

Lessons 43-46

- 1 Proof of the Bible Part One
- 2 Proof of the Bible Part Two
- 3 Time of Ezra and Nehemiah - Fifth Period of Canonization
- 4 How the New Testament Came Together
- 5 The Inspired Order of the Books of the Bible
- 6 Introductory Survey Approach of Studying the Bible
- 7 Genesis 1 - 3
- 8 Genesis 4 - 9 Part One
- 9 Genesis 4 - 9 Part Two
- 10 Genesis 10 - 11
- 11 Genesis 12 - 36
- 12 Genesis 37 - 50
- 13 Exodus 1 - 18
- 14 Exodus 19 - 40
- 15 Leviticus Part One
- 16 Leviticus Part Two
- 17 Numbers
- 18 Deuteronomy
- 19 Joshua
- 20 Judges
- 21 I Samuel 1 - 15 & I Chronicles 1 - 9
- 22 I Samuel 16 - 31 & I Chronicles 10
- 23 II Samuel 1 - 20 & I Chronicles 11 - 20
- 24 II Samuel 21 - 24 & I Kings 1 - 11 & I Chron. 21 - 29 & II Chron. 1 - 9
- 25 I Kings 12 - 22, II Kings 1 - 2, II Chronicles 10 - 20
- 26 II Kings 3 - 25 and II Chronicles 21 - 36
- 27 Ezra and Nehemiah
- 28 Between the Testaments
- 29 Introduction Survey of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John
- 30 Matt. 1 - 4:11; Mark 1:1-13; Luke 1 - 4:13; John 1 - 2:12
- 31 Matt. 4:12 - 9:17; Mark 1:14 - 2:22; Luke 4:14 - 5:39; John 2:13 - 4:54
- 32 Matt.8,11,12,13; Mark 2:23 - 4:20; Luke 6:1 - 8:15; John 5
- 33 Matt. 8,9,10,13,14; Mark 4:21 - 6:29; Luke 8:16 - 9:9
- 34 Matt 14:13 - 17:23; Mark 6:30 - 9:32; Luke 9:10-45; John 6:1 - 7:1
- 35 Matt.17:24 - 18:35; Mark 9:33 - 10:1; Luke 9:46 - 12:59; John 7:2 - 10:21
- 36 Matt. 19; Mark 10; Luke 13 - 19:29; John 10:22 - 12:11
- 37 Matt. 20:18 - 25:13; Mark 11:1 - 13:37; Luke 19:29 - 21:38; John 12:12-50
- 38 Matthew 25:14 - 26:75; Mark 13:37 - 14:72; Luke 22:1-62; John 13:1 - 18:27
- 39 Matt. 27:1 - 28:20; Mark 15:1 - 16:20; Luke 22:66;24:53; John 18:28 - 21:25
- 40 Acts 1 - 9
- 41 Acts 10 - 17
- 42 Acts 18 - 28
- 43 General Epistles
- 44 James
- 45 I & II Peter
- 46 I, II, III John & Jude
- 47 Major Prophets - Introduction
- 48 Isaiah 1 - 14
- 49 Isaiah 15 - 35
- 50 Isaiah 36 - 49
- 51 Isaiah 50 - 66
- 52 Jeremiah 1 - 15
- 53 Jeremiah 16 - 34
- 54 Jeremiah 35 - 52
- 55 Ezekiel 1 - 16
- 56 Ezekiel 17 - 32
- 57 Ezekiel 33 - 48
- 58 Background - Apostle Paul
- 59 I & II Thessalonians
- 60 Galatians
- 61 I Corinthians
- 62 II Corinthians
- 63 Romans
- 64 Colossians & Philemon
- 65 Ephesians & Philippians
- 66 Hebrews
- 67 I Timothy & Titus
- 68 II Timothy
- 69 Battle Against First Century Heresies
- 70 Minor Prophets - Introduction
- 71 Hosea & Joel
- 72 Amos, Obediah, and Jonah
- 73 Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk and
- 74 Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi
- 75 The Writings - Introduction
- 76 Psalms 1 - 41
- 77 Psalms 42 - 72
- 78 Psalms 73 - 89
- 79 Psalms 90 - 106
- 80 Psalms 107 - 150
- 81 Proverbs 1 - 9
- 82 Proverbs 10 - 22:16
- 83 Proverbs 22:17 - 31:31
- 84 Job
- 85 Song of Solomon
- 86 Ruth
- 87 Lamentations
- 88 Ecclesiastes
- 89 Esther
- 90 Daniel Part One
- 91 Daniel Part Two
- 92 Ezra, Nehemiah and I & II Chron.
- 93 Revelation - Introduction
- 94 Revelation 1 - 3
- 95 Revelation 4 - 6
- 96 Revelation 7 - 10
- 97 Revelation 11 - 13
- 98 Revelation 14 - 18
- 99 Revelation 19 - 22
- 100 Questions & Answers

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Introduction to the General Epistles

I want to **begin a new series. It will be a fairly short four-part series on the General Epistles.** I think it will serve to tie up material that we have covered. We went through the Gospels—the story of what Jesus Christ said and did—then we followed up with Acts, the actions of His original apostles. We have the emphasis on action—what was done by Jesus Christ and His disciples.

Now we come to what is next in the inspired order of the New Testament—the General Epistles. I'll explain to you, in just a few moments, as to why they would logically come next. We will focus a little bit on what these books contain because they have vital information.

When we finish this series, we are going back to the Old Testament and picking up some of the material we skipped over earlier. We covered the historical survey of the Old Testament in story flow, but there are many books that we did not touch upon. When we finish this series on the General Epistles, we will go back and pick up the Major Prophets—Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel—that I think will prove to be a very timely subject. Then we will go into the Minor Prophets. I think we will find that the timing of going into those books will prove to tie in very directly with the events that we will be going through in the course of the next year.

Let's focus this evening on the General Epistles—sometimes called the “catholic epistles.” That's right! You know why they are called the “catholic epistles”? The word “catholic” simply means “universal.” The term “catholic epistles” does not mean that they have any connection with the Catholic Church. We will notice a little later what the Catholic Church sought to do to some of these epistles. Some of the commentators use the term “universal” or “catholic” in the old sense of “universal” or “general.”

Many of the letters that Paul wrote were specific letters. He wrote a letter to the Church at Rome. He wrote a letter to the Church in Corinth, a letter to the Church in Thessalonica, a letter to the Church in Ephesus.

The General Epistles are letters that were written, not to a specific church or to a specific

individual like Titus or Timothy or Philemon, but to a wide general audience. They were not directed toward one specific congregation or one specific individual. That's why they are termed “General Epistles.”

In the order of the New Testament that the Greeks have preserved, we have, first, the Gospels and Acts. They were preserved in the order that we customarily find them. Next are the General Epistles of James, Peter, John and Jude. Paul's epistles come next in mostly the order that we now have. The only difference would be that Paul's letters to the seven Churches—Romans through Thessalonians—would follow in the order that we have them, but the book of Hebrews would be inserted between 2 Thessalonians and 1 Timothy rather than coming after Philemon, as in our common English versions. *The inspired order is the Gospels, Acts, the General Epistles, Paul's epistles followed by the book of Revelation.* We are going to note that there were some reasons for this. As I said, this is the order that was preserved by the Greeks in their manuscripts.

The order that is used in our English Bibles is what is called the “Western order.” That is the order that was derived from the Catholic Vulgate—the Latin translation—that was the official version of the Catholic Church. They rearranged the order of the books from that which the Greeks had preserved. When the translations were made from the Greek manuscripts (even the translation of the King James, even though the translation was made from the Greek manuscript), they rearranged the order of them to conform to that which people were already familiar, which was the Catholic or Western order. The reason was that they didn't see what difference it made. They said, ‘It's all the same books; what difference does it make what order they are in? This is what people are familiar with, so this is what we will do.’ That's why all subsequent English translations have followed that order. To my knowledge, the only English translation that uses the original order is the Pannan translation of the New Testament. He didn't fully understand what the significance was, but he figured there must be one. In doing his English translation, he followed the original Greek order.

We have the same thing with the Old Testament. The order that we have in our King James and all the English translations is a rearranged order. It is not in the order that the Jews preserved the books. If you find a Jewish translation of the Old

Testament, it will be in the inspired order, but any of the other English orders simply follow a rearrangement. The library in Alexandria, Egypt, didn't see any "rhyme or reason" to the order that the Jews had, so they rearranged it—as librarians are want to do. They arranged it in the order that made sense to them—which missed the point—but they didn't understand the point. There are several reasons why God originally inspired that the general epistles come right after the book of Acts and why that was the first thing you would go into. One clear reason involves the subject matter of the books themselves. The subject matter contained in James, Peter, John and Jude is very basic.

Peter tells us about Paul's epistles.

2 Peter 3:16, "as also in all his [Paul's] epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which those who are untaught and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures." Peter recognized that Paul was a writer that you have to read very carefully. Paul was a deep thinker. He wrote very complex sentences. Any of you, if you were an English teacher, would have a great time trying to diagram one of Paul's sentences. Some of them take up almost two paragraphs. He wrote a lot of very complex thoughts. Because of his style of writing, you really have to carefully go through what Paul said. He was a very deep thinker; he expounded very many deep truths.

