of imprisonment in Caesarea. Although it seems less formal and more hastily written than many of Paul's earlier letters, even his other prison epistles, it bears a distinct Pauline stamp, for its diction and ideas are quite in harmony with the others. In spite of its informality, the letter has become a valuable source for understanding Paul's mature theology, especially his view of the Messiah, the church, and the last things.

### ANALYSIS OF PHILIPPIANS:

1:1-26	Information:
1:1-11	Paul's gratitude for the Philippian Christians' support,
1:12-26	Paul's hopes.
1:27-2:16	Admonition:
1:27-2:4	To spiritual unity and service,
2:5-11	To follow the Messiah's humble example,
2:12-16	To show obedience until the Messiah returns.
2:17-30	Information:
2:17f	Paul's joy through his suffering for the Messiah's ministry,
2:19-30	Paul's anticipation of Timothy's and Epaphroditus' visits to Philippi.
3:1-4:9	Admonition:
3:1	To rejoice in the Lord's coming glory,
3:2-7	To beware of backward-looking Jewish legalism,
3:8-17	To follow Paul's own forward-looking example,
3:18-4:1	To pursue heavenly rather than earthly values,
4:2-9	To seek peace and other Christian virtues.
4:10-23	Information:
4:10-20	Thanks again for their support through Epaphroditus,
4:21-23	Greetings from Rome.

1. In the address of the letter (1:1), how do you think the mentioned church officials (1 Ti 3:1-14) are related (a) to each other, (b) to the rest of the Christians in Philippi, (c) to their congregation(s) (d) to the apostles, Paul and Timothy and (e) to the Messiah? What parallel relationships can you discern in your congregation and in its wider Christian fellowship?
2. What made Paul's thanksgiving prayer for the Philippian Christians so joyful (1:5-8)? In what ways do you think you and your congregation have brought joy to the leaders of your Christian fellowship? Do you feel that they view and treat you as valued fellow ministry partners (1:5, 7)? Where does Paul's confidence in the Philippian Christians' spiritual growth (1:6) come from? How did this inform the requests of Paul's prayer for them in 1:9-11? Which of these requests do you feel most in need of? Why?
3. How did Paul's personal experience demonstrate that the work of the Christian gospel was fostered, rather than hindered, by Christians' suffering because they were Christians (1:12-14)? How true do you think this was for the next two and a half centuries of periodic persecutions? Could that become true also in cultures where Christians are persecuted today? Can you think of any recent examples? Would you view such suffering as a great privilege (1:29; Ac 5:41; 1 P 4:16)? How much of this might apply to the other suffering of Christians? How so?
4. How could Paul be so tolerant of others preaching the gospel on his turf while he was imprisoned, even for poor motives (1:14-18)? How accepting are you of other Christians' ways, means and motives for proclaiming the good news of Christ to nonbelievers in your neighborhood? With whom would you cooperate in joint evangelistic endeavors? Based upon your knowledge of Paul's letters so far, what criteria for co-operating or not co-operating evangelistically do you think Paul might suggest (e.g., Ga 1:6-9; 2:16; Ro 3:21-26; 1 Co 1:21-25; 15:3-8; 2 Co 5:18-21; Cl 1:13f; Ep 2:8-10)? How would you handle criticisms about your decisions from fellow Christians?
5. How do Paul's basic reasons for living or dying influence his attitudes towards his imprisonment and its possible outcomes (1:20-24)? Do you share his reasons? What might you learn personally from his struggle to face the prospects and possibilities for his life and death (1:20-30)? Would you evaluate the options as he did? Why are so many Christian life choices between competing goods or between lesser evils? Without clear black or white options, how should you make the best choices (Ps 25:4-10; 32:8; Pr 3:5f)? What should you do if you make poor choice? Why?

1. According to Paul, what three elements are considered most important to a life worthy of the good news about the Messiah (1:27)? What sort of suffering will also likely be involved (1:28-30)? Do you count that that a privilege (1:29)? How do each of these four components manifest themselves in your Christian life? Which one of these elements does Paul choose to expand upon from 2:1 on? How essential is each of the "if" clauses of 2:1 for achieving this? How would the behaviours enjoined in 2:3f, also help realize this? What would practicing this involve for you? How might it impact your congregation, your family, your work-mates?
2. How are these vital Christian attitudes and behaviours (2:1-4) perfectly exemplified in the attitudes and behaviours of Jesus that are celebrated the first part (2:6-8) of the early Christian creedal hymn cited in 2:6-11? How consistent is this with Jesus own teaching of his disciples (Mk 10:42-45; Jn 13:12-17, 34f)?
3. What all does this hymn teach you about Jesus as God's Messiah? What does the "therefore" of 2:9 suggest about the connection between the content of the two halves of the hymn? Which connotation of "Lord" is being applied to Jesus the Messiah in 2:11: (a) sovereign/master (3:8; Jn 13:13; Ro 1:4; 10:12b; Ps 8:1b), (b) Yahweh/ LORD (Ps 8:1a; Is 45:23; J12:32; Ac 2:21; Ro 10:9, 10a, 13; 1 Co 12:3), or (c) perhaps both (Jn 20:28)? Which brings the most glory to God the Father (2:11)? How so? What do you intend to imply when you confess Jesus as Lord?
4. Do your Christian confessions bring glory to God the Father not only through your professed orthodoxy [correct thinking], but also through your orthopraxis [correct practice] and attitudes conforming to Jesus' incarnate pattern? Would such Jesus-like, attitudinally-driven behaviour help outsiders recognize that you truly were one of Jesus' disciples (Jn 13:35)? How might such a lifestyle be characterized as loving others just as Jesus did (Jn 13:34; Ep 4:32-5:2)?
5. What does 2:12f indicate about how your activities and God's activities within and through you can work together? Was this co-operation what was being pointed to earlier in 2:1 in the phrase the "fellowship/ sharing of/ in the Spirit"? How aware are you of God's partnership with you to accomplish his purposes both in your life and character (Ro 12:2; Ep 4:23) and also through your Christian ministry (1 Th 3:2; 1Co 3:9; Cl 1:29)?
6. How much does Paul seem to evaluate his own success as a Christian minister (2:16) by how well his converts mature in the basic Christian attitudes (2:2-4) and virtues (2:14-16)? How were these attitudes and virtues exemplified in Epaphroditus as he is introduced in 2:25-30? How close were the personal and working relationships between Paul, Timothy, Epaphroditus and the Philippian church (2:17-30)? What about these relationships would make them appear as much a light in the world today as it did in the dark times of the early 60's A.D. (2:15; Mt 5:14-16)? How could Paul, Timothy and Paul be examples for you in expressing your interest and concern for the Christians with whom you are partnered? Who partnered you?

1. What sorts of false religious confidences does Paul criticize in 3:2-6? To what present-day religious behaviours might this also apply? What is wrong with such religious grounds for righteousness (3:3f; Ro 9:30-10:4)? What is the only true way to have access to God as the righteous and gracious Father (3:3, 7 Jn 14:6f; Ro 3:26)? Why is this a much surer way to become righteous and eventually to participate in the resurrection of the righteous dead (3:9-11)? Can you identify with Paul in his graphic comparative evaluation in 3:7f? How do various English translations render it?
2. What do you think Paul means by saying that Christians are "the circumcision" (3:3; Dt 10:16; 30:6; Ro 2:28f; Ga 6:15f; Cl 2:11f)? How do you and your congregation "worship/serve in/ by the Spirit of God" and "glory/boast in Christ Jesus (3:3)?
3. What is Paul's ultimate Christian hope (3:11, 14, 20f)? How is what he said earlier in 1:6 and 2:12f relevant to that hope? What would you single out as your own ultimate Christian hope? How do you expect it to be realized (3:12,14, 21f)? In what ways does that hope relate to how you live your life here and now?
4. In 3:11-16, does Paul think he or any other Christian must be or become perfect in order to be included in the resurrection of the righteous dead (3:11)/ God's upward call in union with Christ Jesus (3:14)? What sort of maturity is he referring to in 3:15? What sort of thinking/ attitudes does it engender with respect to one's past, present and future living in partnership with Christ? What athletic metaphor for Christian living does he seem to have in mind (2:12, 6; Ga 2:2; 5:7; 1 Co 9:24-27; 2 Ti 4:7)? How transformative might it be to view your Christian life as Paul did his? Would you, like Paul (3:17; 4:9; 1 Co 4:16; 2 Th 3:9), feel comfortable recommending that other Christians imitate your way of thinking and living? With what attitude and lifestyle does he see his cross-bearing living in stark contrast (3:18f; Ro 12:1f; He 12:1f; Mt10:38; Mk 8:34; Lk 9:23; 14:27)?
5. What practical implication does Paul draw from the fact that those who are in union with Christ are citizens of heaven (3:19-21; Cl 3:1ff)? What makes this citizenship even more valuable than Roman citizenship was then for Paul himself (Ac 16:35-40; 22:25-29; 25:11f) and for the proud citizens of the Roman military retirement colony of Philippi? How might you present Christian life and hope be transformed by recognizing the fact your heavenly citizenship? How would it relate to your other citizenships?
6. What light does 3:21 throw upon your future resurrected body and how it is made possible?

1. What seems to have been the problem in the Philippian church that Paul is addressing in 4:2-5? How does this apply what he had been talking about in 2:2-5 and 14f? What similar issues might there be in your Christian congregation? What difference should it make that the names of both of these women are "written in the book of life" along with Paul's other coworkers (4:3)? How should this common fact influence how you deal with your relational issues with fellow Christians? Could God be calling you to play a peacemaking role (4:3)? How important for women's ministry in the church today is it to note well again (Ro 16:1-3, 6f, 12) that some of Paul's valued partners in ministry were women (4:2)?
2. How comprehensive is Paul's schema of appropriate values for Christian meditation in 4:8? How do various available translation of this list, clarify the wide range of what is valuable? Which of these values have you been familiar with? Which should you take more seriously? To what areas/ spheres of your Christian life might each value be applied? How might such value-meditation shape your thinking and behaviour in those spheres? How might they also impact your congregation's thinking and practice?
3. In the context of what Paul says in passing about God and the Lord in the closing sections of his letter, what is the meaning of each of his frequently quoted sayings in (a) 4:6f, (b) 4:11f, (c) 4:13, and (d) 4:19? If you were to follow Paul's instructions to follow his own example (3:17; 4:9), how would you apply each of these sayings to your Christian life? Which one of them might be worth choosing as your motto or life's verse?
4. What inspired the postscript of 4:10-20 after the general benediction (4:9)? What are the great values of generosity for everyone involved (4:14-20)? How important are both giving and receiving for being a Christian, and for a community being recognized as truly Christian (Ac 2:44f; 4:32-35; 1 Co 12:7; Ro 12:4f; Ep 4:16; Jn 13:35)? In what ways have you personally discovered what both Jesus and Paul claimed: "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Lk 6:38; Ac 20:35)?
5. What might 4:22 indicate about how far the Christian gospel had penetrated through the strata of Roman society by the early 60's A.D.? How true is that of your own society? Why might that be? What strata seem still touched in your society? How could the Christian church be more involved in reconciling all the strata,(Ga 3:28; 1 Co 12:13; Cl 3:11; Ro 3:22)? Might a more joyful and mutual Christian network of generous giving and grateful receiving help to incarnate our loving unity in Christ? How so?

## INTRODUCTION TO 1 TIMOTHY

This letter comes from the very last period of Paul's life, probably somewhat after his 2 year house-arrest in Rome (60-62 A.D.) but before his final imprisonment and martyrdom (circa 65-67 A.D.). Just where Paul was writing from is far from clear, but there are early Christian references to Paul having realized his earlier hopes of evangelizing in Spain (Ro 15:24, 28). He seems also to have revisited Macedonia (1 Ti 1:3).

This is the 1<sup>st</sup> of 3 extant pastoral letters written to his co-workers about their respective ministries. Paul's main purpose in his first letter to Timothy was to guide and encourage him in his work. Thus the letter is full of practical advice concerning church affairs and the preservation of purity of life and doctrine. A worker for God should be uncompromising in his loyalty and devotion to his duty.

Timothy is Paul's dearly loved younger companion and helper, whom he first found in Lystra (Ac 16:1-3) and ever afterwards regarded as his son (1 Ti 1:2, 18; 2 Ti 1:2; 2:1). He was with Paul on his subsequent missionary journeys and in his early Roman house-arrest (Cl 1:1). From time to time, he was sent by Paul on important missions (1 Th 3:1-6; 1 Co 4:17; 16:10f; Ph 2:19). This time he had been left in Ephesus to check on tendencies to false teaching there (1 Ti 1:3f) and to superintend the affairs of the church as the apostle's representative (1 Ti 3:14f).

### ANALYSIS OF 1TIMOTHY:

1:1f	Address and greeting.
1:3-20	Paul and his gospel:
1:3-11	The gospel contrasted with false teachings,
1:12-17	The gospel in Paul's experience,
1:18-20	The gospel committed to Timothy.
2:1-4:16	Regulations for church order:
2:1-8	Public prayer,
2:9-15	Women in the church,
3:1-13	Qualification of bishops and deacons,
3:14-16	Introduction of a Christian hymn,
4:1-5	Combating false teachers in the church,
4:6-16	Timothy's personal responsibilities.
5:1-22	Timothy's dealing with various groups in the church:
5:1f	Different generations,
5:3-16	Widows,
5:17-22	Elders.
5:23-6:19	Miscellaneous instructions:
5:23	About Timothy's health,
5:24f	About good and bad deeds,
6:1f	About servants and masters,
6:3-5	About false teachers,
6:6-10	About seeking wealth,
6:11-16	About what Christians should be seeking,
6:17-19	About wealth again.
6:20f	Final advice and benediction.

1. Do you like Paul think of God as your Saviour and Father and his Messiah, Jesus, as your hope and Sovereign (1:1f)? What does each of these titles mean to you? How are these meanings related to your receiving grace, mercy and peace (1:2)? How do you address God and Jesus when you are seeking any of these?
2. In 1:3-11, how does Paul characterize his teaching in contrast to the teaching of some others? What is Paul's goal in teaching (1:5, 15; Ga 5:6, 13; Ep 2:8-10)? How is that related to God's law? What is that law meant to accomplish (Ga 3:24)? How does Paul's own personal experience (1:13-16) underline the effectiveness of God's glorious gospel (1:11) even for the whole range of people delineated in 1:9f (1 Co 6:9-11)? Who then couldn't the Christian gospel help?
3. In what ways can you identify with Paul in his brief testimony here (1:12- 16) to God's amazing grace? Does your experience of God's grace through his Messiah lead you to faith and love (1:14)? How is that love expressed in your ministry (1:12)? Is it also ever expressed in impromptu doxologies? What would be the content of your praise? Who is addressed in Paul's doxology (1:17)? Who would be addressed in yours? Why?
4. What do you make of Paul's warning command to Timothy in 1:18f? What similar, but much more contemporary examples of shipwrecking the Christian faith have you witnessed or heard about? How similar is Paul's discipline of such people to that of the sexual deviant person in Corinth (1 Co 5:5)? How could this be intended for their good? What should be the response of their Christian community if they repented/ turned around (2:4; 2 Co 7:9-13; 2 P 3:9)? How would that work out in your Christian community?
5. How do you distinguish in your own mind the several types of prayers listed in 2:1? How many of them are practiced publicly and regularly in your Christian congregation? Which are most neglected? Why? Should Christians in your country be praying for public officials for the same reasons that Paul advanced in 1<sup>st</sup> century Rome (2:2-6) in spite of his extensive personal incarceration?
6. What important theological issues could be illuminated by three general statements in 2:4-6 if they were taken as universal truths? How do they illuminate Paul's two subjects in the present context (2:1f and 7)? What do the following groups of scriptures add to clarify their general meaning (a) Ek 18:23,32; 1 Ti 4:10; Tt 2:11; 2 Ti 2:24f; He 10:26; 2 P 3:9; Jn 3:16-18, (b) Jn 14:6; Ac 4:12; Ro 3:30; 10:12; 1 Co 8:4, 6, and (c) Mt 20:28; Mk 10:45; Jn 4:42; 1 Jn 2:2; 4:14? What other relevant scriptures can you think of? To whom does God's atonement through Jesus' death and resurrection apply? How would your answer to this last question impact your prayers and evangelism?