Paul is not for beginners in the sense that Peter said Paul wrote things that are hard to be understood. That tells us you start with what's easy to be understood and progress to what's hard to be understood. If you start with what's hard to be understood and you don't understand that, then you are all "balled up" by the time you come to something easy. Then the whole thing is a mess. It's kind of like starting with Algebra and then trying to work your way back to two plus two. That's not the approach to use. You start with the most basic and work up to what is more complex. Paul wrote things that were more complex. He wrote some very deep spiritual things.

When you go through the Gospels, you have what Jesus Himself said and did. When you go through the book of Acts, we find the continuation of the story of what the apostles said and did, but the emphasis is on action. When we come to James, Peter, John and Jude, there are basic things that are further developed. We will find what those things are in just a few moments.

The material is very basic and provides a proper prelude to the study of Paul's letters.

The apostles who wrote the General Epistles are James the brother of Jesus, Peter who was the chief of the 12 apostles and John who was part of that inner circle of the twelve. He was the last of the original apostles left alive. Peter and John were basically responsible for the completion of the New Testament canon. James, of course, had died prior to the time the canon was completed. James died two or three years prior to the death of Peter. He was not involved in canonization of the New Testament. James the brother of John had died much earlier (Acts 12:2). He had been martyred much earlier.

In Galatians 2:9, Paul acknowledged James, Peter and John as being the pillars of the Church. Paul recognized and acknowledged them as such. James, as I said, was the brother of Jesus. He was the apostle who presided over the headquarters' Church in Jerusalem. Peter was the one that Jesus utilized as the chief of the twelve. John was a part of that inner circle of Peter, James and John. There are two James. You recognized that. James who wrote the book of James was not the James who was the brother of John (Acts 12:2). James who wrote the book of James was the son of Joseph and Mary; therefore, he was technically the half-brother of Jesus Christ. Jude was a younger brother of James and, therefore, also a half-brother of Jesus.

When we look at James, Peter, John and Jude, we are looking at the writings of apostles who were centered and had been focused there in Jerusalem. The apostles were, in the case of Peter and John, a part of the twelve; in the case of James and Jude, they were literal brothers of Jesus Himself.

Even though Jesus' brothers were not converted during His lifetime, you have to recognize the benefit they had. They had grown up with Him. They knew Jesus in a way that basically no one else did. They had grown up with Him and were with Him up until He was 30 years old when He left home to begin His ministry. They were at least in their mid-20s by that time. They had been around Him, had worked with Him and had associated with Him all their life. They knew how He thought. They understood a lot of things that they didn't fully grasp until they were converted. Once they were converted, they had that tremendous background of that intimate day-after-day exposure for years and years.

The exposure of the 12 apostles had been more limited to a three and one-half year period, but it

was a very intense exposure. It was the time of Christ's ministry. It was a time when they were more mature and more receptive—even though they weren't really converted and didn't really get the point of a lot of what Jesus said until after they were converted. Once these individuals were converted and really began to get the point, a lot of things came together.

The greatest importance of the books of the General Epistles is the basic knowledge and warnings that they provide the Christians. They give the knowledge about the real meaning of Christianity and the attempts that were being made to subvert and to corrupt it. There is a great deal of warning in these epistles concerning the apostasy, attempts to subvert the truth and to raise up what ultimately became the great false church.

It's interesting because there have probably not been any books of the New Testament that have been more objected to over the years than most of the General Epistles. In the early centuries, the church at Rome, Alexandria and Carthage rejected most or all of these books. The Catholic Church likes to claim the credit for having given us the Bible. That, of course, is not true. When you first come upon the early Catholic Church conference, the Bible, as we know it, was already in existence. The only thing they were arguing about was taking books out of an already existent canon. They were arguing about whether or not certain books should be included that were already included. We find something already extant and we find individuals objecting to it.

The interesting thing is that when you look at the Churches that Paul raised up or the Churches that John administered in the latter years of his life, there was never any objection to the canon of the New Testament. When you look at the Churches in Asia Minor and in Judea, you find no record of any objection to these epistles or to any of the New Testament. There was never a question in the areas of Judea or the area of Asia Minor. There was never any objection from any of those Churches to the canon of the New Testament as we have it.

The only places objections came from were Rome, together with Alexandria, Egypt, which should tell you something. What did God ever do in Egypt, other than tell His people to come out of it? Rome is not where you look as the repository of truth. That is made plain and is one of the reasons they so greatly objected to the book of Revelation. You know, you don't even have to be really perceptive to read Revelation;

by the time you get to Revelation 17, you come to this great city that reigns over the kings of the earth that sit on seven hills. You don't have to scratch your head too long to figure out which one that is. There are not very many cities that will fit that definition. The great city of the ancient world that was very famous for being the city of seven hills, clearly, was the city that reigned over the kings of the earth. They didn't have to read too far. They could even figure out a few things and knew that it was directed at them and they didn't like it.

The Churches in Syria and Jerusalem accepted these books from the earliest time. There was never a question in the Churches in Asia Minor. The real reason for the argument was a desire to discredit the instructions and the warnings that are contained in these books.

It's interesting that you can come all the way down to the Protestants. Martin Luther didn't like these books, particularly the book of James. The Lutherans derive from Martin Luther. The German translation of the New Testament is based on Martin Luther's translation in the German language and is the equivalent of what the King James is in the English. It is kind of standard.

To this day in this German translation, there is a verse in Romans that is mistranslated because Martin Luther added a word in where it talks about being justified by faith. Martin Luther didn't think that was strong enough, so he added in "alone." So, it reads, "justified by faith alone." Martin Luther referred to the book of James as "an epistle of straw." He didn't like the book of James because it says "faith without works is dead." He called it "an epistle of straw."

Well, if you wait a few years, you will get to find out what James is going to call Martin Luther. We found what Martin Luther called James' epistle; wait a few years and you will get the rest of the story. We will hear what James calls Martin Luther, and I daresay James will have the last word. In the long run, his word is going to carry a whole lot more weight. The ways things are headed, you may not have to wait too, too, long to find out what James thinks on the subject. Then we will see some of the scholars who want to argue about the Greek and the Hebrew. They can be arguing about it while the bombs are falling and the Germans are marching down the street. They can be arguing about how many people wrote Isaiah, that the Bible doesn't mean what it says and prophecy doesn't really tell

about the future. We will just stick around for a few years and see who has what to say.

The objections to these books go back to certain areas. The objections to these books ultimately go back to the subject matter. These books were clearly written to encourage Christians during times of increasing stress and persecution, of increasing turmoil and dissensions within the visible Church. You have to get the picture. You have to realize a little of what was going on at the time.

The book of James and the books of Peter (certainly James and 2 Peter) were written within a five-year period prior to the destruction of Jerusalem. Both of the books of Peter were written within, let's say, a six or seven-year period of the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. John's books were written in the 90s, but James, Peter and Jude were written in the early to mid-60s A.D. 2 Peter was written perhaps around 67 A.D. What we are looking at is a time just a few years prior to the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple.

You have to understand what that meant. From the time that the Church had its beginnings on the Day of Pentecost 31 A.D. up to this time, things had been centered in Jerusalem. If there were questions, controversies or problems, they could come up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders there, and the matter could be resolved.

Look at the case in Acts 15. It was clear that this was where the apostles were and where things centered. If there were questions, you went to Jerusalem and you got them resolved. The Jerusalem Church was the nucleus. Paul admonished the Gentile Churches to be followers of the Churches of God in Judea. Everyone was directed to look to headquarters, to Jerusalem, to the Churches in Judea because that was where the Churches had been established for the longest period of time. This is where the people who were the most deeply grounded in the Law and Scriptures were. This was the logical place.

Even for the Jews who were converted, a great deal of their life revolved around Jerusalem and around the temple because the temple was the focal point for Jerusalem. Even those who were converted still went to the temple and viewed it. Jerusalem was a visible symbol of where God had been working, of God's work and what God was accomplishing and doing. There were many things that focused in on it.

It was very difficult for them to perceive of how things could go on with Jerusalem "wiped off" the map and with the temple "wiped off" the

map, which meant, of course, that the headquarters Church scattered. There was a remnant that went to nearby Pella, but they ceased to have influence. You have to realize the extent to which this was going to shake up people and the extent to which this was going to be a problem. These events would seem so drastic that those who had understood some of what Jesus said in Matthew 24 must have thought for something like that to happen, it would mean that the end was here—Christ was going to come back. After all, didn't Jesus say, "when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies" (Luke 21:20); weren't they going to perceive that?

Now there were things that had to be pointed out. That's part of why the General Epistles were written. Paul wrote Thessalonians right around the same time.

2 Thessalonians 2:1-3, "Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come. Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition..."

He was warning them. He said, 'You are going to see things going on and you are going to scratch your head and say, "How can this be?"' Here are people introducing heresies, people who were doing and saying things. In some cases, whole congregations were being subverted.

Paul warned those in the Greek-speaking world in 2 Thessalonians 2:3 to understand that at the time of the end, that day shall not come except there was a falling away first and the man of sin was revealed—the son of perdition.

2 Peter 3:3-4, "knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, 'Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation.'"

Peter wrote and explained, 'Don't think when you see things happening, and it doesn't happen on your time schedule, that God is slack concerning His promises or that God is careless or that God is not paying attention to things. Don't think that.'

Verses 8-9, God is not slack concerning His promises. God has a time plan; in God's plan, one day is representative of a thousand years. You draw the conclusion from that—a day is representative of a thousand years in God's plan.

In Revelation 20:4-6, John makes plain that period is a thousand years. We know that there is a Sabbath that God reserves to Himself at the end. That's made plain in the Major Prophets. Isaiah and others describe that God reserves a period of time. The time of the Messiah, the time of the Messiah's reign, is likened to a Sabbath (Isaiah 14:7). John tells us in Revelation that that Sabbath will be a thousand years of duration. Peter tells us in 2 Peter 3:8 that a day is illustrative of a thousand years in God's time schedule. God is not slack, but He is on a time schedule. You begin to perceive a seven thousand-year plan—six thousand years allotted to man and the seventh thousand-year period, the millennial Sabbath, reserved for God. You begin to understand some of that, but it really doesn't become clear until Revelation 20:4-5 where John makes it plain that period is a thousand years.

One of the purposes of these epistles was to encourage Christians during the times of increasing stress and persecution, of increasing turmoil and dissension within the visible Church. There were going to be problems and things they were going to see. I think we have to understand that sometimes God allows things to take place. You think, 'Why would God allow this?' Well, God over the years has chosen to allow many things. What we have to do is stay close to God, walk with God and realize God has a plan and a purpose that He is working out.

God allowed some of these things; these epistles were to encourage them and to build them up during those times. It was to give instruction on points of basic Christian doctrine and Christian living. There were some very fundamental issues addressed in the General Epistles. We will see what those were in just a few moments. The most fundamental basic issues of Christian life were addressed here. These are things people needed to know.

The General Epistles serve to warn the people about the heresies that were increasingly rampant and to exhort them to continue in the faith once delivered. Jude exhorted the people to contend for the faith once delivered (Jude 3). Here was Jude writing in the 60s A.D., 30 to 35 years downstream from the Day of Pentecost (not even a full generation away from it). He had to tell the Christians of his day to really contend for the faith once delivered.

Other things were coming in—a little change here, a little watering down there, a little something here, a little something there. Heresies were coming in; various ideas and philosophies

of people were coming in. Jude said, 'You have to earnestly contend for the faith once delivered.' Contending for the faith once delivered is what we want, not the corruption that man has introduced or the customs and traditions that man has introduced. We want the faith once delivered.

Too many times people look at a lot of books that come out. In many cases, they start from today's social customs, attitudes and ideas and then they try to read some of those things back into the Bible. Well, you can't do that. That is not the perspective. What we have to contend for is the faith once delivered—not trying to read the attitudes of a liberal, permissive western society back into things that God had written almost two thousand years ago.

Let's notice a little bit of these individual books. Let's get the theme of these books and understand why they are so basic.

What did **James** talk about?

James 1:3-6, "knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting,"

Verse 12, "Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been proved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him."

Verse 22, "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves."

James 2:1, "My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality."

Verse 17, "Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead." James talks about **faith and works** throughout the remainder of Chapter 2. As you go through, James continues to address this subject of faith. When you look at the book of James, he addresses the subject of faith. He explains what living faith is. He explains that faith without works is dead, that the trying of your faith works patience. James is the one who addresses the subject of healing.

James 5:14-15, "Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven." Again, the emphasis is on faith.

Verse 17, “Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months.” Elijah prayed the prayer of faith. Throughout the book of James we have an emphasis on faith. James explains what real faith is. *Real faith is living faith. It is faith that is mingled with actions.*

Now, this is the thing that Martin Luther objected to. It bothered him, and this is the thing that has bothered many about James’ writings. They consider James as too “Jewish” because he stressed the importance of what we do. Faith is not simply what you believe. Real faith carries over into action. I can say I believe something, but unless I act on it, I don’t really believe it very much. If you tell me this building is on fire, if I believe you, I will get up and get out. I can sit here all night, and say, ‘Oh, I believe you. I am sure you are right. I know you are telling the truth. I surely believe that.’ But if I don’t do anything, it is pretty evident that I don’t believe it too much. If I believe something, I am going to act on it.

That happens sometimes in a natural disaster. A hurricane is going to hit here, and you have people that aren’t going to believe it. They say, ‘Oh, I don’t think it’s going to do that kind of damage. I don’t think it will hit here. I’ve lived here for 40 years. I don’t think I am going to leave.’ They don’t believe it. That’s the point! Because they don’t believe it’s going to happen to them, they don’t do anything. Others believe it and do something—they get up and leave. They do various things.

Faith! If we really believe something, we act on what we believe. The kind of faith that the Christian-professing world pays lip service, the kind of faith they talk about—‘Oh, brother, do you believe?’—is dead faith. If they really believed, they would act on what they claimed to believe. James tells us that faith without works is dead. If you believe something, you act on that belief. If you don’t act on it, you don’t believe it.

He tells us that our faith is tried so that we can build endurance. God does not just instantly answer or give us an instant response every time where faith is involved. If our faith were never tried, we would never learn to endure. Our faith is tried and tested when what we see and what God says contradicts. Then, which evidence do you believe? Do you believe what God says or do you believe what your eyes see? When the two are in contradiction, do you believe what the

five senses discern or do you believe what God tells you? What do you believe?

Matthew 14:28-31, remember when Jesus was walking on the water and Peter said, “...‘Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water.’ So He said, ‘Come.’ And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus. But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, ‘Lord, save me!’ And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him, and said to him, ‘O you of little faith, why did you doubt?’”

‘Lord, if it is really You, tell me to come, and I’ll come and walk on the water, too.’ Christ said, ‘Come on,’ and Peter impulsively acted. He believed what Jesus said and he stepped off the boat and started walking. Then, all of a sudden, he started looking around and he said, ‘Wait a minute! I can’t do this. You can’t walk on water.’ And about that time, glug, glug, glug, down he went. Before we laugh too hard at Peter, we need to realize at least he took a few steps. He took a few more steps than any of us have taken, and few more than any of the other apostles took. He believed at least for a little while.

But what happened? What his five senses discerned and told him contradicted with what Jesus said. Jesus said, ‘Yes, you can—come on.’ While he believed and acted on it, he was fine. But as soon as he began to think, ‘Wait a minute, I can’t do this,’ when he began to notice and pay attention to what the five senses told him, faith “went out the window.” Faith and sight often contradict. The question comes: what do you believe? Do you believe what your five senses tell you or do you believe what God says? That is the issue of faith. James addresses faith. You can’t get much more basic than faith.

What does Paul tell us?

1 Corinthians 13:13, “And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.” The things that are permanent abiding values are faith, hope and love. Those are the basic fundamental values that are necessary for the Christian life. Without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrew 11:6). Without faith you can’t please God because the very basis of our relationship has to be a relationship of trust. That’s what faith involves. It involves trust. James discusses the subject of faith. He goes through and expounds what real faith is. That is pretty fundamental.

Now guess what **Peter** talked about. **Hope!** We start out with faith and we get to hope. Guess

what we are going to find **John** talks about? You guessed it. **Love!** John talks about love all through the books of 1, 2, 3 John.

1 John 4:16, he talks about, "...God is love,"

1 John 5:3, "For this is the love of God that we keep His Commandments."

1 John 4:20-21, "If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also." You can't love God and hate your brother. It talks about all kinds of things about love.

It's kind of interesting. You start out with one book of James, two books of Peter, and then three books of John. It's kind of building up, step by step—faith, hope and love—and the greatest of these is love. Step by step it builds up. These are fundamental Christian doctrines. These are fundamental abiding Christian values.

We have gone through what Jesus said and did in His life and what the apostles continued to do in the book of Acts. Then, we come to the epistles. They are not so much a story of the actions, but they now begin to explain certain concepts and principles in more detail. We start out with a focus on the fundamental Christian principal: faith, hope, and love. **Jude primarily warns about apostasy and the need to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered** (Jude 3). Then you go into Paul's epistles.

At that point, with the background of the General Epistles, you are prepared for the book of Romans and for some of the things that Paul says there. Peter has already warned us that there are things that Paul wrote that are a little difficult to be understood. When you understand that Paul builds on what the others have said, you don't go off the "deep end" when Paul talks about not being justified by works. James didn't say we're justified by works; he said faith without work is dead. Your works don't justify you. But if you don't have any works, you clearly don't have any faith. While it is your faith that justifies you, if your faith doesn't have any works, then your faith is dead. A dead faith won't save anybody.

You have to approach it step by step to really get the point or else you wind up where the Protestants are. Some of the Protestants have gone off the "deep end" because they have laid aside James, Peter, John and Jude; they jump directly into some of the great complex parts of Paul. 'Well, all you have to do is believe.' They don't understand what kind of faith is living

faith. They don't understand the difference between a living faith and a dead faith. That's right; faith is all you need, but it has to be a living faith and not a dead faith. What you need is faith and love. That's right! But if you read 1 John, you'd know that, "This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments." You'd know that love is the fulfilling of the law. You'd know what love is. We would understand these things.

What happens is the Protestant world skips over the General Epistles and jumps immediately into Paul's epistles. Then they come up with a couple concepts: all you need is to believe and all you need is love. If you understand what is involved in belief and in faith, if you understand what's involved in love, that's right—that's what you need. But those things involve a lot more than most of the Christian-professing world thinks they do.

Let's notice here. James starts out with faith. Faith has to do with our relationship with God. It has to do with trust in God, with believing God, with holding onto the promises God makes. We build and develop our relationship with God as we go through certain things, certain trials and tests. It may be in regards to healing or jobs or family problems. It may be in regards to many different things. I think almost all of us look back at certain things in our lives. I can look in my life and can look at some things that I hope I never have to go through again. But I wouldn't take anything for having gone through them, in the sense of what I learned and the fact that my faith was deepened as a result of it. What do you need over faith? Faith is fundamental. But hope comes in there. What does hope do?