1. How appropriate were Paul's instructions for his young envoy, Timothy, regarding the behaviour of women in the Ephesian church (1:3; 2:9-12; 4:12f, 15f; 5:11-14)? What about the particular pagan culture of Ephesus made these especially relevant (Ac 19:23-28, 32-39; 2 Ti 4:14)? How valid do you find Paul's supporting rabbinic-style argument (2:12-15) in light of the well-known ministries of Deborah (Jg 4:4) and Huldah (2 K 22:14-20) in the Hebrew Scriptures? How does Paul's apparent misogyny here fit with his clear general assertion in Ga 3:28 and also with his evident appreciation of the vital ministries of Priscilla (Ac 18:24-28; Ro 16:3), Phoebe (Ro 16:1), Mary (Ro 16:6), Junia (Ro 16:7), Tryphaena and Tryphosa (Ro 16:12), Nymphia (Cl 4:15), Lydia (Ac 16:15), Timothy's mother (Ennis) and grandmother (Lois, 2 Ti 1:5; 3:14) and probably of Philip's four prophesying daughters (Ac 21:9), as well with his awareness through Luke of the prophetic ministry of Anna (Lk 2:36), the practical support of Jesus' traveling female companions (Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Suzanne, etc., Lk 8:1-3) and of Tabitha/ Dorcus (Ac 9:36, 39)? Why are some Christian communions today still wrestling with this gender-inclusive ministry? What is the practice of your congregation? Why? How do they relate to congregations and communions who take a different stand? Why?
2. How relevant today are each of the qualifications for leadership in the Christian church that are presented in 3:1-13? Could they also apply to good political leaders? Why do you think matters of self-discipline, family life and public opinion are so prominent? What sort of leadership development process would be needed to apply these criteria to your congregation?
3. What do you think is meant by "the faith" in 1:19b; 3:9, 13; 4:1; 5:8; 6:10, 12, 21; Tt 1:4, 13, 16; 2 Ti 2:18; 3:8; 4:7; and Jd 3? How might the doxology of 2:17 and the great mystery of godliness of 3:16 be related to this faith? How do you think this faith is related to "the truth" that is also so often referred to in Paul's pastoral letters (2:4,7; 3:15; 4:3; 6:5; Tt 1:1, 13f; 2 Ti 2:18, 25; 3:7f; 4:4)? How closely is the Christian faith related to truth (Jn 14:6; Ro 1:21,25; I Co 15:12-20; 1 Jn 4:1-6)? How can Christians think and talk intelligibly about such truth in a post-modern age of relative perspectives and pragmatic assessments? To whom do you think the great mystery of godliness in 3:16 refers? Why might some later Greek manuscripts have identified the subject here as "God" ("*theos*") rather than "he" ("*os*") as in the earlier manuscripts?
4. In 4:1-5, what light is thrown upon the Christian view of sexuality and of eating? What principles should govern these spheres of life (6:17)? How do similar principles apply to other areas of life? Which ones? How much do you follow such principles? What has prayer to do with all of this (4:5)?
5. Is 4:14 referring to Timothy's ordination to ministry (2 Ti 1:6)? If so, how is that ordination related to the basic baptismal ordination to ministry of every Christian (I Co 12:13)? How do Ep 4:4-7, 11f, 16 illuminate this relationship? How much of what is said in 4:6-16 to Timothy about exercising his special ministry is also relevant to the exercise of your own particular ministry? With Paul's advice in mind, how might you need to make adjustments in your Christian ministry and life? How important is Christian truth and sound teaching to the development and exercise of your ministry (2 Ti 3:16f)? Are you the sort of example to fellow believers that Paul recommends in 4:12? How could you be more so?

1. How helpful was Paul's general advice to Timothy in 5:1f? What do you think were his sources for this wisdom about human relationships? How does it fit your experience of human relationships? In 5:3-16, what classes of widows does Paul distinguish? Are there similar group of widows in your society? How differently should each group be treated by Christian congregations today? Why? How generally applicable is the principle enunciated in 5:8? How might this work out in your family?
2. What is Paul driving at in each of his instructions to Timothy about relating to elders (5:17-24)? What might be the positive and negative consequences of applying each of them in your congregation?
3. Although Paul's first statement in 5:18 is clearly quoted from Dt 25:4 as in 1 Co 9:9, where is the second one found in the Hebrew Scriptures? Could he be (a) paraphrasing Lv 19:13 or Dt 24:15, or (b) citing a saying of Jesus as transmitted by Christian unwritten oral tradition (1 Co 15:1) as likely in 1 Co 9:14, or (c) quoting verbatim Jesus' teaching as recorded in Lk 10:7 or Mt 10:10? If it is (c), what does that imply about the relative dating of one or both of those gospels or their written source (Q) with respect to 1 Timothy? What also might it indicate about Paul's view of these written sources' authority relative to that of the Hebrew Scriptures (2 Ti 3:15-17; 2P 3:15f)?
4. What would make Paul's advice to Timothy in 5:23 very sensible in light of his health and his present urban environment? How might this advice be applied or misapplied in your Christian community? What further light do scriptures like Pr 20:1; 23:20f, 29-35; 31:4-7; Jn 2:1-11; Ro 13:13; 1 Co 5:11; Ep 5:18; 1 Ti 4:4f and Tt 1:7 throw on this issue? What might this indicate about justifying a particular life-style behaviour by one brief scriptural quotation? Can you think of other examples of such a procedure? What do you think of their validity? Why?
5. What light might 6:1f throw upon some of Paul's motivation for writing his earlier letter to Philemon? What possible repercussions of that letter might have led Paul to speak as he does here about a Christian slave's proper respect for his Christian master? How might the same general advice apply to Christian employees and their Christian employers in your society?

TRAIL XII -- SECTION 25: 1 Timothy 6:3-21.

1. How important is sound teaching to Paul not only in this letter (1:10; 2:7, 12; 3:2; 4:1, 6, 13, 16; 5:17; 6:1-3), but also throughout all of his pastoral letters (Tt 1:9, 11; 2:1f, 10; 2 Ti 1:11; 2:2, 24; 3:10, 16f; 4:21)? How is this related to "the faith" and "the truth" (Trail XII.23.3)?
2. What do you think is meant by godliness (6:3, 5f)? How is true godliness related (a) to knowledge of the truth (6:5; Tt 1:1) and (b) to sound doctrine/ teaching (3:16; 4:7f; 6:3-6)? What role do spiritual disciplines play (4:7b-10; 6:11f)? What identifies those whose godliness is false (6:3, 5; 2 Ti 3:5)? When is godliness truly profitable (6:5-8)? How have you experienced this?
3. What great spiritual dangers are inherent in the pursuit of material wealth (6:5-10, 17)? Why? How might writing "In God we trust" on our money help avert the dangers (6:17)? What true riches should God's people pursue (6:6, 11 f, 18f)? Why? How can material riches be used most profitably (6:18)? What possible implications does all this "money talk" have for you, your family, your congregation, your nation?
4. According to the context, who is the "He" referred to in the impromptu doxology of 6:15f (1:17; Dt 10:17)? Who is also referred to as "our saviour" in 1:1 and "the saviour" in 4:10 (Tt 1:3; 2:10; 3:4; Jd 25)? Why should many Christians today find some of these New Testament divine appellations misplaced (Lk 2:11; Jn 4:42; Ac 5:31; 12:23; Tt 2:13; 3:6; 1 Jn 4:14)? Who do you view as your saviour? Why?
5. Is the eternal life for Christians referred to in 6:12 and 19 something (a) future, or (b) present, or (c) both (Tt 1:2; 3:7; 2 Ti 1: 1, 10; Jn 3:15f, 36; 1 Co 15:53)? What light do 6:13, 16 and 19 throw upon the common belief in the human soul's innate immortality (1:17; Jn 5:24-26; 1 Co 15:53f)? If it the soul is inherently immortal, then what would God's gift of eternal life (Ro 6:23) add?

## INTRODUCTION TO TITUS

This is probably the second of Paul's pastoral letters. It is very similar to 1 Timothy and probably written at about the same time, near the end of Paul's life but before his final imprisonment and martyrdom. It emphasizes the importance of congregational order and discipline. The gospel had evidently made rapid headway in Crete, but church government was as yet quite underdeveloped (1:5) and false teaching had to be countered. Above all else, the letter addresses the Christian's calling and obligation to live a holy life.

Titus was a gentile convert (Ga 2:3) led to faith by Paul (Tt 1:4) and thus considered a son in the faith. He had accompanied Paul on some of his missionary journeys and had been sent on important missions to Corinth (2 Co 8:16-18, 23) and Dalmatia (2 Ti 4:10). This time Paul had left him in Crete to establish Christian congregations on the island (1:5).

## ANALYSIS OF TITUS

1:1-4	Address, opening words and greeting.
1:5-9	The type of leaders to support.
1:10-16	False teachers in Crete.
2:1-10	Appropriate Christian behaviour:
2:1-3	For the elderly,
2:4-6	For the youth,
2:7f	For Titus himself,
2:9f	For slaves.
2:11-3:7	Christian teaching:
2:11-15	What God's grace does for Christians,
3:1f	Christian social responsibilities,
3:3-7	Christians contrasted with pagans.
3:8-11	Closing exhortations:
3:8	The value of good works,
3:9-11	Arguing with false teachers.
3:12-15	Closing messages and greetings.

1. What does Paul deem the characteristics of Christian leaders (1:6-9)? How do they compare to the characteristics set forth in I Ti 3:1-13? Why is each of the characteristics here so important for leadership in God's church even today? Which characteristics do you think need to be emphasized more in the church as you know it? According to 1:5 and 7, how might elders [Greek="presbuteroi"] and overseers/ supervisors/ bishops [Greek="episkopoi"] be two names for the same officials there and then? When did a clear distinction between them emerge? How so?
2. Why might the statements of 1:12f be called "the Cretan paradox"? Where have you encountered such logical conundrums? How much more serious is the contradiction of 1:16 for true Christian witness? Nevertheless, how prevalent is it among Christians today in a media-driven culture? What damage does it do to the gospel? What could you and your congregation do about this?
3. How universal is the principle of 1:15? To whom does Paul apply it here? To whom did Jesus apply it in Lk 11:37-41? Could there be a connection between these two applications (Ac 11:2; 15:1, 5)? To whom did Paul apply the principle somewhat differently in Ro 14:14, 20, 23? How might it apply to your life and behaviour as a Christian?
4. According to 2:1-10, how should the character and behaviour of various classes of Christians help prevent the Christian gospel from being brought into disrepute in their community? Likewise, what positive actions might promote good repute of Christian believers in every class? Is this still true today in your community? How seriously does your Christian congregation take this? Which aspects of this are most relevant to you personally?
5. How should the facts and meanings of both the Messiah's first (2:11, 14; 3:4f; 2 Ti 1:10) and second (2:13; 1 Ti 6:14; 2 Ti 4:1) appearances, influence how we live as Christians in the world (2:12-14) during the interval between those events? How should this general Christian lifestyle express itself in specific areas of life (3:1f, 8-14)? What might that mean for your life?
6. Is 3:3-7 a good description of how God has been working in your life? What is the relation between good works and God's graciousness here? How does this compare to the Paul's delineation of the roles good deeds should play and cannot play in God's economy of grace in Ep 2:8-10?

## INTRODUCCION TO 2 TIMOTHY

This is likely the third of Paul's pastoral epistles and probably his last letter written in his final imprisonment in Rome when he was aware that his death could not much longer be delayed (1:8; 2:9; 4:48). It reveals that his last days were spent without material comfort rather than in the relative luxury of his earlier house-arrest (Ac 28:30f). There was no earthly reward to crown his long years of labour for the Messiah. For one reason or another, most of his friends had left him (1:15; 4:10, 12, 16). He asks Timothy to come quickly before he dies and to bring with him his old cloak, books and notebooks (4:13).

In such difficult circumstances, Paul is more concerned about Timothy and the future of the gospel than for himself. Steadfast and confident to the end, he still has the same message to give to everyone who is called to the Messiah's service/ ministry: remain faithful to the truth.

## ANALYSIS OF 2 TIMOTHY

1:1f	Address and greeting.
1:3-5	Thanksgiving for Timothy and his desire to see him again.
1:6-14	Exhortations and encouragements.
1:15-18	Paul and his associates.
2:1-26	Special directions for Timothy:
2:1-13	Exhortations and encouragements,
2:14-26	Being an approved worker for God.
3:1-9	Predictions about the last times.
3:10-4:5	More advice for Timothy:
3:10-12	A reminder of Paul's earlier persecution,
3:13-17	Continue as you began with the scriptures,
4:1-5	A final charge to Timothy.
4:6-18	Paul's farewell address:
4:6-8	His confession of faith,
4:9-15	Personal requests and warnings,
4:16-18	His first legal defence and future hopes.
4:19-22	Greetings and benediction.

1. What Christians do you feel the same about as Paul did for Timothy (1:3-5)? How does that permeate your prayer life?
2. According to 1:6-14, what elements of the Christian good news should give a Christian courage to face anything coming? How does this work out for you on a day-to-day basis? What have you confidently entrusted to God or his Messiah to guard until "that day" (1:12)? What day is Paul referring to here (4:1; 1 Ti 6:14; Ti 2:13)? How important is that great prospect to you? Why?
3. In your own words, what is one of Paul's basic principles for church growth in 2:2? Are you willing to be a functioning link in this chain of Christian teaching? How well did it function in Timothy's own family (1:5; 3:14f)? How does Paul want to extend women's intergenerational teaching in the church well beyond their own family units (Tt 2:3-5)? How healthy is the inter-generational Christian teaching of your congregation? How might it be improved? What role might both older and younger women play in this? Should Paul's caution about wives teaching husbands still be heeded by Christians in your culture today (1 Ti 2:12; 1 Co 14:35; 7:12-16)? Why?
4. How much of Paul's further advice to Timothy as a teacher in 2:15f and 2:22-26 should also apply to your Christian teaching? What changes might that necessitate? How open are you to them? Why?
5. What do the three metaphors of 2:4-6 together teach you (2:7) about the nature of Christian discipleship? How does that relate to the trustworthy saying about the Messiah cited in 2:11-13? How important is v. 13 to you (Ro 11:29; Ti 1:2)? How does this fit with v.12 (Mt 10:32f; Mk 8:38; Lk 9:26)?
6. How do the two inscriptions on the firm foundation laid by God complement one another (2:19; Ep 2:810)? What happens when they are not kept connected and also in that proper order? Which one does Paul emphasize here for Timothy (2:20f)? Why might that be (2:22-26)?