1 Peter 1:3, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."

Verse 13, "Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." Peter talks about trials and the basis of surviving trials. The means of surviving trials is the reality of the hope that is before us.

1 Peter 3:15, "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense [KJV, "an answer"] to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear..."

Peter emphasizes the importance of that hope being real to us, of the hope of the resurrection

being real to us, and the hope of the reward that God has in store for us being real. It is because that hope is real and because that hope is fixed in our minds that we are able to go through what we encounter here and now.

Brethren, we need to understand. We look at the things that are happening on the world scene and we get excited about it. Well, we should in some ways. But we also need to be sobered by it because if we are where we think we are, we haven't seen anything yet. You haven't seen anything yet. Jesus said very plainly that before He returns, there is going to be a time of tribulation that is going to be greater than anytime that has ever been on the earth until then (Matthew 24:21). When you look back and see some of the things that have happened, you realize that's going to be pretty bad. When you look at what has happened, Christ said there is going to come something that is going to pall all of the other things into insignificance. It's going to be so much worse. It's going to be so much greater. It's going to be the culmination. We are going to go through these things.

I know God holds out promises of a place of protection, a place of safety, a place where at least the Philadelphia era of the Church is going to be kept and protected for a time, times, and half a time—for three and one-half years—the period of the tribulation. I understand that. But how do you think that's going to be divided out? Do you think God's going to have an announcement made, 'All right, everybody who wants to be a Laodicean and go through the tribulation, would you please form a line over here on this side of the stage. And everybody who wants to be a Philadelphian and would like to be protected from the tribulation, please get over here and form a line. We are on our way.' You think that's the way it is going to be? No!

One of the things we are told about the Laodiceans is that they don't see themselves as they are. They think they are the ones in great shape. Do you ever think about that? They think they are rich and increased with goods. They have need of nothing; they are in great shape. They don't perceive themselves as Christ perceives them.

You know, we are in for a time of trial and testing in the Church, as well as in the world. Don't think all the time of trial and testing for the Church ended in 1979. I think God allowed us to go through things (not that we will go through exactly the same things), but if we think that all of the trials and tests on the Church were over ten

years ago and that it's just kind of "riding a greased sled" from now on into the Kingdom, I think we grossly deceive ourselves.

That's not what I read in the prophecies of the Bible. That's not what I read in Matthew 24 when it talks about people becoming offended and even hating and betraying one another. It talks about love growing cold and about various other things. In other words, brethren, we are going to go through and live through some very real events. Some have emphasized it in the context of watching world news. We most definitely need to watch *ourselves*. You know, God is on schedule. Am I? That's what I need to look at. God's plan—what God is doing and what God is working out in the world—is on schedule. But what about me—my life, my growth and my development—is that on schedule? That's the thing that I need to take note of and that's the thing in your life that you need to take note of.

Peter emphasizes the reality of the hope. The means of surviving trials is seeing the reality of the hope.

1 Peter 1:3-6, he tells us, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible [this is what our hope is] and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials."

We go through a lot of trials, a lot of difficulties. He didn't say that we don't get "down" with things sometimes. He says we rejoice in hope. Not that we don't get "down" and discouraged by some of the many problems we encounter here and now. What we rejoice about is the fact that there is something on the other side. There are a lot of people who have gone through a lot of trials and tests, a lot of things a lot worse than any of us have encountered.

While the celebration was going on in Germany for the ending of the Wall, there was a very solemn occasion that was being noted in Israel—an occasion known as "Kristallnacht," which means "the night of glass." That was the night, approximately 56 years ago, that the Germans came through and broke all the windows in the Jewish shops and Jewish homes. It was the beginning of the end for the Jews. They called it

the German term, which meant “the night of glass” or “the night of broken glass.” Here were people who saw everything that they had worked for, everything that they had built, destroyed by a mob. Over the next few years, in many cases, their lives, their families, everything was wiped out. They went through those things and they died. For many of them, they didn’t really have any practical hope. They didn’t know what lay ahead.

The world is filled with people who have gone through suffering, whether it’s been diseases, whether it’s been terrible family calamities or various problems. The world is filled with people who have problems. We go through trials, but trials are not unique to the Church of God—whether it is financial trials, health trials, family trials or whatever. People all over the world have problems, trials and difficulties. What is unique is that we have hope. We have an understanding of the reality of what lies on the other side of those trials and difficulties. That is what we are told to rejoice in—to rejoice in hope.

1 Peter 2:1 we continue to be admonished, “Therefore, laying aside all malice, all guile, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking...”

Verse 5, “you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”

Verse 6, it describes the analogy of laying in Zion the chief cornerstone, and that is Jesus Christ.

Verses 7-8, “Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious; but to those who are disobedient, ‘The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone,’ and ‘A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense.’ They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed.”

Verses 9-12, “But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy. Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.”

Verse 20, “For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer for it, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God.” If I get in trouble for something I did and I take it in a good attitude, big deal! I brought it on myself. If I am persecuted for righteousness’ sake and I take it well, now that counts for something because then I am doing what Jesus did. He never suffered for anything He did; He suffered for righteousness’ sake. I can’t say that the only suffering I have ever had is for righteousness’ sake. Can you?

Then it goes through in terms of human and personal relationships, husbands and wives, people dealing with one another.

1 Peter 3:14-15, we are told, “But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you are blessed. And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled. But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense [KJV, “an answer”] to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear...”

You don’t have to worry if you suffer for righteousness’ sake. We can suffer for righteousness’ sake and maintain a positive attitude. People are going to wonder, ‘What’s with you?’ That’s kind of the context in which people ask you what it is about you that is different. How can you go through this and handle it the way you do? We are told to be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks concerning a reason of the hope that is within us. It is the reality of that hope that enables us to endure.

It goes on and talks about trials and all of these things. The means of survival is the reality of that hope.

2 Peter 3:9, “The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness,” That hope is not something that is far removed.

We do look for a new heavens and a new earth.

Verse 13, “Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.” The reality of that hope is emphasized.

2 Peter explains a great deal of important material. It even explains and gives us some insight into the beginnings of the false church. It gives us insight into understanding how we came to have the New Testament preserved as we do. We will focus on that a little later. There is an emphasis on hope.

Faith, hope and love. John talks about love throughout the books of John.

1 John 2:10, “He who loves his brother abides in the light,”

Verse 15, we are not to love the world or at least the things of the world.

1 John 3:1, “Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called the children of God!”

Verse 16, “By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.”

Verse 18, “...let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.”

1 John 4:7-8, “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born [begotten] of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.”

Verses 10-11, “In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.”

Verse 16, “And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.”

Verses 18-19, “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. We love Him because He first loved us.”

1 John 5:2-3, “By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.”

You know, you’d almost think that John was talking about love! Faith, hope and love. John explains what real love is.

James explains what real faith is. Real faith is living faith. It is a faith that is coupled with action and results in action. In other words, we act on what we believe. That’s what having faith with our works means. We act on what we believe. If I really believe it, I am going to act on it.

Peter explains how to keep on acting on it when everything is going wrong around you. You are able to keep going because you have a hope that is living, a hope that is real and a hope that is on the other side of the trial. How did Christ go through and survive what He went through? – Because of the reality of the hope that was set before Him. Peter explains the living hope that we have is the means of our enduring the trials.

We start out with faith and we demonstrate our faith by acting on it. Our faith is tried and tested. Our means of going through and surviving trials and tests is the hope that is real to us.

Then we come to understand the most fundamental aspect of God’s character, which needs to be made a part of us—love! We find that love and law go together. We find that love is the fulfilling of the law.

1 John 5:3 explains, “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments.” We are to love God and love one another. God loved us. We see this emphasis, this explanation, of what is real love.

If you go through the Gospels, you find that 1) Jesus kept the Sabbath. He entered into the synagogue on the Sabbath, as was His custom (Luke 4:16). You go through the book of Acts and find that 2) the apostles did the same thing. Then James tells you that 3) you need to have works with your faith. Then Peter tells you that 4) Paul wrote a few things that were sometimes misunderstood. John tells you that 5) sin is the transgression of the law (KJV, 1 John 3:4), and the love of God is that we keep His commandments. Jude tells you 6) to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered (Jude 3). You are not going to get to Romans that Paul wrote and think that Paul must have done away with the Sabbath and the Ten Commandments. We have a basis of understanding on some of the things Paul wrote because we understand these fundamental areas of faith, hope and love, which Paul said were the things which were going to abide (1 Corinthians 13:13). How do you understand what faith, hope and love are? You go back to James, Peter and John.

2 John 6, John tells us, “This is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, that as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it.”

Verses 9-11, then he talks about deceivers who have gone out into the world who are not bringing this doctrine.

In 3 John 9-10, he talks about certain congregations being subverted.

We find that there was a church that was appearing on the scene that did not continue in the faith and actions of the apostles. Therefore, it should not surprise us to find that there were those who were trying to get rid of these epistles, and get them out of the canon. Who were they? Well, it’s a good bet that the ones that John and Jude were warning you of were the ones that you read of a few years later that were trying to get

rid of those books. If people want to get rid of something, it is generally because it points them out.

Then you come to Jude who warns about apostasy, the falling away and contending for the faith once delivered.

Jude 3-4, “Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Oh, so the problem was going to involve a misunderstanding of grace. Peter said Paul wrote some things a little difficult to be understood—or that can be misunderstood—if you don’t take them in the right way, which those that are unlearned and unstable twist (2 Peter 3:16). In other words, they take it out of context. The way you misunderstand Paul is when you don’t take him in context. He wrote long complicated sentences. You can extract something out of the middle of it, take it out of context, and totally miss the point. Peter warned that’s what some did, the same way they twisted other parts of the Scriptures.

Jude tells us that those who were trying to subvert and to mess things up were the ones who were turning grace into lawlessness. They were distorting what God’s grace is about. Now, God’s grace is wonderful. God’s grace is what makes possible our forgiveness and our opportunity to be a part of His Family. But God’s grace does not diminish from our responsibility of obeying Him. God’s grace is extended to us because our best efforts are not good enough. There is nothing we could ever do on our own to atone for what we have done in the past. God extends His grace and His mercy. If we believe that, we are going to act on that belief.

Jude goes through and really gives us warnings about some of these things. We have here material that is fundamental. *Jude was addressed to the twelve tribes of the dispersion.* It was not just to the Jews but also to all of the Israelites.

We might look, just very briefly, at these books. James was the presiding apostle at the headquarters Church in Jerusalem. He was the half-brother of Jesus Christ. This book was probably written around 60 A.D. James was a remarkable individual. He was known, even

among the Jews, as James the Just or James the Righteous. He was martyred about 62 A.D. by being thrown over the side of the temple. He was pushed, shoved or thrown off of the high wall down on the rocks below.

Many of the Jews, interestingly enough, felt that the Roman invasion was retribution for their martyrdom of James. The Jews greatly respected him and, in a sense, knew that what they had done was wrong. It is interesting in some of their own writings, some of the statements that are made concerning that.

James was an individual of quite renown. We will note some things when we get into the book of James. *We will note the area of circulation and the areas of prominence that the book of James had throughout the Middle East, and even some of the areas of Britain and Parthia where Israelites were settled.*

Peter was written to Israelites dispersed along the southern shore of the Black Sea. There is a lot of emphasis on hope in the midst of persecution. 2 Peter was written shortly before Peter’s death. It explains the origin and purpose of the New Testament canon.

John wrote about 30 years later, after all the others had written. He gives kind of a wrap-up and a summary. He zeroes in on two things—love and law. Interestingly enough, what did Christ warn?

Matthew 24:12, ““And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold.”” It’s interesting. The thing that John focuses on is the fact that (1) lawlessness is multiplying and (2) love is growing cold. John focuses in on the relationship between love and law. He shows the antidote to what Christ had warned of because that’s what happened. That was what sapped the spiritual strength and stamina of the New Testament Church.

What did Christ tell the Ephesians Church?

Revelation 2:1, 4, ““To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love.”” What sapped the spiritual strength and stamina? Well, there was a certain watering down. There was a disregard for law that began to grow; as a result, love began to diminish.

It doesn’t matter how much you emphasize love. If disregard for the law and a casual approach to the law begins to grow, love inevitably will dim because law and love go together. You cannot separate them. The reason is because a lawless attitude is a selfish, self-centered attitude. The law reflects our relationship with God and with

other people. When you have a disregard for the law, you have an increase in selfishness and self-centeredness. Why do people want to break the law? –Because they don't want to be inconvenienced by doing what they are supposed to do. They want to do what they want to do. That is selfish; that is self-centered. When people have that kind of selfish, self-centered approach, it is obviously going to diminish the love that they show toward others.

John zeroes in on these things. John wrote in the 90s A.D. What John wrote has specific connections with the heresies that were extant at the time.

Jude was written about the same time as 2 Peter. It shows the extant that the apostasy was in “full swing.” It has the warnings and the insight that helps us to understand what was actually taking place in the early New Testament Church.

Next Bible study we are going to cover the book of James. The following Bible study we will cover 1 & 2 Peter. Then the following study after that, we will cover 1, 2, 3 John and Jude. That may seem like a lot to lump together, but when you look at 2 John and 3 John, you realize they are little short chapters. They are just little short one-chapter books. Jude is just one chapter. 1, 2, 3 John and Jude, taken together, are very short amounts of material.

I think it will give us a basis, a kind of an overview of this section of Scripture. This section is very basic in terms of understanding practical day-by-day Christian life. We can kind of take it from there.

When we conclude the General Epistles, we will save the remainder of the New Testament until later. We will come back and do a series on the “Life and Letters of Paul” at a later time. We will also save the book of Revelation until later. When we finish this series on the General Epistles, we will go back to the Old Testament. We will pick up the Major and Minor Prophets, and then we will see where we go from there.

Bible Study # 44
November 28, 1989
Mr. John Ogwyn

General Epistles Series—James

This evening we are in the book of James. We want **to get into and address this book of James**. We have already mentioned the theme that runs through each of these General Epistles—James, Peter, John and Jude—the theme of faith, hope and love. We went through and saw that in quite a bit of detail last time. Of course, Jude contains warnings against apostasy, against falling away and the exhortation “to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered.”

The book of James was written in the early 60s A.D. We would date it about 61 A.D. Of course, James wrote it. There are several James mentioned in the New Testament. The James who wrote the book of James was the brother, or more properly stated, the half-brother of Jesus Christ. Jesus had several brothers as well as sisters. His brothers James, Simon and Jude are all mentioned and are enumerated in the Gospels. He also had several sisters.

James had grown up with Jesus Christ. He was somewhat younger, perhaps two to four years younger than Jesus Christ. Even though he was not one of the twelve and was not one who followed Christ in His ministry, yet it seems clear that James was converted in the immediate aftermath of the resurrection. There certainly had been nothing of greater impact to have struck him than to have seen his brother, who was dead, stand before him alive.

We are told by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:7 that He specifically appeared to James, as well as the others. Christ, in a very personal way, appeared to James and manifested Himself after the resurrection. We are not given the details of the account in the Gospels, but Paul alludes to it because there was that 40-day span between the time of His resurrection and the time of His ascension into heaven during which Jesus appeared many times (Acts 1:3).

In the aftermath of this, James was converted and became a very leading apostle. He was the presiding apostle at the Church in Jerusalem, serving as the pastor and overseer of the headquarters Church. He is the one who presided at the ministerial conference of Acts 15. He is the one that is enumerated, along with Peter and John, as one of the three pillars of the Church. He is catalogued by Paul in Galatians 2:9 as

being one of the upright supports, one of the strong stays and supports of the New Testament Church. He is one of the key figures. He was looked up to and was highly respected.

The book of James was *a letter that went out and was addressed* not simply to the Jews or to those in Judea where James was, but *to all the tribes of Israel*.

James 1:1, “James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad: Greetings.” This is who the book of James is addressed to. It was an address to all of the tribes of Israel, not simply the tribe of Judah.

Realize that there was a certain awareness of where the tribes had scattered. The identity of the 12 tribes had not been entirely lost by this time. We find a concentration of remnants of the 12 tribes in the area to the east of the Euphrates River, which was not at this point a part of the Roman Empire but of what was called the Parthian Empire. The Parthian Empire was the other great empire that lay east of the Euphrates. The Euphrates was pretty much the dividing line between Rome and Parthia. There were a number of Israelites who were in the area east of the Euphrates because after the captivity of the ten tribes (2 Kings 17), they had settled in that area to the east and up on the southern shore of the Black Sea.

According to Ezekiel’s prophecy, a 390-year period would transpire for Northern Israel (Ezekiel 4:5). We date the 390 years from the time that Northern Israel went into captivity in 721 B.C. If you bring it down 390 years, you come down to 331 B.C., which is the year that Alexander the Great conquered the Persian Empire. It was the year that saw the release of the Israelite captives who had been subject to the Medes and the Persians. Within the next couple of decades was the beginning of the so-called Celtic invasions into Europe, which came up across and around the Black Sea. It was the time of the coming of the Gauls. Really, it was many of the Israelite tribes.

There’s a lot that we could go into on some of that, but the point is these people came up from the Black Sea, up the Danube River basin, up into the area of modern day France, and many crossing up into Britain. There had been an earlier migration to Britain at the time of the captivity of some who had escaped. There had been previous migrations in that area. There were concentrations of Israelites in Europe, as well as the Parthian Empire who were remnants of the 12

tribes. We could go into many things, of pinning down specific tribes and where they were located at the time. And there were a number of migrations yet to occur. But do you realize that most of the original 12 apostles actually went to one or the other of the 12 tribes—and we could track them? Perhaps, we will at a later time.

The book that James wrote was very widely circulated. It circulated as far as Britain. It circulated in the Parthian Empire. It circulated throughout the Middle East, in terms of Judea, and in the area of Asia Minor.

James is a very basic book. It deals with practical, basic principles of Christian living. We have seen that James has a **primary theme of faith**. It sets the stage for the progression of faith, hope and love that we see through the General Epistles. James deals with faith, but he deals with faith in a very practical way. He deals with faith in action. He addresses faith in our lives.

We are going to go through and note 12 component parts of the book of James. One of the things that James addresses is the importance of becoming a completely mature Christian.

James 3:2, “For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man,”

The word translated “perfect” is a word that means “fully mature” or “a completely developed person”—a completely mature Christian. It is the same word that is used when Paul addresses spiritual maturity in Hebrews 5.

Hebrews 5:12-14, “For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God [in other words, the most basic principles of God’s word]; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age [mature], that is, those who by reason of use [practice] have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.”