1. What indications might there be that you are living in the difficult times of the last days described in 3:1-13 and 4:3f (Mt 24:1-14; Mk 13:4-13)? What are some of the attitudes that characterize people then? Should Christians expect times and people to get even worse (3:12f)? How do these prospects impact everyone who follows God way (3:12; Mt 24:7-14)? How much of this infects your culture and even your own Christian congregation? How might simply living among the very sorts of people described in 3:2-7 cause serious difficulties for anyone seeking to follow Paul's personal example (3:10f)? Would that dissuade you? How could your following Paul's advice to Timothy in 2:14f and 3:14f help you persevere against the prevailing spiritual winds of your time (Ro 12:2)? As a Christian teacher, could you also help other Christians persevere by following Paul's ministry instructions to Timothy in 4:2 and 5?
2. According to 3:14-17, what great products can the right use of scripture provide? How relevant are these to each stage of your Christian live: from early childhood dependence, through adolescence development, to adult service? What has the advice in 2:15 to do with reaping all of these benefits personally? Of how much of these riches have you been availing yourself? How could that improve?
3. What is a fundamental purpose of the scriptures according 3:17? If that were to be achieved for every Christian (Ep 2:10; 4:12), then would every congregation still need a pastor who is adept at teaching the scriptures (2:2, 15, 24; 1 Ti 3:2; Tt 1:9; Ep 4:11)? How prevalent is such teaching in your experience? How much would your welcome and support help it become more so?
4. How important is it to you that Jesus, God's Messiah, is the One whom God has appointed to judge all human beings, both living and dead (4:1, 14; Mt 16:27; Jn 5:22,27; Ac 10:42; 17:31; Ro 2:16; 14:10, 12; 2Co 5:10; He 9:27; 1 P 4:5)? With this in view, can you confidently affirm what Paul himself does in 4:7(1 Co 9:25-27; 1 Ti 1:18), and had once exhorted Timothy to be able to do as well (1 Ti 6:12)? Or can you even claim what Paul does in 1:12? On what basis?
5. What does Paul seem to refer to in 4:18? How do his previous remarks in 4:6-8, 9, 21 and 3:11f fit with this interpretation? However, what do his references to "that day" in 1:12; 4:1 and 4: 8 suggest? Do you, like Paul, love the Messiah's second coming (4:8)? How prepared are you for that event? How could you be better prepared?

## INTRODUCTION TO HEBREWS

This book is an anonymous, exhortation and warning to the Jewish Christians, [probably in Italy (13:24)], shortly before the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in 70 A.D., who were overly devoted to Judaism and its institutions. Jesus is set forth as the fulfillment of Old Testament types prophecies with more than twenty names and titles being employed. Jesus' divine and human nature developed more here than in any other New Testament book. At the same time God's view of humanity is an important subtheme throughout the book. The faith and endurance of Old Testament saints and of Jesus are held up as examples to Christian believers. Interpolated into the text are six sharp warnings to the readers, which still remain very relevant today.

For Jewish Christians in the Greek-speaking Roman world, the book is suitably written in high quality literary Greek marked by careful construction and elegant diction. It is also saturated with quotes from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C. LXX Greek translation of the Old Testament, not as footnotes, but as ground for the book's argument for the Messiah's superiority. Although there are a number of similarities with Paul's writings, the polished Greek, written to Hebrew Christians suggests an author other than Paul, who wrote in rough, marketplace Greek to Greek-speakers. Most of the authors proposed by ancient and modern scholars have been Greek-speaking associates of Paul, e.g., Barnabas, Apollos, Silas (13:22f) and Priscilla.

## ANALYSIS OF HEBREWS

1:1-10:18	The Doctrinal theme: Jesus' superiority:
1:14:13	The person of Jesus as God's Messiah:
1:1-4	Jesus is superior to the prophets,
1:5-2:18	Jesus is superior to angels,
[2:1-4	First warning]
3:1-4:13	Jesus is superior to Moses and Joshua.
[3:74:13	Second warning]
4:14-10:18	The work of Jesus as the high priestly Messiah:
4:14-5:10	Jesus' priesthood as divinely appointed,
5:11-7:28	Jesus' priesthood is in Melchizedek's order,
[5:11-6:20	Third warning]
8:1-9:10	Jesus' work is within the new covenant,
9:11-10:18	Jesus' work is centred in a perfect atonement.
10:19-13:25	The practical application of this doctrinal theme:
10:19-39	Exhortations to hold fast,
[10:26-39	Fourth warning]
11:1-40	Examples of faith from the past,
12:1-29	Advice concerning present sufferings:
12:1-13	Regard present trials as disciplinary,
[12:14-17	Fifth warning]
12:18-29	Contrast between the old and the new covenants.
13:1-25	Resulting Christian responsibilities.
[13:1-8	Sixth warning].

1. How does the revelation of God in On Old Testament/ Covenant compare with that now available in the New Testament /Covenant (1:1-4; 24)? What makes the new revelation so much better? What is said here about who Jesus is? How is he related to Yahweh God? What functions usually attributed to Yahweh does Jesus share? How is he related to the Holy Spirit (2:4)? How might all this enrich your personal and congregational worship?
2. From this section, what can be learned about angels/ messengers and their functions? In what ways are angels important to Christians today? How closely do scriptural descriptions of them compare to how they have been popularly depicted in classical Christian art? What is this "word" being spoken of in 2:2 (Ac 7:53; Ga 3:19)? How illuminating is this role of angels for you?
3. How important are the Psalms for the author's theological argument here? Why do you think so many major Christian theologians over the centuries have drawn so heavily from the Psalms for understanding of God? How much do the Psalms inform your understanding of God's nature and activities?
4. In your own words, what is the first warning in the book (2:1-4)? Why should you personally take this seriously? What difference might it make to you?
5. What are Jesus' (a) names, (b) titles and (c) roles in this section? Start a list with references for each of (a), (b) and (c), and add to them as you progress through the book to the Hebrews.

1. With the text of Psalm 8 open before you, how much of that psalm is quoted here in He 2:5-8? Where does this translation from the LXX Greek Old Testament differ from yours of Ps 8, as translated from the Hebrew Scriptures? How might you account for these differences? To whom does the author immediately expect the psalm to apply (2:8)? Does he/ she actually switch applications from v. 8 to v. 9ff? How does vv. 10f and 14 clarify this? How does such an application help account for why Jesus, God's Messiah, had to become a real human being rather than just an angel to restore God's sharing of his sovereignty in the inhabited earth (Greek = "oikoumene" (1:6; 2:5))? What are the two basic divine purposes that are thus being accomplished in 2:9? What does that linking mean for human beings (2:10f)? For you?
2. How tight is the logic of the quotation and the additional interpretation in 2:8 with respect to God's delegation of sovereignty in the inhabitable world? Is the proper and full exercise of such worldly sovereignty connected with the glory being realized for the "many souls/ sons" of 2:10, "brethren" of 2:11 and "children" of 2:14? Does that include "daughters" and "sisters" (Ga 3:27f)? What else is specified as involved in their glory here (2:11, 14f)? Does 2:10 imply that every person involved becomes a child of God in exactly the same sense as Jesus is himself was eternally (He 1:14; Ro 8 5, 9:4; Ga 4:5f; Ep 1:5; 1 Jn 1:1-3)? What could the perfecting through suffering in 2:10 mean for Jesus himself (4:15; 5:8f; 7:28)? How might this process apply to you (Ro 5:3-5; Ja 1:2-4; 1 P 1:6f)?
3. Why was it so appropriate, even necessary, for God's "pioneer of salvation" to share human flesh, blood and suffering (Jn 1:14; Ro 1:3; Ga 4:4f; Ph 2:7f; 1 Ti 3:16; 1 Jn 1:1f; 4:2; 2 Jn 7)? Because of this, what four things does it say in 2:14-18) that Jesus was able to do for us? Which of these is most meaningful for you? How does all this enhance your understanding of God's view of humanity, both Jesus' and yours? How does it enrich your regular worship?
4. Throughout this whole passage, which is talked about more, sin or death? How are the two related here? What connections are noted between you, the devil and Jesus? How aware are you of these connections? How has Jesus' death freed humans from our great fear of death? What then do you fear in death? How can Christians view every moment of this life as very precious, even though we have no fear of our true life with God really ending at any moment?
5. How is Jesus' intimate involvement in human suffering helpful to you when you are suffering (2:9f, 18; 2 Co 1:3-5)? How does this influence your living and praying (4:14-16)?

1. What is the "heavenly calling" referred to in 3:1 (2:8, 10; 3:14; 4:9f)? How might it be related to Israel's calling in Ex 19:5f (Lv 19:2; Dt 7:6; Is 61:6; 1 P 1:19, 2:9; Rv 1:6; 20:6; Ga 3:7, 29; 6:16)?
2. Why is Jesus worthy of more honour than great heroic Jewish saviours like Moses (3:2-6) and Joshua (4:2)? Should Christians accord Jesus more honour than we now do? Why? In what ways could that be possible?
3. If taken by itself and quite literally, what might 3:4 mean for your life and achievements (Ps 127:1)? However, in this particular context (3:4-6), what particular "houses" are designated? How does this contextual meaning colour 3:4's meaning for you (1 Co 3:9-17)?
4. What is implied about the Holy Spirit's relationship to the writings in the three general sections of the Old Testament scriptures quoted here (3:7) and frequently throughout the book (10:18)? How is this implication corroborated by the apostles Paul (1-Co 2:0-16 and 2 Ti 3:16) and Peter (2 P 2:21)?
5. What is the danger of the 2<sup>nd</sup> warning section (3:7-4:13)? Is it applicable to Christians today? How should fellow Christians respond to those so endangered (3:13)? What elements of support should your Christian congregation be providing regularly (10:24f; 13:1, 16f)? In your own words, what is the "God's rest" into which God's people are invited to enter? What has a person's trusting and obeying to do with entering into God's rest? To what extent are you even now beginning to enter into God's rest (Jn 14:27; 16:33; Ph 4:6f; Ep 2:8-10)?
6. Is the "God's word" [Greek = "*logos*"] of 4:12f referring to the living word (Jn 1:1) or to the written (inscribed) words of the Old Testament quoted so liberally throughout this book? How is it like a two-edged sword? How have you experienced its impact personally (4:13)? How carefully should you, then be handling God's word (2 Ti 2:15; 3:16f)?
7. Does 4:12 really teach that the human soul and spirit are quite separate entities? How separate are your body's joints and marrow or the thoughts and purposes/ attitudes/ intents of your heart [which for the Hebrews thought and decided (e.g., Mt 9:4) rather than felt]? What light do these comparisons throw upon the spirit/ soul distinction?

1. Returning in 4:14 to the theme introduced in 3:1 about confessing Jesus as God's emissary/ apostle and high priest, what especially qualified Jesus for these vital roles (4:14-16) To become effective as our high priest, how important was it that Jesus be tested in every way that we humans are, yet without sinning [missing God's goal for humanity (Ro 3:23)] (2:17f)? What does the term "throne of grace/ favour" (4:16) indicate about the character of God and how he treats needy sinners who approach him through the mediation of Jesus his high priest? How does Jesus' faithful experience as a weak human being encourage you to trust him to act as your advocate (Ro 8:34; 1 Jn 2:1), sympathetically pleading your case for God's mercy (4:16)?
2. According to 5:1f, what are the basic roles of any high priest (8:3)? How does Jesus meet the all the criteria of being a high priest more fully than either Aaron or any other merely human high priest ever could (5:2-10)?
3. What practical criteria of Christian spiritual immaturity and maturity are given in 5:12-14? What knowledge and processes are involved in becoming spiritually mature? How seriously do you and your congregation take the call to this sort a Christian maturity? How is the mature Christian's ability to discern between good and evil (5:14) different from the knowledge promised by the tempter in Gn 3:5f? Are you surprised by any of the themes included in the list of elementary matters (6:1-3)? Yet as foundational elements, how frequently do you find that some of them need to be reappreciated in your congregation or in your own life? Why might that be the case?
4. Whom is the author concerned about in 6:4-12? What signs indicated that they had really become true Christians? Yet why didn't such significant religious experiences guarantee that they would continue in the Christian faith and remain assured of the Christian hope (Jn 13:21-26; Mt 7:21-23; 13:20f)? Do you know such people today? What hope does the author have for such people (6:4)? Why (6:6-8)? How similar is all this to what Jesus had said in Mt 7:24-27; Mt 10:32f (Mk 8:38; Lk 9:26); Mt 21:28-32 and Lk 9:62; in 8:31-37; in 15:2,6, and what Paul cites in 2 Ti 2:12? Why is it impossible to renew such people to repentance (to turn around) (He 6:6-8; Rv 2:21; Jr 18:9-12) even when God himself wants everyone to come to repentance and be saved (Jr 18:24-27; 2 P 3:9; 1 Ti 2:4)? Nevertheless, how does Paul's final comment in 2 Ti 2:13 remain true?
5. What evidence of God's true abiding work in them, made the author confident that his readers would not fall away from the Christian faith and hope (6:9-12)? How does their "work" differ from the "dead works" (6:1) that should be turned away from (9:14; Ep 2:8-10; 4:1; 5:1; Ga 5:6, 13; Ja 2:14-26; 1 Jn 4:7-21)? Although such works were visible signs for observers to discern genuine faith in Christians (Mt 7:16-23; Jn 13:34f), what were the very surest possible, assurances for believers of their Christian hope of inheriting God's promises through Abraham (6:13, 20) Do these same grounds anchor your life to the great hope exhibited to you in the trail-blazing activity of your high priest Jesus? How does this (6:19f) bring the author back to the main theme of 5:10f, after his long third warning (5:11-6:20)?

1. How essential is the mediation of a priest for humans to be able to draw near to God (4:15f; 5:1; 7:19, 25; 10:1,22)? Are priestly mediators other than Jesus himself any longer necessary for human access to God (7:25, 8:6, 13; 9:15; 12:24; 1 Ti 2:5f)? What are the implications of this for you?
2. How well do you follow the characteristically Jewish rabbinic-style arguments used by the author here to convince 1<sup>st</sup> century Jews (a) that Melchizedek's type of priesthood was superior to Aaron's type (Gn 14:18-24; Ps 110:4) and (b) that Jesus' priesthood was of Melchizedek's type? What puzzles you most about such reasoning? Yet, what main points still come through clearly as quite true? How would you express and connect them in your own words? How prominently do these issues figure in your Christian thinking?
3. Why was a new order of priesthood needed (7:11-8:5)? What created and guarantees Jesus' better priesthood (5:5f, 10)? What are the characteristics of Jesus and his service that make his priestly ministry superior to the Aaronic one the Jews had relied upon for centuries? How do you depend upon Jesus' priestly ministry? What for? How does this make your Christian worship more meaningful?
4. Why was a new covenant between God and humanity also necessary (Jr 31:31-34)? What happens to the old covenant? Why is that? How and why will the new covenant succeed where the old one failed? How might this relate to Paul's hope for his people in Ro 11:23-32? What might this mean for Christian-Jewish relations today?
5. What do the verb tenses in 8:4 and 9:8f indicate about whether the Jerusalem temple (destroyed in 70 AD) was still intact with its traditional priesthood functioning when the author wrote to his fellow Jews? What implications might this have for dating his book?