Paul draws a point here in terms of spiritual maturity. He describes the difference between being spiritually mature and spiritually a baby. He says a little baby can’t sit down and eat a big rib eye steak. He can’t digest it; he can’t handle it. He needs milk! That’s all that a little baby’s stomach can digest.

Paul compares that to the most basic elemental principles of Christianity and then says that strong meat belongs to those that are of full age. It’s for those who are mature. The word that is

translated “of full age” is exactly the same word that is used back in James 3:2 and is rendered “perfect.” That’s what it means. It means someone who is “fully mature,” someone who is “completely developed.” It means someone who is a “fully-developed Christian.” James wants each of his readers to become a completely mature and fully-developed Christian. With this idea in mind, we are going to note a little more, as we go through, that this is really faith in action. This is a mature, developed faith that produces fruits, works and actions in our lives.

Let’s notice, as we go through the book of James, the **12 themes that reflect the various components of a mature Christian**. James 1:1 is the introduction.

(1) The first component in James 1:2-18 is **the attitude a mature, fully-developed Christian has toward trials and temptations**. It addresses the response of a fully-mature Christian towards trials and temptations.

James 1:2, “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials...” You know, when you read that, that’s talking about something that’s a little more mature than what most of us have come to. Do you just get all excited and jump up and down and you’re so happy every time you have a trial? ‘Boy, I have a trial. It just really makes my whole day.’ What did James mean when he said, “count it all joy when you fall into various [different] trials”? It’s not that the trial is fun. A trial isn’t fun for anybody. I don’t care how mature you are or how long you’ve been around or anything. It’s not the trial that’s enjoyable or pleasant.

Verses 3-4, he says, “knowing that the testing of your faith works patience. But let patience have it’s perfect work [again, you have the same word “perfect”—this complete, mature, fully-developed work], that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.” Let patience be fully developed and matured in you that you might be perfect, that you might be complete, that you might be fully, entirely, whole, completely developed and matured, not lacking in anything.

Verses 5-6, “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men liberally...But let him ask in faith, with no doubting [KJV, “nothing wavering”], for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind.” If you approach it that way, God doesn’t answer that.

Verse 7-8, “For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.”

God requires a commitment. To be double-minded is to lack commitment; you're not really resolved in a specific course of action. You're pulled in two different ways. You're kind of "hedging your bets," as it were. It is a lack of total commitment. When God says to ask in faith nothing wavering, what needs to not waver is the depth of our commitment. If our commitment is wavering because we are double-minded, we're not really totally committed. Until we come to that level of commitment, God's not going to pay a lot of attention.

Verses 12-18, he goes on and says, "Blessed is the man who endures temptation [endures trials]; for when he has been proved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted of God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures."

You see the subject of trials and temptations is addressed here. The thing that is joyful about a trial is not going through of the trial; it's not the trial itself. The joy is the result, the consequence. It is the spiritual character that is developed as a result. Our faith when it is tried works patience. We learn to wait on God. We need to develop that kind of a relationship with God.

When we lack wisdom, we don't understand. We can ask God for wisdom, but we need to ask in faith, not wavering in our commitment, but single-minded in our approach. We need to go to God in faith, asking Him for the wisdom to understand and to have the perception of what is going on in our lives. God says that He will answer that prayer. The joy comes from the results, the spiritual character that results from the trial.

I don't think anybody enjoys having a problem. But we can probably all look back and see results of trials. I know I certainly can look at certain trials I have gone through in my life, and I hope that I never have to go through them again. But I wouldn't take anything for having gone through them. I wouldn't take anything for some of the

results, the consequences and certain things that I learned as a result. Even though it was not at all pleasant in the process of going through it, there was a certain relationship with God that was built.

James initially addresses the attitude towards trials and temptations of a completely developed, fully-mature Christian.

(2) The second component in verses 19-27 is **the reception of God's Word**. He addresses the way in which a fully-mature Christian receives God's Word.

James 1:19-20, "...let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God." He says, 'Be swift to hear and slow to speak.' So many times we reverse that. Ever been quick to speak and slow to hear? I guess with all of us it has happened one time or another. It should tell us something that God gave us two ears and one mouth. He didn't reverse it. He could have given us a mouth on each side of our head and one ear in the middle. God didn't choose to do it that way. I don't know all the reasons why. Maybe part of it was He wanted us to spend twice as much time listening as talking because He said that we're to "be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath"—not quick to "fly off the handle," not quick to form an opinion, not quick to jump to conclusions because that doesn't lead to the righteousness of God

Verses 21-22, then he says, "Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save our souls. But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves."

Verses 23-24, he then draws the analogy that if you listen and don't do, you are like somebody looking in the mirror and not acting on what they see.

Verses 25-26, "But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does. If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless." We are kidding ourselves because real religion involves action.

Verse 27, "Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit the orphans and widows in their trouble [KJV, "afflictions"], and to keep oneself unspotted from the world."

We focus here on how a mature developed Christian receives the Word. He is quick to

listen, not quite so quick to speak and receives with meekness the implanted (KJV, “engrafted”) Word. He desires to look into that perfect law of liberty, to have God’s Word actually put into him and to become a part of him. There is receptivity to the Word. There is an approach we see in terms of trials and temptations. We learn to value and appreciate the character that is developed and to be receptive to the Word.

(3) The third component in James 2:1-13 is our attitude toward others. It involves impartiality in the spiritual area when it comes to regarding the worth and the value of someone else.

James 2:1-3, “My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality. For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy [vile] clothes, and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine [KJV, “gay”] clothes and say to him, ‘You sit here in a good place,’ and say to the poor man, ‘You stand there,’ or ‘Sit here at my footstool.’”

In other words, don’t make spiritual distinctions based on physical criteria. Don’t use outward physical things or economic status to decide someone’s worth. Someone comes in to your assembly with gold rings and goodly apparel, and someone comes in and is poor and in worn, tattered clothes. If you have respect for him who wears the gay clothing, you are showing partiality.

Let me just pause for a second. I want to call your attention to something to illustrate a point. Notice how the English language has changed since 1611. Sometimes things are not a matter of a mistranslation, it is that the meaning of a word in English has simply changed.

He’s talking about someone having “gay” clothing. If you were talking today and said somebody had on “gay” clothing, the connotation would be a little different than what Paul was addressing here. Here’s a word that’s basically changed its meaning. In this case, it meant something that was bright or something that was festive. We have seen people in what we would today term “gay” clothing. You see them and you don’t have to do too much figuring to figure what they are. And certainly in some of our major cities, there are areas like that. There are an awful lot of them that are easy to pick out, out there on the street. It’s kind of hard to describe, but if you were to drive down the street, you would know what I mean—I don’t think you would be in doubt.

That’s not the meaning of the word “gay” in James 2:3. A lot of words in the English language have simply changed their meaning over a period of years. Sometimes when you read something in the KJV translation, you have to consider what the word meant at the time it was translated in 1611 A.D. because sometimes it has taken on a different meaning over the years, and we don’t always get the same impact of it that people who read it 100 or 300 years ago received.

He says two people come in and one is dressed very nicely and indicates a very wealthy, prominent individual. Someone else comes in and by his appearance, gives the impression of abject poverty. Don’t make a distinction based on that. To the person who looks rich, influential and impressive, you say, ‘We have something special for you.’ You give him the best seat in the house and really go all-out to try to make him welcomed. Then someone comes in and appears to be poor, to have a very low economic and social status, and they are kind of relegated to the “back burner.” ‘Maybe we can find a spot for you.’ They are kind of ignored and shunted off to the side. James is addressing this matter of respect of persons in terms of power, status and economic circumstance.

Verses 8-9, “If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself,’ you do well; but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors.” Because the law says you shall love your neighbor as yourself, that’s the royal law. In other words, we are to treat every human being with proper respect. There is, in the context of relationships in the Church, the realization that all human beings are of special worth and value before God. God does not judge the worth and value of someone based on the size of that person’s bank account or the degrees that person has after his name. God does not look at economic criteria, race, education or physical components to determine spiritual worth and value—and neither should we.

Now there are obviously physical relationships that we have in this world. The scripture tells us that there’s neither Jew nor Greek, male nor female, bond or free; we’re all one in Christ (Galatians 3:28). That is relative to our spiritual relationship (our relationship with God) and the basis of our proper relationship and valuing of one another as Christians. It’s the basis of loving our neighbor as ourselves.

Obviously, there are physical relationships in this physical life. We are still male and female on a physical level. There is that physical distinction, but it does not carry over in terms of our worth and our value to God. God does not look at someone as being of more worth or more value or as being spiritually superior because of race, sex or economic status. Those are not spiritual criteria. James is bringing out that there were circumstances of that matter in the Church at this time, just as there are today.

Servitude was a very common thing in the Greek and Roman world. You have many circumstances of that even existing in the Church. In fact in several of Paul's Epistles, he addressed instructions to masters and instructions to servants because there were Christians in both categories (Ephesians 6). But there was a spiritual relationship that transcended all earthly physical components. In some cases today, some of us may work for others of us. There are various things that are there, but that is not something that determines the spiritual worth and value.

James brings out that the fully-developed Christian properly esteems his neighbor as himself and does not make some distinction based on economic status. The same principle would apply to other criteria as well, whether it is race or whatever. Any of those things that would be the outward physical distinctions are not the basis of a spiritual judgment or spiritual valuing. We are to love our neighbor as ourselves and not get into this attitude that the world has of wanting to show special favor to someone who is in a position of power, kowtowing to someone who has power and status and taking advantage of someone who is defenseless. God says to deal with people fairly and equitably regardless of their status. This is addressed in the first 13 verses of chapter 2. We need to recognize that all of us are judged by this perfect law of liberty.

I might just add one other thing in regard to the matter of dress. The matter of dress is not the basis of making distinctions. What is appropriate is that we, as individuals, show a respect for God. This is not advocating that people should show a lack of respect for God by just dressing in the worse thing they have when they come to Church. That's not what is being described at all. In fact, the clear implication is that the person who came in the vile raiment came in the best that he had. It just wasn't much. In some cases, if there is someone who is not able to buy what is appropriate to wear, we can have an attitude of

love and concern toward our neighbor and share with them. Perhaps, we can give them some of what we have. We could have that attitude of sharing and helping rather than standing back and kind of looking down on them. They're doing the best they can do, but they are very limited in what they have. Part of that is the principle behind our "used clothing."

(4) The fourth component in James 2:14-26 is **our credentials of living faith**. It describes the kind of faith that will characterize a mature, fully-developed Christian.

Verse 14, we see that it is the kind of faith that is living faith—faith that is coupled with action.

Verses 15-17 bring out that we see our brother or sister destitute and we have an attitude of "depart in peace, be warmed and filled"—'Hope things get better for you.' But you don't help them; you don't do anything. You don't avail yourself of the action you could do to help them in their circumstance. What does it profit? Faith that does not have works is dead. If we really are concerned and our heart is really in the right place, then we are going to desire to do something.

Verse 18, then James goes on to address the fact that we demonstrate our faith by our actions.

James 2:20, and that, "faith without works is dead."

Verse 21, he showed Abraham was justified by works, but we are also told Abraham was justified by faith. That's right! It was his faith with his works.

Verse 22, "...and by works was faith made perfect?" —Made complete, made fully mature, fully developed. This is the same word here. His faith was completed. He completed his faith by acting on it.

Verse 23, "...Abraham believed God, ..." And because he believed God, he acted on what God said.

Verse 25, Rahab did the same thing. We find here the living faith that is a component of the completely mature, fully-developed Christian.

(5) The fifth component in James 3:1-12 is **the use of the tongue**.

James 3:1, "My brethren, let not many of you become teachers [KJV, "masters"] knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment [KJV, "greater condemnation"]." This word "masters" is a word that has changed its meaning over a period of time. It is used in the older English sense of "teacher," as in "schoolmaster." That's a term that you don't hear very much anymore. It used to be common years ago to talk about the

schoolmaster. The term “master” in that sense is still commonly used that way in England when referring to a teacher.

Actually many people don’t realize there are three totally different words in the Greek language that are all translated by the one English word “master.” One of them is a common word referring to a teacher. There is a second Greek word, “*kurios*,” also translated “master” that was a title of respect. It literally referred to someone who was an owner or possessor of property. It was a title of respect and most closely akin to our English word “Mister,” which is derived from “master.” It is a title of respect for a property owner and has come to be the universal title of respect in the English language. The Greeks had a word that was very similar to that and used in the same way that is translated “master” in the New Testament.

There is a third word that is translated “master” that’s only used one time in the New Testament. That’s in the verse in Matthew.

Matthew 23:8-10, when Jesus said (KJV), “But be not called Rabbi: for One is your Master, even Christ; and all you are brethren. And call no man your father upon the earth: for One is your Father, which is in heaven. Neither be called masters; for One is your Master, even Christ.” When He said, ‘don’t call any man Father, and don’t call any man Master,’ it’s a totally different word. It’s not the word that’s the title of respect, and it’s not the word that means teacher. It was a term that had the connotation of a spiritual guide. It was more of a religious title. It was used in the Greek world to refer to someone who guided them through the maze of the mystery religions. It had the connotation of someone to whom you gave over your spiritual guidance; he was going to guide you through the mysteries.

That was a relationship that’s alien to the Scriptures. We may have those who teach us, but in that sense, God—His Spirit and through His Word—is ultimately our guide. While God may use human instruments to help teach and expound that Word, they are not the source of it.

James 3:1, when he says (KJV), “...be not many masters [The word here is “teacher”; ‘Don’t all desire to be teachers’ is what he is saying.], knowing that we shall receive the greater [the sterner, the more strict] condemnation.”

The point he is making is don’t think that it’s some “glory” job to be the one who is teaching. Understand something: with that responsibility comes a stricter, sterner judgment. God is going to scrutinize much more closely what those who

are in the role of teachers say and do than anyone else because there is a responsibility. The teacher impacts those who are learning; therefore, he is more highly accountable. James warns of that. People should not be quick to want to volunteer to do the teaching.

Then he begins to address the subject of what we say.

Verse 2, “For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body.” The fact is that all of us offend in one way or another.

Verses 3-5, “Indeed, we put bits in horses’ mouths that they may obey us, and we turn their whole body. Look also at ships: although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds, they are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires. Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things.”

Verse 10, “Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so.” Sometimes out of the same mouth proceeds blessings and cursing.

Verses 11-12, “Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening? Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Thus no spring can yield both salt water and fresh.” Some things need to be one way or the other. We have the use of the tongue that is brought out—the way we utilize the tongue. The use of his tongue is shown to be a very important part of a mature, fully-developed Christian.

(6) The sixth component in James 3:13-18 is true wisdom.

James 3:13-14, “Who is a wise and understanding man among you? [Is there someone who really has knowledge among you?] Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth.” That is not something to be proud of.

Verse 15, “This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic.” This is wisdom that does not come from God; it is earthly, sensual and devilish.

Verses 16-17, “For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing will be there. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.” These are the seven components of wisdom.

Verse 18, “Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.” Righteousness and peace go together. We see godly wisdom, true wisdom, wisdom that results in appropriate actions. Wisdom is not based on striving for status and position, but is based on humility, on serving, on giving, on helping, on a willingness to humble the self and serving others. Wisdom is pure and peaceable, gentle, easily entreated. In other words, it is full of mercy, of good fruits, with no partiality, “wrangling” and hypocrisy. We see this contrast here. We see the wisdom that will characterize the mature, fully-developed Christian.

(7) The seventh component in James 4:1-10 is **the amiability, humility and lack of worldliness.**

James 4:1-4, “Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in you members? You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your own pleasures...Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.”

We have to make a choice. We have to choose between God and the world. We cannot desire to fit in with the world and fit in with God at the same time. Friendship with the world is enmity with God because God does not value and approve of the things that the world takes for granted. God does not value the things that the world values and approves.

It’s proper and appropriate that God’s people should be different. We shouldn’t be just like the world. If we look like the world, act like the world, be like the world and fit in with the world, then we’re not fitting in with God.

In verse 5, the scripture warns us that the Spirit that dwells in us yearns jealously or it lusts enviously. There is that nature in us that really kind of desires and yearns after, in kind of an envious way, the glitter and the glamour that the world holds out. It looks enticing, and there is a nature in us that is constantly pulling us in that direction.

Verse 5, “Or do you think the Scripture says in vain, ‘The Spirit who [which] dwells in us yearns jealously?’” No. We are warned of that. That’s our nature and that’s the constant pull. That desire, that pull, has always been since Adam and

Eve in the garden until now. Yet, it is something, if yielded to, which alienates us from God.

We are told that God gives more grace.

Verses 6-10, “But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: ‘God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.’ Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.”

We are told how to get close to God. We are told to renew that relationship with God. It addresses the concept of how we get along with one another, which ties right on into our relationship with the world, which leads right on into the attitude of humility, which is really our relationship with God. These are tied together. The way we get along with one another, the way we get along with the world and the way we get along with God are all tied together in this matter of relationships. The types of relationships that characterize the mature and fully-developed Christian are described in the first ten verses of James 4.

(8) The eighth component in James 4:11-12 is **the consideration of our fellow man.**

James 4:11-12, “Do not speak evil one of another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother speaks evil of the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another?” The attitude of the completely mature, fully-developed Christian is his consideration of his fellow man which is described here. It’s not an attitude of speaking evil and sitting in a judging and condemning way.

(9) The ninth component in James 4:13-17—5:7 is **the attitude and the approach of business affairs.**

James 4:13, “Come now, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit’...” You have all these great plans.

Verse 14, “whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away.” It doesn’t say you shouldn’t make any plans, but it says our plans need to be subject to God’s will.

Verse 15, “Instead you ought to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.’” ‘My plans are to do this or that, if God is willing.’ We are not to just go charging off, thinking we will do this or that and making this money, etc. We must have a state of mind of recognizing that our plans are subject to God’s will.

Verse 16, we are not to rejoice in boasting like that. That kind of boasting is evil.

We are still dealing with the subject of business affairs and our attitude toward business.

James 5:1-7, “Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you! Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver are corroded, and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have heaped up treasure in the last days. Indeed the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. You have lived on the earth in pleasure and luxury; you have fattened your hearts as in a day of slaughter. You have condemned, you have murdered the just; he does not resist you. Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain.”

Here it describes the attitude that has caused some to mistreat others and to hold back the wages of their laborers. In other words, they are so greedy and anxious for gain that they take advantage of those who work for them.