1. Why do you think the portable tabernacle of the first covenant is described in such detail (9:5; Ex 25:9)? How did it compare with the permanent temple built by Solomon (1 K 6:1-38; 7:13-51) and Herod the Great's recent greatly-expanded edifice, so splendid gold and marble (Mk 13:1f; Lk 25:45f)? How and why did the all these old sanctuaries and their traditional sacrificial rites fall short of what was needed for true worship of God (9:6-10; 1 K 8:27-30; Ac 7:48-50)? What made the Messiah's sacrificial ministry and its unique temple so different (9:11f)? For whom should it suffice?
2. What did the shedding of blood accomplish in both the old and the new covenants (9:15-23)? Yet how did the sanctuaries (9:23f) and the bloody offering dramatically differ (9:13f; 25f)? Does the illustration of the terms of the covenant as a will the same words in both Hebrew and LXX Greek], help you to understand the necessity and consequences of the Messiah's death for you (9:15-22)?
3. Why is there now no longer any need whatever of further sacrifice for human sin and sins (9:25f)? What are the consequences in the lives of everyone who trusts in the Messiah's atoning sacrifice (9:12, 14f, 22, 24)? How have they affected your-own. Christian experience? How is this connected with Jesus' second coming (9:28)? What is that for? How much do you look forward to this? Why?
4. Since Jesus' self-sacrifice was "once for all" time (7:27; 9:12, 26, 28; 10:10, 18; Ro 6:10), why do some Christians view the Lord's Supper/ Eucharist/ Holy Communion as a sacrifice? Are they thinking of another new sacrifice or of a contemporary participation in the continuing sacrifice of Jesus? What has the "living sacrifice" that Paul speaks of in Ro 12:1 got to do with Jesus' atoning sacrifice? How does this "once for all"ness inform your worship and your Christian living (Ep 4:32-5:2)?
5. What important role of the Holy Spirit is being spoken of in 9:8 and 10:15f (1 Co 2:10-14; 2 P 1:2)? Why does this role matter to you? What has the Spirit's action produced in your life (2 Ti 3:15-17)?

1. According to 10:19-25, what practical ramifications flow from Jesus' fulfillment of the Old Testament promises of a new covenant (Jr 31:33f; Mk 14:24; Mt 26:28; Lk 22:20; 1 Co-11:15)? What does direct access into God's presence (10:19f) mean for your faith, hope and love (10:22-24)? What purposes are given for Christians meeting together regularly (10:22-25)? How well do you experience them in your congregation's meetings? Why? How could you help facilitate these purposes?
2. How would you summarize the author's 4<sup>th</sup> warning (10:26-39)? Why would deliberate continuing to sin after having received the knowledge of the truth be considered as a rejection of the sacrifice of God's Son and insulting the Spirit of grace (10:29)? What would be the result (9:27; 10:27; 29, 31-39; 2 Co 5:10f)? Why do we need to persevere (10:36)? How could remembering surviving your earlier sufferings as a young Christian in a hostile environment encourage you to persevere in your present difficult circumstances (10:32-34)? How important, then, is your Christian endurance for trusting that you will receive what God has promised?
3. How does the author's interpretation of "the righteous will live by faith" (Hb 2:3f) in 10:37f differ from Paul's regular one in Ro 1:17 and Gal 3:11? Which fits the context in Habakkuk better? To understand these different interpretations of the same text and to see how faith is connected with endurance, how helpful is it to discover that both Hebrew and in New Testament [*Koine* or common] Greek) the same term can mean actively mean faith/ trust/ confidence and passively mean faithfulness/ fidelity/ trustworthiness? How is the author's whole argument for a Christian's trusting grounded in his teaching about God's trustworthiness/ faithfulness 10:23; 11:11; 6:13-18)? Who should anyone trust but someone who is trustworthy? Do you?
4. In the author's diatribe against such a great sin (10:26, 29-31), how effective is his description of how that behaviour treats Jesus, the Holy Spirit (10:29) and God himself [(10:30) quoting Dt 32:35f and Ps 135:14 about Yahweh]? What is his intent here? Nevertheless, what evidence does he give us in passing for the triune nature of God? What aspects of God's character are linked here with each person? How illuminating are these associations? How does this fit with other direct and indirect information about the Trinity in the Bible? How clearly do you think about the Trinity? Why?
5. How helpful or puzzling to you is 11:1 as a definition of faith? Does the expressed need or faith in 1:3 and 6 imply that no valid rational or empirical proofs of a creator God's existence are possible (Ps 8:1; 19:1; Ro 1:19f; Ac 17), let alone any that demonstrates his graciousness goodness (Mt 5:45 14:16f; Ac 14)? How important is it to remember that "faith" in the Bible is usually more a matter trusting (believing in) than credence (believing that)? Yet how can one believe in something without also believing that something is and is trustworthy (11:6)? As you contemplate the lives of the faithful people here, what basic characteristics of trust are illuminated? How do these characteristics illustrate the endurance and confidence described in the person's actions? How do all these stories of faith help to clarify for you the nature of faith? Which ones help your trust in God's faithfulness grow? How do they exhibit the three-fold Gospel pattern of Ep 2:8-10?
6. How does the "great cloud" of faithful Old Testament witnesses encourage you to pursue the goal of your own Christian faith (11:39-12:4)? What does this teach about your participation in the communion of saints? How does your Christian life help fulfill their lives (11:39f)? Whose prime example of faith faithfulness most inspires Christians to look forward to the city which God himself designs and builds (11:10; 12:22f 13:14; Rv 21:1-22:5)?

TRAIL XII -- SECTION 36: Hebrews 12:1-29.

1. How well can you imagine 11:39-12:3 and 12f as an analogy of the Christian life as a relay race? Who is analogous to various participants: (a) the coach (12:1, 7f, 11f), (b) the involved spectators, (c) the lead runner, (d) the anchor runner, (e) the other relay team members? Where and when is the race being run? How is each athlete to prepare for the race (12:1, 7f, 11f)? What motivates and encourages each one to run as well as possible (12:1-5)? What is required for such efficient running (12:1, 3f)? How should members of the relay team relate to each other (11:39f; 12:14f)? What baton is being passed from runner to runner (11: 1, 39f; 2 Ti 2:2)? How does your lap and its challenges compare to theirs? Who, however, should be your model runner (12:2)? Where are you in your particular lap of the race? How well do you think you've been running so far? What happens at the end of your lap? What happens at the end of the entire race? How helpful is this metaphor for you?
2. According to 12:6-11, what is a major consequence of being a child of God, the Father? How do the Old Testament passages alluded to in 12:5f (Pr 3: 2; Ps 119:75f, Dt 8:5; 2 S 7:14; Pr 13:24; 19:18; 23:13f) help to clarify what is meant? How is discipline (reformation) different from punishment (retribution)? Why do loving human parents treat their children this way (12:9)? Why does the loving God do so (12:10)? What makes it worthwhile (12:10f, 14; Jn 1:12f; 1 P 1:6-9)? When will that be quite clear (12:11)? How is being disciplined evidence that you are indeed a true child of God (12:7f)? What is the most important resource for living in such caring relationship with Father God? How is this small section on God's discipline connected to the larger one within which it is imbedded (12:1-13)?
3. How do the exhortations of the 5<sup>th</sup> warning (12:14-17) flow from the immediately preceding view of the goals of the Christian life? What does the example from Esau's life add to this? How also does this illustration tie in with the four earlier warnings (2:1-4; 3:7-13; 5:11-6:20 and 10:26-39)? How seriously are you taking these warnings? In what ways could all this be important to your congregation as to you yourself?
4. How does the author, in 12:18-29, expand and utilize the illustration of his 1<sup>st</sup> warning in 2:1-4? What are the two mountains, and how are they compared? How and why should God's people now be responding quite differently to their God on this new mountain? How are you responding? Is that a change from your earlier responses to God? How so?
5. To what do you think the "shaking" in 12:26-29 refers (1:10-12; 8:13; 10:27, 31; 9:27; 2 Co 5:10; Rv 21:11-13; 22:1; 2 P 3: 10-13)? What do you think will never shake apart (12:28; 1 Co 13:13; Ph 4:8f; 2 P 3:14, 17f)? In your lap of life's relay race, how can you focus on these unshakable things? Is it possible for you think of God as a consuming fire (12:29) as well as your loving Father and your coach? How so?
6. How does 12:28 reflect in different words the tri-fold gospel pattern of Ep 2:8-10? How are gratitude/ thanksgiving involved in receiving God's gracious gifts? What sort of priestly service appropriately expresses such gratitude (13:15; 1 P 2:5,9)? How is this response related to the reasonable divine service that Paul calls for in Ro 12:1?

1. How appropriate is it that our grateful reception of God's unshakable reign (12:28) should lead to practical expressions of love for our new Christian family (13:1-8; 1 Jn 4:9-21)? How many of these expressions should characterize Christians today? Which ones do you find most challenging? In what ways do the reasons given for each expression of love, help motivate you to enrich your loving behaviours?
2. How helpful is it to discover that the great divine promises to Old Testament heroes like Moses (Dt 31:6) and Joshua (Js 1:5) can encourage a New Testament Christian to appropriate Ps 118:6's brave affirmation personally? Can you confidently make the same affirmation? For the same reason? Should you take this example, as warrant to apply many more of God's promises to specific biblical people to yourself (Ro 15:4)? How often do you do so?
3. What biblical characters had experiences of entertaining angels unawares while showing hospitality (On 18:3; 19:2; Js 5:13-15; Jg 13:3-23)? What connection can you see between such experiences and what Jesus was talking about in Mt 25:35f? How important a role did hospitality play in the spread of the gospel for Jesus and the earliest church (Mt 21:17; Mk 11:11; Lk 10:38-42; Ac 10:6, 18, 32, 46; 12:12; 16:14f; 17:5-7; 18:7, 27; 21:4-6, 8, 16; 28:7; Ro 12:13; 16:1-4f; Plm 2, 22; 1 Ti 3:2; 5:10; Ti 1:8; 1 P 4:8-10; 2 Jn 10f; 3 Jn 5-8)? How important a role could hospitality play in your Christian life and that of your congregation (Jb 31:32; Ro 12:13; 1 P 4:9)?
4. What do you learn in 13:7 and 17-19 about the role of Christian leaders and their relationship to their followers? Yet what warnings about some leaders were necessary (13:9f)? How does the illustration from Old Testament worship practices apply here (13:11-14)? Why and how should you support, honour and also watch your Christian leaders?
5. What specific things are said in this chapter about Jesus, God's Messiah? What lessons for Christian living are drawn from each of them? How could each one be applied to your own living as a follower of Jesus?
6. How meaningful to you is the great benediction of 13:20f? How might expressing its sentiments in your own words make it more meaningful to you? Try it and see.
7. What can you learn about the author and the churches that he/she knows from the closing remarks (13:22-25)?

## INTRODUCTION TO 1 PETER

The letter is attested by many internal allusions to the life of Jesus-by very early external evidence as a genuine writing of the apostle Peter. Peter wrote it from "Babylon (5:13), which is commonly agreed to be a veiled reference to the city of Rome, as in Rv 14:8; 16:19;17:5; 18:2, 10, 21. It was probably written just prior to Nero's persecution of Christians in Rome in 64/65 A.D. Its good Greek and Pauline themes are attributed by many biblical scholars to the influence of Silvanus (5:12), probably the Silas of the Book of Acts, a leader in the Jerusalem church who accompanied Paul on his second missionary journey (Ac 15:40-18:22). Perhaps both Peter and Paul had been together again in Rome in the early 60's. John Mark (5:13; 2 Ti 4:11) may also have been a link between them.

The letter is addressed to "the exiles of the dispersion" in Asia Minor. Though Peter was an apostle to the circumcision [Jews] and the term "dispersion" usually applied to Jews scattered among the gentiles, the letter seems to be addressed to Christian readers -- some of whom seemed to be gentiles (1:14; 2:9f; 4:3f) — who together were addressed as the spiritual Israel dispersed among the heathen (Ga 6:16).

The letter had a double purpose: to comfort and encourage Christians in a time of actual or threatened persecution, and to exhort them, all the more on account of this danger, to holy living and hope of glory. As a minister of the new covenant, Peter was able to go beyond the Book of Job in facing the problem of innocent people suffering. Without quoting Jesus' exact words, but with obvious allusions to Is 53, he frequently presents Jesus as God's faithful suffering servant (1:19; 2:22, 24f). Because of the strong emphasis on our Christian hope (1:4-6, 13; 4:4, 13; 5:4), Peter has been called "the apostle of hope".

## ANALYSIS OF 1 PETER

1:1-12	Introduction: Becoming and Being a Christian.
1:13-2:3	Living as God's Children.
2A-10	Being God's People.
2:11-5:14	Christian Living/ Behaviour:
2:11-17	In human institutions,
2:18-25	In work relationships,
3:1-7	In marriage,
3:8-12	In all human relationships,
3:13-4:6	In secular society,
4:7-19	In the end times,
5:1-5	In the church,
5:6-14	In God's world.

1. Do you ever feel that you and other Christians are aliens scattered widely in many societies across the known world? How does that accord with your also being chosen by God? For what purpose does Peter say God has chosen you and other Christians? Where should that purpose be lived out (Jn 17:6, 9, 11, 14, 21)? What will such a life in that setting likely involve (1:6; Jn 16:33; 17:14)? Does it for you? Why should that be a cause for rejoicing (1:6, 8f)? Is it for you?
2. In this whole passage (1:3-2:3) several themes are interwoven as in a fisherman's net: let's untangle them. First, what is said about the past, present and future dimensions of our Christian salvation? Why and how is this salvation accomplished? How does it come to us? How can we receive its benefits? How then are a Christian's faith, hope and love related?
3. Secondly, what is said here about how God's children should therefore, live? Which parts of this are the hardest for you personally? Why? What resources do you need to live as a child of God? Where can you find that kind of help?
4. Thirdly, what light does Peter throw in passing on the triune God's nature, functions and interrelationships? What do his various names for God signify? Why do you think both male and female metaphors are applied to God here, as was commonly in the Old Testament (e.g. Is 63:16; 64:8; 66:13)? What might be the implications of that?
5. What figures of speech does Peter mix together in 2:4-10 in order to speak of the church? How many of them are rooted in the Old Testament's view of God's people, Israel (Ex 19:6; Dt 7:6; 10:15; Is 43:20f; 61:6; 66:26; Ho 1:10; 2:23)? What special blessings and responsibilities are suggested by each figure of speech? What practical challenges do they pose for you and your congregation? What seems to determine whether someone will find a place in such a church or not (2:7f)? What do you think and feel about that?

1. According to 2:11f and 3:8-18, what would be the general characteristics and purposes of a Christian's behaviour in the world (1:1)? How is this specifically applied (a) to political life (2:11-17), (b) to employment life, (2:18-25) and (c) to married life (3:1-7) and to interpersonal relations generally (3:8-12)? How illuminating is it to discover that in his ministry Peter travelled widely with his wife (1 Co 9:5)? How much of this Christian behaviour is still appropriate in your society? What spheres of your behaviour need the most renovation to be Christian by Peter's standards? How could your Christian congregation better support you in this (He 10:24f)?
2. What does Peter add in 2:24f and 4:1-3 to what he had already said about what is involved Christian salvation? How important is it to keep these aspects of your salvation in mind?
3. According to 3:13-17, what general principles should characterize your approach to Christian evangelism (C14:5f)? Why is vv. 13-15's suggestion as to how you should begin, so vitally important? What aspects of your personal behaviour might prompt unbelieving, close observers to wonder about your apparently different hope (2:12; 15-17, 19-21; 3:1f, 14, 16f; 4:3f)? In what ways have you experienced such queries? How easy is it for you both to wait for and also to welcome such personal questions (3:15f)? How can you be prepared to offer a true and intelligible rationale for your different Christian hope whenever it happens to be asked for? How open might sincere questioners be to your honest, personal, and perhaps imperfect, answers? Yet whose thinking and words do your questioners really want to hear? How does what is added in v. 16 facilitate their taking what you say seriously? Why do you think this non-aggressive approach to evangelism has proven to be the most effective strategy with most adolescents and adults? Would it have been so with you too?
4. What light is thrown upon the types and purposes of Christian suffering in 1:6f; 2:19-25; 3:13-18 and 4:1f? How does what is said here about the Messiah's suffering, help you come to better terms with the sorts of suffering that you have experienced while you were a Christian? Why can some Christians rejoice in their suffering (1:6)? Would you like to be able to do that too? What might make it possible?
5. What do you make of Peter's two intriguing asides in 3:18-22 and in 4:1f? What topics might these passages illuminate? What further questions do they raise in your mind? What other groups claim to be able to answer such questions? What might be their sources of such knowledge? Why do you think God might see fit not to answer all of our questions here and now (Jn 16:12f; Ac 1:7)? How do you feel about that?

1. According to 4:7-11, how should Christians live in the end times? How close to those times do Christians believe we are living today? How close do you think the end times might well be? What do non-Christians think about such beliefs? However, who is really in control of the times (4:11; Mt 24:36; Mk 13:32; Ac 1:6f)? What, then, should be the Christian's most basic general responses (4:7-9)? Why? What is the significance of the fact that it is in the context of making such fundamental Christian responses to living in the end times, that Peter focuses upon the urgent need for Christians to utilize God's multifaceted gifts of grace, both for speaking and serving (4:10f)? How does what Peter says about how to do this, follow Jesus' own way of speaking and acting for his Father (Jn 1:14, 17; 3:11; 5:19, 30; 12:49f; 14:10, 31; 17:8)? How do you feel about being called to be a fellow worker with God (1 Co 3:9; 1 Th 3:2; Cl 1:29)? What should keep such a privilege and responsibility from not "going to your head" in pride or presumption (4:11; 5:5f, 1 Co 12:6; Ep 4:6; Ps 8:49)?
2. What more is taught about suffering in 4:12-19? What two kinds of suffering does Peter have in mind? What, if any, of the items listed in 4:15 apply to you in light of Jesus' elaboration in Mt 5:21-45? What does Peter mean by suffering "as a Christian"? Have you ever been embarrassed, as Peter himself had been (Mt 26:69-75), by being identified as Jesus' follower? How ought you to feel (4:13f, 16)? What makes Peter's advice in 4:19 appropriate for Christians experiencing all kinds of suffering (2:21-23)?
3. Where does Peter say God's judgement normally begins (4:17)? Why do you think that is so (2:5, 9; Pr 3:12; He 2:10; 12:5-11; Rv 3:19)? How, then, can you entrust your life (soul) to God as the righteous judge (2:23) and faithful Creator (4:19), the "God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1:3-9)?
4. How are the guidelines for Christian eldership/ leadership in 5:1-7 put into practice in your Christian congregation? How do they follow the Messiah's own example as the Good Shepherd (Mk 10:42-45; Jn 10:11-15; Ep 5:25-32)? How could you help these norms be realized in your setting? Why is humility essential for both followers (5:5f) and leaders (5:3; Ph 2:3-11; Ro 12:10; Ep 5:21) for a Christian congregation to function as God intended? How would following the advice of 5:7 help these relationships flourish?
5. What light does 5:8-11 shed on the role of the Christian's adversary, the devil, in suffering? How do his attacks confirm your being a true follower of God's Messiah and give you hope (5:9f)? Why does being a Christian involve you in the cosmic evil rebellion against God (Gn 3:15; Ps 8:2; Ep 6:10-13; Rv 12:7-9, 13, 17; 13:7)? What attitudes and action will help you deal with his diabolical aggression (5:5, 8f; 1:3; 4:7)? How important is it for you to remember in this warfare the universal and eternal sovereignty of Jesus (Dn7:13f; Mt 28:18; Ro 14:9; Ep 1:2-22; Ph 2:9-11; Cl 2:10; 1P 3:22) and God (4:11; 5:6, 11; Mt 6:10; 1Co:15:27f; 2 Co 6:18; Rv 1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7, 14; 19:6, 15; 21:22)? How does this fit with the further advice for dealing with the wiles of the devil in Ja 4:7f; Ep 4:25-27 and 6:13-17?

## INTRODUCTION TO 2 PETER

The authorship and date of this letter has been debated more by ancient, Reformation and modern biblical scholars than any other book in the New Testament. This is prompted in part (a) by its not being attested by the church before 200 A.D., (b) by its Greek being much poorer than that of 1 Peter, (c) by its different focus and pastoral concern than 1 Peter, and even paradoxically (d) by its many literary and theme affinities with 1 Peter. If it's poorer Greek is the result of Peter no longer having Silvanus (1 P 5:12) as his scribe, it could well be written by poorly educated Peter by himself just before his death [in 65 A.D.] as his last testament (1:13-15), in order to address a new pastoral challenge, that Jude also would soon write about. With this possibility in mind, we're treating 2 Peter between 1 Peter and Jude as a suitable context.

It seems to be written to Gentile Christians (1:1, 4) to warn and exhort them about heresies and moral evils that have crept into the church, and also to encourage them to face persecution bravely while they await the Lord's return. Throughout the letter he stresses the importance of a true knowledge of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.

### ANALYSIS OF 2 PETER

1:1f	Greetings.
1:3-11	Christian living and godliness.
1:12-21	Testimonies to the reliability of God's promises:
1:12-15	Peter's testimony as one facing immanent death,
1:16-19	Peter's testimony as an eyewitness of God's witness to Jesus,
1:20f	Witness of the Spirit-directed Old Testament prophets.
2:1-22	Warnings against false prophets and teachers:
2:1-9	Judgement for false prophets, old and new,
2:10-18	Signs of their depravity,
2:19-22	Their teaching leads to bondage rather than liberty.
3:1-10	God's promises will be fulfilled:
3:1-4	In the catastrophic end of the world,
3:5-7	Prefigured in the ancient flood,
3:8f	Why God's judgement is delayed,
3:10	The certainty of the day of God's judgement.
3:11-18a	Christian living in these end times.
3:18b	Closing doxology.

TRAIL XII -- SECTION 41: 2 Peter 1:1-21.

1. Looking back over the New Testament's records of what Peter had said about who Jesus was, especially about his relationship to God (Mt 16:16; Ac 21:21; 2:22, 31f,36; 3:6, 13-15, 18, 20f, 26; 4:10-12, 26f, 29f; 5:30f; 9:34; 10:36, 38, 42f; 15:11; 1 P 1:1f, 7, 13, 19-21, 23; 2:4f, 21-23; 3:15, 18, 21f; 4:11, 14; 5:1,4, 10f) can you discern any developments now (2 P 1:1f, 8, 11, 14, 16f; 3:2, 18),? Is anything made clearer in 1:1f? Is your faith the same kind/ value as Peter's in 1:1f (Ac 15:11; 1 P 1:3, 5, 19-21, 23; 3:18-21)?
2. What is Peter saying in 1:3 about the resources provided for Christian living and godliness? What would it mean for you to trust that this is really true? In 1:4 are Christians promised that we ultimately share the "divine nature" in exactly the same way that Jesus, God's Messiah, seems to in 1.1 (Jn 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; 1 Jn 4:9; He 1:3; 2 Co 4:4; Cl 1:15)? How does Peter's immediate presentation of a result of our sharing in the divine nature (1:4) and his discussion of the development of distinctive Christian virtues (1:5-8), clarify what sort of divine likeness that he thinks should grow from our "knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1:3, 8)? How much does 1:9-11 support this interpretation? How does your knowledge of Jesus as Lord and Messiah foster such continuing character enrichment for you? How much must you personally be involved in this developmental process (1:5; Ph 2:12f; Ep 2:10; Cl 3:1-17)? How important does the above theme seem to be to Peter, to be stressing it yet again in his last testament (1:12-15)? What vital theme would you want to underline one last time for those that you have been mentoring? Why that particular theme?
3. According to 1:16-18, what was for Peter the lasting impression of his personal experience of Jesus' transfiguration (Mt 17:5; Lk 9:7; Lk 9:35)? What implications does he draw from this for himself and for his readers (1:16, 19; Jo 1:4f; 3:19; 8:12; 12:46)? How can you heed his advice? What personal witness of God speaking to us do all Christians have today (Ro 8:15f; Ga 4:6; 1 Co 2:12)? How important is that to you?
4. What does 1:20f indicate about Peter's view of the creation and interpretation of the Old Testament scriptures (Zc 7:12; Ne 9:20, 30)? In 3:2 and 15f, does he really view Paul's writings, and perhaps even those of the other apostles, as on a par with the Old Testament scriptures? What might that imply for Christians? How does your congregation's official view of the Bible fit with your view of it and with Peter's view of it? What are the practical implications of your view of the Bible for your use of it?
5. To what, do you think, the last two clauses of 1:19 are referring: (a) to the Messiah's 2<sup>nd</sup> coming/ advent (Nu 24:17; Mt 4:2; Lk 1:28; Ro 13:11f; Rv 2:28; 22:16; 2 Co 4:6) or (b) to every Christian's present, inner, personal awareness of the Messiah's presence (1:3, 8; Mt 28:20; Ro 8:10; 2 Co 4:6; Ga 2:20; 4:6; Cl 1:27)? Could the words "in your heart" be taken to imply that the Messiah's return is only a subjective Christian spiritual experience?

1. What forms of false teaching and aberrant practices among Christians was Peter vying against in ch. 2? How is this in stark contrast to the Christian way of life that Peter himself was advocating (1:3-11; 3:17f)? What do you make of the metaphors he uses to describe these people? How do they fit people today? What other metaphors might you want to add to Peter's list? Why? What is wrong with such teachings and practices? What motivates them? What are their consequences (2:19f; Ro 6:16; Jn 8:34)? Who and what ensures their rightful judgement (2:1, 4, 9, 12, 19-21)?
2. In ch 2, how does Peter see the joint theme of God's judgement and salvation running throughout the history of God's people's life in the world (2:4-10)? How does he apply this to the situation that Christians were facing right then in the mid 60's A.D.? How might it apply in your day and situation?
3. What might be learned about angels from what Peter says in ch. 2? How important are angels to you? How so?
4. How similar are the pet themes and conclusions of the mockers of the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. to those of today (3:3f)? How valuable is Peter's refutation for your present situation? Why is knowledge of the creator's ways and actions throughout the scriptures important for understanding our current events (3:5-8, 10)? What reasons does Peter give for God's delaying his promised coming and judgement (3:9, 15)? Are there any limits suggested for the realizing the intentions of God stated in 3:9 (Jr 18:1-11; 1 Ti 2:4; Rv 2:4)? Explain.
5. From 3:7-13, what can be learned about what is involved in the coming day of the Lord (Yahweh)? What do you make of its similarity to the effect of a nuclear holocaust? Why is the way of living described in 3:11-18, the most appropriate response to such a looming disaster? How would you describe that response in a short phrase or two? What connection does it have to Peter's hope for how his readers' Christian lives should develop (1:5-10)? What would it mean for you to believe that such a day of the Lord was very near? How might practicing the response suggested for Christians to such a prospect in a time of general panic, prompt non-Christians to inquire about our different hope and its rationale (3:18; 1 P 3:15)?
6. How important is it for your Christian congregation that the ultimate hope of God's people is "a new heaven and a new earth" (3:13; Is 65:17; 66:2; Ro 8:21; Rv 21:1)? What does it mean to you personally? How important is it also to you that in this new creation righteousness/ justice will dwell? How much does that prospect delight you? Why?

## INTRODUCTION TO JUDE

The writer of this little letter has traditionally been identified with Judas, one of Jesus' and James' (1:1) brothers (Mt 13:55; Mk 6:3). The letter was probably written after the fall of Jerusalem and after the death of most of Jesus' apostles (17), possibly between 75 and 80 A.D. The early church long debated the canonicity of this letter, partly because its message is very similar to much of 2 Peter. Both were concerned that evil teachers with libertarian ways had crept in ' the churches and were endangering their Christian life. While Peter seems to have foretold the coming of such teachers (2 P 3:3, 17) and have witnessed their early activity (2 P 2:15, 17), they were quite active by time Jude wrote (18). The object of both letters was to stir up Christians to fight their evil influence. Both authors looked to the past for illustrations of divine judgement on sin and declared that similar judgement was sure to come on everyone who subverted God's truth and righteousness. Some of Jude's illustrations were drawn from extra-canonical, popular Jewish literature with which his late 1<sup>st</sup> century readers would have been familiar.

His readers themselves were exhorted to keep themselves in the love of God while building themselves up on their most holy faith, praying in the Spirit and waiting for Jesus to give them eternal life (20f).

## ANALYSIS OF JUDE

- 1f Introduction.
- 3f Purpose of the letter.
- 5-7 God's judgement in the past.
- 8-16 Condemnation of the evils infecting the church.
- 17-23 Exhortations.
- 24f Closing doxology.

1. If you had lived then, might you have been included in the sort of people that Jude was addressing (1, 3)? Nevertheless, do you too still need more of God's mercy, peace and love (2)? Do you also need to be urged to carry on defending the apostolic (17) Christian faith (3)? How are you and your congregation doing that? If it is a faith that was "once of all delivered to the saints" (3), how much latitude is there for theological innovation and development as the Church of Jesus Christ faces the challenges of different cultures and issues? How can both growth and conservation be kept in dynamic balance? Could there be such a thing as "progressive conservative" theology? If so, could that be christened in the 21st century as a "beautiful orthodoxy"?
2. What specific evils does Jude see corrupting the church in his time? What makes them especially destructive? How are these evils and their perpetrators connected? Who is going to judge them? How certain is that? Why? How seriously do Christians that you know best take Jude's warning about God's judgement? Who is being referred to in 22f? Is there a distinction being made here and in v. 9 between how Christians should treat (a) sinners and (b) their sinful views and practices? What do you think of a few other biblical texts that might be adduced in support of such a sinner/ sin distinction (e.g. Jr 18:6-11; Mt 5:44f; Ro 3:25-28; 5:8; Rv 20:12, 15; Lk 23:34; Ac 7:60)?
3. How many of the evils enumerated by Jude are evident in your Christian congregation today? What positive approaches does Jude recommend for Christians to protect themselves from the many evils that threaten normative Christian faith and practice (20f)? How well are you and your congregation employing each of these means?
4. How does Jude's great concluding doxology (24f) bring together the themes of his letter? What encouragement does it give for your defense of the apostolic faith and for your fight against corrupting practices? What primary role of God is focused upon here (Ho 13:4; Is 43:11; 45:21; Lk 1:47; 1 Ti 1:1; 2:3; Tt 1:3f; 2:10; 3:4)? How often do Christians today focus upon that role of God? Why might that be so? What does each authority term in v. 25 mean? How are they related to each other? To whom alone does Jude apply them? Should we do the same?
5. What do you make of Jude's liberal use of extra-biblical illustrations of God's judgments from "The Book of Enoch" (4, 6, 13-15) and "The Assumption of Moses" (9, 12-14, 16)? Should Christians read and use these and similar ancient Jewish popular literature? What classical and modern Christian literature might also fall into a similar value category? Yet whose words are more authoritative than such popular literature (v.17f)? Where are they to be found (2 P 3:3, 15f)?

## INTRODUCTION TO 1,2 and 3 JOHN.

1 John and the Letter to the Hebrews are the only two New Testament letters that are written anonymously, and the author of 2 and 3 John merely introduces himself as "the elder". Today it is quite clear that the three letters are all by the same person, and a strong case can be made for saying that it was the writer of the 4<sup>th</sup> gospel, probably the apostle John, just as the early Christians suggested. He writes as an eye-witness who has personally known the Lord in the flesh (1:1-4; 4:14), as a teacher with apostolic-like authority (2:8, 17; 3:6; 4:1; 5:20f), and as a seasoned pastor with deep concern to defend and confirm the Christian faith (2:1, 26; 4:1-6; 2 Jn 8; 3 Jn 4). However, whether the epistles were written before or after the gospel is far less evident. For some recent biblical scholars the very Jewish character of the 4<sup>th</sup> gospel suggests an early date for it, while the sort of heresies dealt with in the three letters suggest a date late in the 1<sup>st</sup> century. The apostle John is thought to have lived and ministered in Ephesus until about 100 A.D.

In 1 John, which is far more like a treatise than a letter, the author sets forth three marks of true knowledge and fellowship with God, namely, a righteous life, brotherly love, and belief that Jesus is God incarnate. In spite of their lofty claims and Christian language, many who profess to know God cannot meet these three criteria

As the treatise progresses, these three evidences marking true Christians are woven more and more tightly together in a style reminiscent of the thought-processes of a net-making fisherman, much like that in 1 Peter by John's friend and fishing colleague. This contrasts with the much more linear and logical thought-pattern of Paul, a well-educated Hellenistic Pharisee. It is helpful to bear this difference in mind when seeking to discern John's meaning in specific passages as well as throughout the entire treatise.

2 and 3 John conform to the pattern of 1<sup>st</sup> century personal letters. Each is just long enough to fill a standard sheet of papyrus. They treat the problem of extending hospitality to visiting Christians, when false teachers, similar to those exposed in 1<sup>st</sup> John, were abusing the generosity of Christians. 2 John is probably addressed to a particular congregation as "the elect lady and her children", while 3 John is a private letter, like Philemon, sent to a friend, Gaius, who seems to have been a leading member of another Christian congregation welcoming visiting teachers. A local leader is reprovved, while the bearer of the letter is recommended to Gaius and the church.

### ANALYSIS OF 1 JOHN

1:14	Introduction: purpose and apostolic authority of the tract.
1:5-2:27	God is light: tests of true fellowship with God:
1:5-2:6	Righteousness like and through God's Messiah,
2:7-17	Brotherly love,
2:18-27	Confession that Jesus is God's Messiah.
2:28-4:6	God is righteous:
2:28-3:10	Practical righteousness,
3:10-24	Brotherly love,
4:1-6	Confession that God's Messiah has become incarnate in human flesh.
4:7-5:12	God is love:
4:7-21	Mutual love,
5:1-3	Keeping God's righteous commandments,
5:4-12	Belief that Jesus is God's Son.
5:13-21	Conclusion: five assurances for Christians.

### ANALYSIS OF 2 JOHN

1-3	Salutation
4-11	Message
12f	Conclusion

### ANALYSIS OF 3 JOHN

1-8	Message to Gaius.
9f	Diotrephes condemned.
11f	Demetrius condemned
13f	Conclusions

1. How would you put in your own words what John is saying in 1:1-4 about his own personal experience of God's Messiah and his purpose in writing this treatise? How much of his experience corresponds to your own? How do your motives for sharing your Christian knowledge and experience with others compare to John's?
2. In the Greek text the definite article, "the", in the Greek phrase traditionally translated into English as "in the beginning" in 1:1; 2:13f; 2 Jn 5f and in Jn 1:1 is missing, just as it is in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C. LXX Greek translation of Gn 1:1 following the pattern of the original Hebrew text, which translates as "in a beginning"/ "in beginning"/ "when God began to create". (CEB, An American translation). What significance can you see in this uniform fact?
3. What two spiritual claims does John critique in 1:6-11? On what grounds can these claims be assessed as true or false? Which claim could you truly make on this basis? What important Christian hope is therefore those of us who fail some or all of these spiritual tests (1:9-2:2)? To whom is that hope open (1:9, 2:2; 4:14; Jn 3:16)? To what extent are you availing yourself of this great possibility and its associated benefits (2:12-14; Jn 3:16)? How does John see all this as related to God's basic character (1:5, 9) and to the Messiah's character and activities (2:1f, 12)?
4. According to 2:3-8, how important is it for Christians to keep God's commandments? How is loving involved in this (Jn 13:34)? Whose love is being realized (2:5; Jn. 13:15, 34)? How is this possible (2:6,8)? Who is the brother/ sibling who is necessarily involved in this kind of loving (2:9-11)?
5. What seems to be John's view of "the world" in 2:15-17 (3:13, 17; 4:1, 3f, 14, 17; 5:4, 19)? How does this fit with what Jesus (Jn 3:16, 17:14-19), James (1 1:27; 4:4), Paul (Ro 12:2; 1 Co 5:9f; 7:31) and even John himself (2:2; 4:14) said about "the world"? How do you as a Christian relate to the world you live in and all that it involves for you as a human being (2:16)? Does what John goes on to say in 5:1-3 help you overcome this world? What might it mean for you to do so (Ro 12:2)?
6. According to 2:18-27, how can Christians discern who are false teachers and messiahs (antichrists)? By these criteria, who should be considered the false teachers of your day? Why? What current views of Jesus seem to downplay much of his role as God's Messiah? Why might even members of your own congregation give credence to such views?

TRAIL XII -- SECTION 45: 1 John 2:28-3:24.

1. What light is thrown in 3:5 and 8 on why God's Messiah came the first time? What more is added in 4:9f and 14? Why is that so important (4:12, 20)? How does this impact you personally?
2. What are the implications of knowing that God is righteous (2:29; 3:7, 9)? Why doesn't the world recognize that Christians are God's children? How should we respond to the hope of becoming as righteous as God himself? What does this involve practically (Cl 2:20-3:5)? How much are you involved in this transformation process?
3. How do you reconcile what John is saying in 3:9f and 5:18 about sinning with what he has said in 1:8-2:2? How does the connection between being born of God and the Son of God help Christians not to sin? Which do you think this means in practice: (a) that one is no longer able to sin; (b) that one is now able to avoid sinning; or (c) that one's habit of continually sinning is broken? Which fits your Christian experience best?
4. How is loving your siblings connected with your being re-born as a child of God (3:10-24)? What is the Christian standard for such loving (3:16; 4:7; Mt 5:43-48; Jn 10:11; 13:34; 15:13; Ro 5:6-8)? What shows that a Christian's love is genuine (3:17f)? How might this change how you express your Christian love?
5. How much do you need regular assurance that you are indeed God's child? What assurances are given in 3:10-24? Which ones assure you most? How is your reassurance linked to the Holy Spirit's roles in your life (3:24; 4:13; 5:7f; Ro 8:14-16; Jn 14:15-17)? In what ways are you conscious of the Spirit's inner activities?

1. In 4:1-6, what are the tests that John offers for discerning which spirit is really from God (1 Co 12:3)? Why do you think they are such important tests (2 Co 5:19, 21)? How could these tests be applied today? What might be the results of applying them to the culture of your time?
2. What many connections are made in 4:7-5:3 between God and loving? What does 4:7f seem to imply about every person who loves as God does (4:10, 12, 19)? Might this be a helpful guide to where, and through whom God is already working in your time, and thus serve as a significant beginning point for Christian evangelism (Ac 17:23) and cooperation (2 Co 6:14-16) even with those who are not yet aware that it is the Christian God who is loving in and through them? Yet, how is God's quality of loving clearly revealed to humans according to 4:9f? What does that imply for those who are aware of being loved God's way (4:11, 20f)? How is our loving like God not only expected (4:11, 21), but also made possible (4:19)? How does our knowing and trusting in the love that God has for us (4:16, 19) also connect with the inner activity of God's Spirit and with our confessing Jesus as God's incarnate Son and world saviour (4:13-16)? What basic human fear should trusting in God's love banish (4:17f)? Has it for you? Does any of this discussion of God's love suggest, contrary to normal Greek syntax, that the assertion that "God is love" in 4:8 and 16 means that "love is God", as some modern theologians seem to want to proclaim?
3. How is a Christian's being a child of God related to Jesus being God's unique/only-begotten Son (4:9, 14f; 5:1; Jn 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18)? What has a Christian's witness, confession and trust to do with this (2:23; 4:2; 5:4f)?
4. What interior witness does each child of God have (4:2-4, 12; 5: 7f, 10-12; Ro 8:16; Ga 4:6; 1 Co 12:3)? What are the five certainties for God's children that conclude John's treatise (5:11-21)? How important is each one of them to you and to your Christian fellowship? Which event(s) in Jesus' life that the apostle John had personally witnessed might he be referring to in 5:6 (Lk 3:21f; Jn 1:29-33; 19:33-37)? Might such connections indicate that John was the anonymous author of both the fourth gospel and this treatise?
5. What sins are mortal (leading to death) and which are not (5:16f)? What criteria distinguish them? Who says so? Are some sinners, therefore, beyond God's forgiveness (2 P 3:9), and should not be forgiven, be visited (Mt 25:35-45; He 13:3) or even be prayed for (Mt 6:44; 1 Ti 2:1-4) by Christians?
6. What idols might John be warning his late 1<sup>st</sup> century readers to avoid (5:21)? What constitutes an idol? How are they related to the true God and the truth about him (5:20; Ro 1:18-25; 1 Th 1:9)? Why are idols so abhorrent to Yahweh (Ex 20:3-6; Dt 5:7-10), to 1<sup>st</sup> century Jews (Ro 2:22) and to Christians (Ac 15:20; 21:25; 2 Co 6:16; Rv 2:14, 20)? How is idolatry closely related to witchcraft, sorcery (Ga 5:20) and demons (1 Co 10:19-21; Rv 9:20), as well as to covetousness/ greed (Cl 3:5; I Ti 6:10; Mt 6:24; Lk 16:13)? Can the real God, Yahweh, really be domesticated, harnessed or manipulated for our human purposes? What idols attract Christians today? Do they attract you? Why?

TRAIL XII -- SECTION 47: 2 John 1-13 and 3 John 1-14.

1. What three general criteria of true Christianity found in 1 John also occur in 2 John? How are they expressed in 2 John? What difference do you notice in how they are connected? How do they apply to your Christian life?
2. How should Christians treat teachers who do not pass these three basic tests of true Christianity? What made this policy so important to the early church, even though it may not seem to us to be very tolerant or inclusive? How might Christians today follow the spirit of this policy?
3. How closely are love and truth connected in 2 Jn 3-5? How closely were they linked in the characters and behaviours of Yahweh (Ex 34:6f) and Jesus (Jn 1:14, 17)? How closely should love and truth always be linked by Christians (1 Jn 3:18f; 1 Co 13:6; Ep 4:15)? Are they by you?
4. How do the three professing Christians referred to in 3 John compare? How does each one relate to the truth? How should each one, therefore, be treated? Why should the truth be so important for all Christians (1 Jn 5:20; in 8:44; 1 Co 13:6)? Is there any such thing as “the truth” today? How does lack of truth impact your economic, political, social, family and personal life today? Does recognizing faithfulness to the truth in others make you feel as joyful as it did the writer of 2 John (4) and 3 John (3f)?
5. Are you as concerned about Christians' being joyful as John was (2 Jn 4, 12; 1 Jn 1:4)? Given Jesus' own concern that his followers come to share in his own great joy (Jn 15:11; 16:24; 17:13), should the apparent presence or absence of joyfulness in Christians and Christian congregations be a significant indicator of true Christianity for interested observers?

## INTRODUCTION TO THE REVELATION

If the title of this book were to be drawn from its beginning words, as in the Hebrew Bible, then it would be called "The Revelation (Apocalypse) of Jesus Christ", but since the early church considered the apostle John to be the author of it as well as of the 4<sup>th</sup> gospel and three letters, it is traditionally called "The Revelation of John". The apostle John seems to have lived to a very old age in Ephesus long after Paul had left there. Modern biblical scholars have doubted his authorship of the apocalypse for several reasons. While there are quite a number of common themes between the gospel and the apocalypse, the style of the Greek is strikingly different: that of the former's being simple, smooth, fluent and grammatically correct, the latter's being rough, harsh and quite irregular. The author does not identify himself as an apostle, but as a prophet, John, (22:9) writing a book of prophecy (1:3; 22:7, 10, 18f). However, if the gospel were written with the help of a secretary/ scribe (as was common in the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D., e.g., Ga 6:11; Phm 19, 23; 1 P 5:12), and the apocalypse in his own untutored Galilean Greek (e.g., 2 P), then the two books of very different genres could have been written by the same person.

The early church dated the book to the closing years of the reign of the Emperor Domitian (81-96 A.D.), when this John was exiled to the Aegean Island of Patmos (1:9) during a local persecution of Christians in the province of Asia.

Although the book claims to be both a prophecy (1:3) and an apocalypse (1:1), its extensive use of symbols makes it appear more like the many Jewish apocalypses which for a few centuries imitated the dramatic and imaginative parts of the writings of Ezekiel, Daniel and Zechariah. Prophetic literature usually portrayed God to work through the course of the history of his people both in the near and distant future. Apocalyptic literature, on the other hand, tended to be tracts for hard times, seeking to encourage those who were presently suffering persecution to continue to trust in God and to endure, by focusing their attention on God's ancient promises to break dramatically into evil human history in the end times to establish his reign of peace and righteousness. Present persecutors were symbolically presented as incarnations of the classical cosmic forces of evil perennially arrayed against God and his people. There is, however, no evidence of any universal persecution of Christians in the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D., only of brief local persecutions like those of Nero in Rome 65 A.D. and of Domitian in Asia in 95 A.D. John's own exile to Patmos is a witness to a local persecution of Christians in Ephesus in the 90's. Thus, the picture of the universal persecution of Christians in this apocalypse goes well beyond the persecutions of the 1<sup>st</sup> century Roman Empire. Therefore, the book may well have two purposes: both as an encouraging tract for persecuted Christians in Ephesus and as a prophetic revelation of the more universal persecution of God's people to come in the end times. It was not unusual for Old Testament prophets to mix prophetic and apocalyptic motifs and also to have several levels of meaning and fulfillment. Why not also the author of this prophetic-apocalyptic book?

No wonder this is the most contentious book of the New Testament to interpret. We would all do well to bear in mind all the traditional methods of interpreting this book. Perhaps each of them will some throw light upon various aspects of its meaning for Christians and the world today.

## TRADITIONAL METHODS OF INTERPRETING THE REVELATION.

**Futurist:** For the first three centuries Christians tended to view the book as a prediction of what would happen in their immediate future before God's thousand-year (millennial) reign on earth. This view was revived in the 16<sup>th</sup> century by some Roman Catholic interpreters, and from the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century it has become very popular amongst Protestants, especially in North America. Extreme futurists view even the seven letters to the seven churches of Asia (Ch 2 and 3) as prophetic predictions of seven ages of later church history. More moderate futurists tend to view them as short letters to real 1<sup>st</sup> century churches with whom John had had a pastoral ministry, and the rest of the book as prophecies about the events of the end times. Futurists differ amongst themselves on these last events' temporal order, length and importance, on their significance for Christians and Jews, and on their relationship to heaven and earth.

**Spiritual:** From the 3<sup>rd</sup> century on through the middle-ages, most Christians viewed the book as a graphic presentation of the spiritual struggle between good and evil, with the church of Jesus Christ finally prevailing universally. This approach has appealed in more recent times to many who appreciate how much uncertainty is involved in trying to find historically reliable 1<sup>st</sup> century identifications for the book's many symbols. They see it as a complex symbolic portrayal of the perennial cosmic conflict between good and evil, coupled with the sure hope that God will triumph in the end. Some interpreters see the saints' reign with God as temporal within and through the church, while others view it as eternal in heaven. In either case, there is no thousand-year, earthly, political reign, thus, this is called an a[i.e., non-]millennial view.

**Historical:** This approach was pioneered in the 12<sup>th</sup> century and developed by a series of reform movements seeking to renew Christendom. It was later dubbed "The Protestant Interpretation" because Luther championed it as he identified the forces of evil within the corrupt administration of the Roman Catholic Church of his time. Here, the whole book is considered as a symbolic prophecy of the whole of church history, with many symbols designating specific historical moments. However, as the age of the church grew longer century by century, these interpreters frequently had to update their detailed historical identifications of the book's symbols in order to keep the climax of history in the future. Thus, these interpreters differ extensively not only over dates and historical identifications of symbols, but even over whether God's earthly reign — the millennium — will come before or after the Messiah's return, i.e., pre-millennial or post-millennial. They also differ sharply as to when the Messiah will come to gather his faithful people, before, during, or after the great time of tribulation.

**Preterist:** This very recent approach treats the book as simply a Jewish Christian apocalypse written exclusively to encourage late 1<sup>st</sup> century Christians to endure faithfully their immanent persecution in the Roman Empire. While they might well despair of the process of history, Christians should hope in God's sure promises to establish his reign on earth. Emphasis is put upon the extensive use of symbolism from the Old Testament and the subsequent popular Jewish apocalyptic literature which would be quite familiar to 1<sup>st</sup> century Christians. It rejects any element of prediction about the end times.

## ANALYSIS OF THE REVELATION

1:1-8	Prologue:
1:1-3	Superscription,
1:4-5a	Greeting and salutation,
1:5bf	Doxology,
1:7	Annunciation of the Messiah's 2 <sup>nd</sup> advent,
1:8	Divine imprimatur.
1:9-3:22	First vision:
1:9-20	The Revelator: God's glorified Messiah,
2:1-3:22	Seven letters to seven churches:
2:1-7	Letter to Ephesus,
2:8-11	Letter to Smyrna,
2:12-17	Letter to Pergamum,
2:18-28	Letter to Thyatira,
3:1-6	Letter to Sardis,
3:7-13	Letter to Philadelphia,
3:14-22	Letter to Laodicea.
4:1-16:21	Second vision:
4:1-11	Heavenly throne and worship,
5:1-8:1	Seven seals:
5:1-14	Sealed book,
6:1-17	First six seals,
[7:1-17	First interlude:
7:1-8,	144,000,
7:9-17	Unnumbered multitude.]
8:1	Seventh seal.
8:2-14:20	Seven trumpets:
8:2-9:21	First six trumpets,
[10:1-11:13:	Second interlude:
10:1-11	An angel and a little book,
11:1-13	Measuring the temple and two witnesses.]
11:14-19	Seventh trumpet:
[12:1-14:20	Third interlude:
12:1-17	A dragon, a woman and her offspring,
13:1-18	Two beasts,
14:1-20	God's Lamb and his followers and God's angels of judgment.]
15:1-16:21	Seven bowls.
17:1-21:8	Third vision:
17:1-18	Mystery of Babylon,
18:1-19:4	Judgement of Babylon,
19:5-21:8	Final triumph and consummation:
19:5-10	Marriage of the Lamb,
19:11-16	Second coming of God's Messiah,
19:17-21	Battle of God's Messiah with the Anti-messiah,
20:1-6	Binding of Satan, the first resurrection and the Messiah's millennial reign,
20:7-10	Satan released, battled, defeated and condemned,
20:11-21	God's final judgement,
21:1-8	New creation of heaven and earth.
21:9-22:5	Fourth vision: The Messiah's bride and the New Jerusalem on earth.
22:6-21	Epilogue.

1. According to the superscription (1:1-3), who are the agents involved in this revelation (apocalypse) and prophecy? Who were the book's intended contemporary readers? What would make it especially appropriate to have John of Ephesus involved in the communication? How can you as a reader today benefit from both its blessing and warning? If the time of fulfillment was near late in the 1st century, how much nearer is it now? How does the long time-gap influence your view of the book?
2. How is God's Messiah first introduced (1:1-5a)? How does his introduction fit with the book's first of many doxologies (1:5f)? To whom is this particular doxology addressed? Yet, from whom is the book's previous greeting (1:5)? How important might it be to keep sorted out who is speaking to whom and under what circumstances in this book, even with respect to blessings and doxologies?
3. Who gives the authorization [*imprimatur*] in 1:8? How important is that particular guarantor? How is it more appropriate for a prophecy emphasizes God's sovereignty over human history, for God to be identified frequently (1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 15:5; 16:7, 14; 19:6, 15; 21:22; 2 Co 15:28; 1 Ti 6:15), as in the NEB translation, as the "Sovereign of all" (Greek = *pantokrator* [*panta* = all + *krato* as in democrat], rather than as the "Almighty" [emphasizing physical might/ power rather than political authority/ power] as in most English translations of the Latin Vulgate [circa 400 A.D.] and the early Western Creeds? How serious might it be for Christians thinking about God and his activities in the world and our lives to confuse God's authority and power, his right and might, as if even for God himself "can" [ability] meant or authorized "may" [permission] as it frequently did for the Roman legions in the Roman Empire?
4. In ch. 1, what is said literally and symbolically about God's risen and glorified Messiah's (a) identity, (b) character, (c) accomplishments, (d) present activities and (e) future actions? How do you yourself imagine the risen and glorified Messiah? How does this differ from him as portrayed in John's first vision? How normative do you think the imagery and ambiance of John's vision should be for later Christian imagining? Why?
5. In your own words, what is the message of God's Messiah and Spirit to the apparently strong Christian church in Ephesus, the largest metropolitan area in Asia Minor? How are both Christian truth and Christian love necessary? Why do you think both are often spoken of in the same biblical contexts? How can a lost love be restored? How necessary might this be to the Christian congregation that you know best?
6. What do God's Spirit and Messiah say to the poor, and perhaps small, church in Smyrna, Asia Minor's richest commercial centre? How might this apply to all Christian congregations caught up in the worldwide commercialism and materialism of our time? What form of persecution might such churches also have to face soon? What resources and encouragement that they share with the Christians in 1<sup>st</sup> century Smyrna would help them cope?

1. As you look at each of the letters to the next five churches, what warnings and judgments does the Messiah give to each of them? What appropriate rewards are offered to those who emerge victorious in each church? What relevance might such rewards have for faithful Christians today? How do the particular elements chosen from the author's vision of the glorified Messiah (1:12-16) fit each church addressed?
2. What do God's Spirit and Messiah have to say about facing persecution to the church in Pergamum (2:12-17), the capital of the Roman province of Asia? What was the pernicious teaching of Balaam (Nu 25:1-5; 31:15f; Ac 15:29)? How could it do even more damage to the church than overt persecution could? How could such teaching be dealt with successfully? What would be the consequences of ignoring it?
3. How does the letter to the purple dyers' trade city of Thyratira (Ac 16:14) indicate that there can be a variety of responses to same challenge, even within the same Christian congregation? What makes some responses inappropriate? What economic-religious challenges have your congregation had to face? How did they cope with them? What accounts for the different responses to such challenges within your own congregation? Are they all equally appropriate? Why?
4. In your own words, what does the Lord of the churches have to say to the Christian church in Sardis, the former capital of the Croesus' fabulous, ancient kingdom of Lydia, with its large 1<sup>st</sup> century Jewish population? What members of your congregation need to hear this message? What makes others then and now considered worthy of a reward?
5. How heartwarming are the Messiah's words of commendation, affection, encouragement and promise to the church in the frontier agricultural centre of Philadelphia (3:7-13)? What activities of the people elicited such good words? How does this apply to your congregation? How significant might the promise and command of 3:11 be for Christians in your society?
6. Why do you think many modern commentators think that the church in the rich city of Laodicea is the one most like those in 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries North America? What makes the Messiah so critical of them, then and now? How ready are you and your congregations to open the door of your life whenever your Lord and Messiah knocks? Why should he be the lord of every room in a Christian's life? What practical implications might there be if you welcomed him into new spheres of your life? How much of your heart is really Christ's home right now? How does all this apply to your congregation's life?

TRAIL XII -- SECTION 50: Revelation 4:1-6:17.

1. How does John's vision in ch. 4 compare with the visions (a) of Moses in Ex 24:10-13 and Ex 33:18-34:8, (b) of Isaiah in Is 6:1-4, (c) of Ezekiel in Ek 1:26-29 and 10:1-22, and (d) of Daniel in Dn 7:9-14? What connection might the rainbow in 4:3 have with the rainbow in Gn 9:12-17 (Ek 1:28)?
2. In the vision of the heavenly worship in ch. 4, what are the characteristics of the One sitting on the throne which the living creatures and the elders specifically single out as making him worthy to receive all glory, honour, power and thanks? What do these particular characteristics of Yahweh mean to you? What feelings do they inspire in you? According to 4:11, which is more basic in the creation of all things, God's power [Greek = "dunamis"] or his will (sovereignty)? How does this fit with your basic thinking about God?
3. In ch. 5, what or who now enters the focus of heavenly worship? Why is he also deemed worthy to receive the same kind of worship so appropriate for Yahweh himself in ch. 4? How does this refocusing of heavenly worship inform you and your congregation's worship (4:8-11; 5:11-14)? In what ways does this refocusing change your worship and motivate you and your congregation to participate more fully in the goal(s) of his achievement for God and his people, as specified in 5:10 (1:6; Ex 19:6; Is 61:6; 66:21; 1 P 2:4-10)? How would you like to join in the heavenly doxologies of 5:12f in your personal worship? What well-known Christian oratorio does so? How might your congregation use these or similar doxologies more in its regular worship? What would that mean to you?
4. How do the events connected with the opening of the first six seals of the book compare with the events predicted by Jesus in his apocalyptic Olivet discourse (Mt 24; Mk 13)? What does each rider and horse represent? What do you think 1<sup>st</sup> century Christians in the Roman Empire might have understood these disastrous events to mean for their day? Why do you think Christians down through the ages have often derived great encouragement from these passages? What do they mean to you?
5. What does 6:16f affirm about the role of Jesus as God's Messiah in God's final judgement of this world (Mt 2:11f; 16:27; Jn 3:16-21; 5:22f, 27; 8:15f; 9:39; 12:47f; Ac 10:42; 17:31; Ro 2:16; 2 Co 5:10; Ep 6:8)? In clarifying Jesus' role in God's judgement, does it help to see a sharp contrast between the Son of Man's reaping and that of the angel reaping in 14:14-20? How well does any role of Jesus in God's judgment fit with your view of him? What might this imply about the adequacy of your view of him?

TRAIL XII -- SECTION 51: Revelation 7:1-9:21.

1. How do the two parts of ch. 7 answer the despairing question of the people affected by the opening of the sixth seal (6:17)? What warning and encouragement might John's two visions have had for contemporary Christians in the Roman Empire (1 K 19:13-16, 18)? How might they also warn and encourage Christians today?
2. Do you see the two visions of ch. 7 as two views of the same people, or of two quite different groups? How does the way each group is described throughout the chapter, help you decide? What difference might it make to know that the number 12 represents the completeness of divine election, both for Israel and the new "Israel of God" of the early church (Ga 6:16)? How does the great multitude's great cry (7:10) echo the Messianic "Hosanna" [Aramaic = "save us, we pray"] of Ps 118:25 and of the Jewish crowd celebrating Jesus' entry into Jerusalem (Mt 21:9; Mk 11:9f; Lk 19:38; Jn 12:13)? How does the heavenly worshipers' "Amen" amplify and confirm their plea (7:12)? Why do they focus this on God alone (7:12, 15f)? Nevertheless, who does the interpreting elder spell out as the agent of God's great salvation (7:14, 17)?
3. Why do you think there was a prolonged silence after the opening of the seventh and last seal (8:1)? What suggests that the events following this, as heralded by angels on seven trumpets, are God's answer to the prayers of all of God's people (5:8; 6:10; 8:3f)? What might this teach about the faithful people's prayers for vindication (6:10; Dt 32:35; Ro 12:17-20)? How can God use such terrible disasters to accomplish his good purposes (Ro 12:21)? What indeed are his good purposes here (9:20f)? In what respect did he succeed (Ro 1:19-25)?
4. How reminiscent of the prophet Joel's vision of destructive locusts (Jl 1 & 2) is the great locust plague of the fifth trumpet (9:3-11)? How many of the other disasters here, remind you of some of Moses' plagues in Egypt (Ex 7-12)? Why didn't such terrible judgments motivate people to repent (9:20f)? Do what are termed disastrous "acts of God" today lead many people to repent? What about you? What other responses do they often seem to elicit (9:20f)?
5. How literally or symbolically should we interpret these many judgments? If they are to be taken as symbolic, what interpretation conveys the full force of the judgment of Yahweh that seems to be intended by the text? If literal, how do Christians distinguish which natural disasters are really God's judgments? Could this apply even to those that are partly man-made? What accounts for the plethora of end-of-the-world scenarios flooding 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century media? How strangely similar do you find the "scientific" reconstructions of the catastrophic events presumed to have followed major meteorite strikes on planet earth millennia ago? What major differences can you find between such modern accounts and the biblical descriptions of (a) the causes, (b) the human responses, and (c) the eventual outcome of such "natural" disasters?

TRAIL XII -- SECTION 52: Revelation 10:1-13:18.

1. In the interlude before the sounding of the seventh trumpet (10:1-11:13), what is revealed about God's purposes for his people in times of tribulation? How might this encourage Christians suffering for Christ (1 P 4:12-19) both in the late 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D, down through the centuries since then, and even today?
2. Why do you think John was prohibited from recording what the seven peals of thunder said (10:4)? How is it that thunder can speak (Jn 12:27-30)? Should we infer that thus far John had been taking notes on his visions? How is this instance of concealing some of God's revelations to his prophet, consistent with God's ancient policy of revealing his plans to and through his prophets (Am 3:7; Dn 8:26; 12:4, 8-10)? Why not hide even more of what was then revealed to John (10:6f; 22:10)?
3. If, as 10:11 might suggest, the contents of the little scroll of ch 10 are disclosed in 11:1-13, why might that scroll at first seem sweet but then bitter to John as a Christian Jew? Can you see, as some Christians do, what happened with God's two witnesses, as a reference to a future great repentance by Jews (11:13) in fulfillment of Jesus' (Mt 23:37-39) and Paul's (Ro 11:9-36) predictions of God's continuing gracious plan for his people Israel? If you viewed such an interpretation of this passage as correct, how might such great evangelistic prospect influence your view of Christian and Jewish relations today?
4. How is the beginning of the ending of the present age clearly announced both before and after the blowing of the seventh trumpet (10:7; 11:15-18)? In what ways does that ending involve (a) God's sovereignty, (b) God's reign (c) God's power, and (d) God's just adjudication and recompense (11:18). Who will be affected positively and negatively? What about you?
5. How do the two sub-visions of ch. 11 and 13 respectively place God's people's struggles and sufferings in cosmic and earthly perspective? How appropriate is it that the former sub- vision employs gentile imagery, while the latter one uses Jewish symbolism? What elements do they have in common? How significant is that? Through its figurative language, what insights does each of the perspectives bring? Which ones are most illuminating for you? Why, however, might it be important for everyone to keep in mind and balance all of the insights of both perspectives?
6. What difference in meaning results from connecting the hanging phrase "from the foundation of the world" in 13:8 to the verb "written" ([NASB, NEB, JB, CFV, CEB, Williams, And American Translation] 17:8, Mt 25:34; 1 Th 5:9; 2 Th 2:13; Ro 8:28-30; Ep 1:4) or to the verb "slain" ([KJV, NASBM, Complete Jewish Bible] He 4:3; 9:26; 1 P 1:20) How would each of these syntactical possibilities affect your theology?

TRAIL XII -- SECTION 53: Revelation 14:1-16:21.

1. What do you make of the different distinctive marks on the foreheads of the general populous (13:16-18; 14:9-11; 16:2) and of the Lamb's followers (7: 31; 14:1-5, 12f; 15:2-4)? What were the different purposes of these different marks? What were the consequences of bearing each mark (13:8-12, 15-17; 14:9-11; 14:1,3-5, 13)? Would it be possible for any person to dissemble by sporting both marks? Is there a connection between the 144,000 in 14:1 and 7:3-8 and the group under the altar in 6:9-11? How so?
2. In ch. 14, what preliminary words of encouragement given to 1st century Christians to help them remain faithful even while they are expecting to suffer, and perhaps even to die, for their faith during the immanent great tribulation (ch.13)? If you were anticipating such dire prospects very soon, which of these words would you find most helpful? How relevant might all this be to Christians who think they are soon to be living in the end times? Do the encouragements of ch.14 assert or even hint that Christians will be spared all or part of the great tribulation? What might that indicate?
3. Does 14:6f hold out any hope of God offering to everyone "a second chance" of repentance, just before his final judgement? How would you articulate the angel's good news in your own words? How is it related to the gospel proclaimed (a) by Isaiah (Is 40:9f; 52:7), (b) by Jesus (Mk 1:14f; Mt 4:23), (c) by Paul (Ep 2:8-10) and (d) by John (Jn 1:1-5, 9-14, 1 Jn 1:1-4)? Why might the angel's gospel be termed an "eternal gospel" (14:6)?
4. Who do you think the reaper of 14:14 and 16 is to be (1:13; 6:16f; Ek 1:26; Dn 7:13; 10:16)? How does this fit into your thinking about God and his Messiah? If 14:17-20 refer to a second reaping might the two reapings also be very different in objects, purposes and results (14:6f)?
5. In the three sets of seven-fold judgments (seals 5:1-8:1; trumpets 8:2-14:20, and bowls 16:1-21), what main pattern do you see in their recipients? Comparing the three sets of seven judgments listed in order side by side, what correlations, if any, can you see between them? Might the parallels that you discern justify seeing them as three versions of the same sequence of judgments? What was heavily underlined about the responses of those judged by the seven bowls (16:9, 11, 20)? Do you think people ever change their mind or direction, i.e., repent, or glorify God as a result of what they understand to be God's impending judgement (Lk 23:39-43)? How do you respond to such "deathbed conversions"?

1. Do you think 1<sup>st</sup> century Christians would identify the beastly seat of the wealthy great harlot, Babylon the Great, with the fabulous city of Rome which was built on seven hills (17:3, 7, 9, 12, 16)? In what ways are the kingdoms and peoples of the world involved in her evils (17: 9-13, 15, 18; 18:3, 23)? How did she treat Christians (17:6, 14; 18:24)? Nevertheless, what hope is held out to Christians (17:14; 18:2, 20)? How would that apply to Christians facing similar challenges within an equally corrupt and oppressive world empire? Why might some interpreters think there now is, or could soon easily be, such a world-wide empire today? Do you agree? Why?
2. In what ways does Babylon serve as an apt metaphor for the Roman Empire's vast economic imperialism (18:3, 11-13, 22f) extending over the many waters (17:1) of the known world? How many great economic hubs of our present world, having similar strategic maritime locations and roles, can you name? Which ones could become a controlling centre of all our world-wide political, economic, and communications networks? What is said about Babylon that illustrates how easily basic economic motives can be subverted to serve much more evil purposes (Mt 6:19-24; 1 Ti 6:9f)? How might its web of economic activities involve human religions (Cl 3)? Are universal human networks prone to evil in and of themselves, or at least more susceptible than other human institutions? How aware is your Christian community about such prospects? How should it come to grips with them?
3. How trustworthy did Babylon's economic allies prove to be (17:16; 18:10, 15, 17)? What seemed to be their motives in this? Who lamented her fall? Why do they? How would you respond to the collapse of a similar empire in your own day? Which response would you join in (a) the rejoicings of the great heavenly crowd (18: 20; 19:1-3) and/or of the heavenly hosts (19:4), or (b) the great laments of those economically hurt by Babylon's fall (18:11, 16, 18f)? What world events would inspire you to shout "Hallelujah [Praise Ya(weh)]?"
4. What light does 17:14; 18:5, 8, and 20 throw upon God's awareness of what has been transpiring on earth and upon how he brings appropriate judgement and recompense? How precipitous is Babylon's fall from great power (18:8, 10, 17, 19, 21)? Why do you think that this is so underlined in the text? How could that be possible for an integrated world-wide economic power even today? Does the hope offered to Christians in 17:14 and 18:2 indicate that Christians or their values will gradually ultimately prevail against the forces of evil? How?
5. How is it possible for Christians today as well as for Christians in the late 1<sup>st</sup> century to give full heed to the warnings given to God's people in 18:4f (2 Co 6:4-18)? How would paying serious attention to these warnings, affect your family, your Christian congregation, and you personally?

TRAIL XII -- SECTION 55: Revelation 19:5-20:15.

1. What occasions the new heavenly call to all who serve and revere God now to praise him and rejoice (19:5-9)? Why do they praise him? Why do they rejoice? Are these also central foci of your and your congregation's regular Christian praise and rejoicing? How so?
2. To what extent and in what ways does your participation in the Lord's Supper/ Holy Communion/ the Eucharist help you anticipate your involvement in the coming joyful marriage supper of the Lamb of God (19:7; Is 62:46; 1 Co 11:26)? Where do the white clothes of the wedding guests come from (7:13; 19:8f; Ro 10:1-4; Ep 2:8-10)? What might that suggest about how Christians are qualified to participate in the Christian church's anticipation of that feast in every generation? What does that mean to you personally? How does it affect how your congregation conducts the ordinance/ sacrament?
3. What grave worship mistake does even someone as enlightened as John himself makes twice in 19:10 and in 22:8? How common was that worship mistake in the 1<sup>st</sup> century gentile world (C1 2: 18)? Could it happen today in your culture? How so? Even among Christians? How so?
4. How far should the sequence of the events in the text here be construed as a prediction of the order of the momentous events of the end times? What are these events? How many great battles with the evil one are there? Why? How do they differ? Who would be involved each time? With what outcomes? Who is it that comes riding on a white horse? With whom? To do what? To whom? How might a strict earthly millennial reign of the God's Messiah fit in between these battles? Who would be involved in it? In what ways? With what lasting impact on humanity? Where? How many resurrections are there? Who are involved? How many judgments are there? Why would the devil have to be released again briefly (20:3, 7)? What difference does his brief release make (20:3, 7ff)? How many resurrections are there (Dn 12:2)? Who are involved in each one? How many judgements are there?
5. In the last judgement (20:11-15; Mt 25:31-46), who are involved as judge (20:11; Mt 25:31; Ac 17:31; 2 Co 5:10) and judged (20:12f; Mt 25:31f)? What books are consulted in the judgment? Who and what are recorded in each book (Ex 32:32f; Ps 40:7f; 56:8; 69:28; 139:16; Dn 12:1-4; Ml 3:16-18; Lk 10:20; Jn 3:16; 4:42; Ph 4:3; He 12:22-25; 1 Jn 2:2; 4:14; Rv 3:5; 13:7f; 17:8; 20:12 15; 21:27)? For what different purposes (Jn 3:17; Ro 3:23; 6 :23; 1 Ti 2:3-6; 4:10; 2 Ti 2:25; Tt 2:11; 2 P 3:9; Rv 3:5; 20:12, 15)? With what results? What has all this to do with you? If you were to be given the choice by the judge (Jr 18:6-10; Ek 18:23, 32; Lm 3:33; Mi 11:18; 1 Ti 2:3-6; 2 P3:9), according to the records of which set of books would you prefer to be judged? Why: However, why might some people prefer not to have their names included in the book of life, even in spite of knowing the eternal consequences of their choice (20:15; 21:27)? What fundamental characteristics of God are revealed here (Gn 18:25; Ex 34:6f; Dt 32:4; Mt 20:14; Lk 6:36; Ro 3:26; 5:6, 8; Ja 2:13)? How do you reckon with all of them?
6. How does all that is said so summarily here, fit with your own Christian tradition's expectations about how God will ultimately deal justly with all the dimensions of good and evil? What more would you like to have had been revealed about these great matters? What other biblical passages seem to you to throw more light on these matters? Why, however, do you think so little is said here about so much? Do Christians really need greater clarity about such penultimate matters, in order to live as God intends his people to live in their present evil age (I P 4:7-19; 2 P 3:9-15; Ro 12:1f; 13:11-14; Ja 5:7-11)? Do you personally? How so?

TRAIL XII -- SECTION 56: Revelation 21:1-22:21.

1. How new in John's vision of a new heaven and a new earth (Is 65:17; 66:22a)? What is truly novel in John's new heaven and new earth? What aspects that we have previously experienced will be renewed? How are the several dimensions of evil dealt with?
2. What does it mean to you that this ultimate Christian hope is not in heaven but on earth (Is 65-17; 66:22-24; Ro 8:20-23; 2 P 3:13)? What makes this renewed earth and the human life on it truly new? In what ways does this fulfill the hopes for humanity expressed in Ps 8, He 2:5-18; 11:8-10, 13-16; 12:22, 24 and 13:14)? How does it satisfy the longings of God's Old Testament people's very earthly hope (e.g., Is 49:22-26; 60:1-22; Ek 36:7-38; 37:24-28; 47:1-12; Ps 72:1-19)? In even answering the 2<sup>nd</sup> petition of our Lord prayer (Mt 6:10), how might this heaven-on-earth hope, help orient, focus and encourage your Christian life here and now on earth?
3. Who will have access to the New Jerusalem (21:3, 6-8, 24, 26f; 22:14f)? What impresses you most about the heavenly city? What do you find most delightful? How would you describe the relationship between the New Jerusalem and the Bride of the Lamb (21: 2, 9; 1 Co 3:9; Ep 2:20-22; 5:28-32; He 11:16, 19; 1 P 2:5)? Is there anything that you think is missing?
4. In how many ways are our ultimate human relationships with God and his Messiah described here? Which are most meaningful to you right now? How might your chief purpose as a human creature be realized fully in these relationships (Gn 2:15; Ps 8; He2:5-11 Ro 8:18-23, 28-31)? How does this influence how you live for and with God now (22:11; 1 Co 15:58)?
5. In spite of this vision of the realization of our Christian hopes (21:2-7), what do the dire warnings of 20:10, 13-15; 21:8 and 22:14f indicate? How might even this terrible alternative human fate be seen as a sign of God's amazing graciousness [active love] to anyone who persists in choosing to live apart from the Gracious Sovereign of all and his Messiah by repudiating his inclusive, good and righteous purposes for them and for his whole universe (Cl 1:16-20)? If they were to be called to repentance [turn around] by God even then (1 P 3:19f; 4:6), how do you think the gracious God might respond if they could Jn 6:44; Ac 2:39) and indeed did repent (Jr 18:71; Ek 18:23 I Ti 2:4; 2 P 3:9; Rv 9:20f)?
6. In this book's epilogue (22:6-21), what are the grounds for the Christian's confidence in this great hope? How should we pay attention to this and live joyfully in light of it? On what basis (1:2; 22:7,12, 20a) have Christians of all ages prayed some form of the closing petition (22:20b; 1 Co 16:22b) "Maranatha" [a Greek transliteration of the Aramaic = "Our Lord, Come"])? When and why do you pray this? Should the Messiah's repetition of "soon" and "quickly" be even more relevant to the situation faced by Christians nineteen centuries later? How much closer do you think we are now to the immanent fulfillment of our Christian hope? Explain. What makes the brief closing benediction (22:21) such an appropriate conclusion for the whole biblical revelation (Ro 16:20; Jn 1:14, 16-18; Ep 2:8-10), as well as the Christian's rationale for continuing to pray "Maranatha"?

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**Write up your answers to the comprehensive question**

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MARANATHA! HALLELUJAH! AMEN!