Just yesterday there was an interesting thing in the news. There is a major component, really the starting component, of the whole American computer industry—the industry that makes the tools that fetches the chips that then are the basic components for all the electronic devices. Well, there is only one company in the United States that manufactures the tools that make the chips, and it’s up for sale. Guess who is buying it. The Japanese! They will have absolute control of the starting point because without the tools, you can’t make the chips, and without the chips, you can’t make anything else. The Japanese will be in control.

An interesting thing is pointed out as to why an American company wouldn’t buy it—it kind of ties in with this—IBM, none of them, wanted it. They said the problem was the approach the American companies were taking was the desire for big profits very quickly. In this industry, the profits were stretched out over a much longer

period of time. There were not going to be any big profits very quickly; you had to take a more long-term view. Nobody here in the United States wanted to do that.

This attitude of greed or people who are out to get everything they can get has led to a lot of the economic problems we’re having. Very shortsighted economic decisions have been made in this country. God shows what’s going to happen.

People will take advantage of those who work for them and hold back what would be rightfully theirs. People who have this greedy attitude take advantage.

The scriptures are very clear and describe in a very picturesque way the aftermath of some nuclear confrontation. I think that is what is described here in verse 3, when it talks about the ‘gold and silver being corroded’ and how it ‘will eat your flesh as it were fire.’ I don’t think that can describe anything else but the results or the aftermath of some nuclear confrontation where you have vast stores of precious metals that become radioactive. Gold does not rust in that sense of the word, but it is very receptive to radioactivity. The exposure becomes very highly radioactive, and it will eat your flesh like fire.

When you compare this with Isaiah 2:18-21 and with Revelation 6:14-16, you find the description of the day of the Lord. It describes the great, the mighty and the rich throwing their gold to the moles and the bats in the caves of the earth, trying to get rid of it.

If you put Isaiah 2, James 5 and Revelation 6 together, what you find is the description of what happens when this horde of precious metals that a bunch of greedy people have put together to try to buy their way out of trouble becomes radioactive. They are going to find out that they are in a big hurry to get rid of it. The point it is making here is the futility of putting your trust in selfish, greedy things but having an attitude of being fair and realizing that our plans are very subject to God’s disposal.

(10) The tenth component in James 5:7-12 is patience and endurance.

James 5:7-8, “Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.” Realize that we have to wait on God and that patience and endurance of waiting on God is a

vital component of a mature, fully-developed Christian.

(11) The eleventh component in James 5:13-18 is conduct in affliction.

James 5:13-18, “Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms. Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the Church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit.”

The point is we see this description in terms of our conduct in affliction. We need an attitude of growing closer to God, praying and walking with God, drawing closer to God, learning to trust God, having our confidence directed in God, having an attitude of praying for one another, seeking to encourage one another and recognizing that the great men and women of the Bible of whom we read were human beings just like we are. They had the same weaknesses, the same problems. They had the same things that make them human, just as we do.

Elijah was a man with a nature like ours. He was just as weak and fallible a human being as all of us. He was a human being. He wasn't some unique different sort of person that couldn't be touched with the feelings of human weakness and frailty. But he was close to God and God listened.

(12) The twelfth component in James 5:19-20 is the effort in behalf of an erring brother.

James 5:19, “Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.” That is the final component.

If you go through, there are 12 components that outline the book. The various components comprise what it means to be a completely mature, fully-developed Christian.

Let's notice briefly our study questions. I think most of them have been commented upon.

1) Why are we told to “count it all joy” when we have problems?

This is brought out in James 1:2. Our character is purged and refined and strengthened by the trials which we go through.

Hebrews 12:11 brings that out as well, “Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but grievous; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.” It is not going through the problem that's enjoyable, but it is the aftermath, the consequence.

2) Does God tempt us?

No. God may try us, but He never tempts us. “Tempt” carries with it the connotation of trying to “trip up” someone. God never tries to trip us up, never tries to get us to fall.

James 1:13 brings that out. God may try us, but He never tempts us in the sense of trying to trip us up. We are basically tempted to sin; our human nature takes care of most of that.

James 1:14 says we are drawn away of our own lust and enticed. That's where the temptation comes in.

3) What is “pure religion”?

James 1:27, “Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.”

There are two components. One involves helping those who are not able to return the favor, those who are not in a position to make it worth your while. It is helping others from a disinterested standpoint.

It is another thing to help somebody who is in a position to help you back. Kind of like the scandal involving several senators who are in trouble now because they interceded on behalf of this fellow who owned this big savings and loan. They said, ‘We were just trying to help. We felt sorry for this guy. He is constituted, this poor American.’ Well, the fact that he kicked in a few million bucks for their campaign funds gave them a little incentive to have a little more interest in helping him than they would have had to help you or me were we in trouble. They just wouldn't have gone quite the length to help us. I don't see five of them lining up to go see somebody on my behalf—or yours either.

The point is that a lot of people are quick to try to help somebody when they think the guy can do a lot of good for them. God says pure religion is when you help somebody who's not in a position

to “make it worth your while”—the widow, the fatherless or those who are really in the least position to defend themselves. You are to visit them, to pay attention to them, to give them help. That’s one of the components of pure religion. Pure religion is service that is directed from a pure motive and is directed toward those who need it most and are least able to make it “worth your while.”

The other component is to keep ourselves unspotted from the world. That is a constant battle because if we’re not careful, bits and pieces kind of rub off on us. The need is to keep ourselves unspotted and unpolluted from the world around us. Those are important components of pure religion.

4) What is the relationship of faith and works?

Faith without works is dead. We show the depth and sincerity of what we believe by what we do. James 2:14-26 bring this out. Faith and works go together; they don’t contradict. We demonstrate our faith by our works. If we believe something, we are prepared to act on it. If we don’t act on it, then we obviously don’t believe it very much.

5) Explain James 3:1.

James 3:1, we have already commented on that (KJV), “...be not many masters,” The Greek word here is “*didaskaloi*.” That’s the word that’s translated “master” here which means “teachers.” Another word was a common title of respect. It meant “someone who owned property”; it is a totally different word, “*kurios*.” And the third word, “*kathegetes*,”—the one that Christ said, “don’t call anyone Master” (Matthew 23:10), has a spiritual connotation and was not to be used as a title—was a totally different word,

The specific words aren’t important. I mention them because you don’t even have to know Greek to be able to tell those words in the Greek language are totally dissimilar words. They are words that are totally different from one another even though they are all rendered by the same English word “master.” Sometimes the same Greek word is rendered by two or three English words; sometimes the same English word is used to render two or three different Greek words. It can sometimes be a little bit confusing if not realizing the distinctions.

6) What are the seven characteristics of Godly wisdom?

Let’s notice the seven components of Godly wisdom. This is James 3:17: (1) pure, (2)

peaceable, (3) gentle, (4) easy to be entreated, (5) full of mercy and good fruits, (6) without partiality and (7) without hypocrisy.

7) Why do we sometimes not receive from God what we ask?

James 4:3 tells us it is because we ask amiss. We ask in the wrong way or not from a proper perspective. That’s one reason why we sometimes don’t receive the answer we desire; we ask amiss.

8) To whom does James tell us that sin is imputed?

James 4:17, “Therefore to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin.” God imputes sin based on what we know. We are judged on the basis of what we do with what we know, and the more we know, the more we are accountable for.

9) To what does James compare life?

James 4:14 compares life to a vapor. It’s just a little trail of water vapor. That’s pretty insubstantial, isn’t it? That’s what comes out of your teakettle. James says that’s what life is like. It’s here and it’s gone. It goes by. It’s something you can’t hold on to. Ever try to hold on to water vapor, get a good hold on it and won’t let it go? Doesn’t work, does it? Life is that way. You can’t just grab hold of it and say you are just not going to turn it loose.

The point that James makes is our life is in God’s hands. God gave us our life, and none of us has any guarantee of how long it is going to be. We need to live our lives with the realization that our life is in God’s hands, that the plans we make are at God’s disposal and that we try to order our lives by recognizing God’s role and how temporary we are.

10) Does it really matter very much whether or not you use oaths?

James 5:12, “But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. But let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No,’ lest you fall into judgment.” He says not to swear. That is why we don’t swear, even in legal matters. We can simply “affirm” something rather than swearing an oath. The law recognizes that. James says don’t do that because when you swear, then in a sense, what you’re doing is you’re making a distinction. He says, ‘Let your “Yes” be “Yes” and your “No,” “No.”’ In other

words, say what you mean and mean what you say!

You make this big distinction, ‘Boy, this time I am really telling the truth. I’m swearing to all this stuff, and I’m really telling the truth this time.’ Well, what’s the implication of that? The implication is that you normally don’t tell the truth. But you stick your hand up, put your other one on the Bible and you’re really telling the truth this time. James said to just simply tell the truth. When you get any further than that, then you get into making distinctions as to whether you’re telling the truth or not. As a Christian, we should just tell the truth—period. There should be no need for a Christian to have to take some kind of an oath because we’re to be consistently telling the truth. If we say it, it is true.

11) What is God’s instruction to those who are sick?

God’s instruction to the sick is a familiar verse, one many of us memorized years ago when we first came into the Church.

James 5:14-15, “Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the Church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick,”

This is one of the basic instructions in terms of anointing for illness and looking to God in terms of recognizing God as our Healer. One of the blessings and the benefits that God allows us as His people to partake of is the fact that we can have access to Him in the midst of our sicknesses and afflictions.

12) What kind of prayers really gets answers?

James 5:16, “...The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.” There are several components to prayer. We are to really put our heart into it. We are to be obeying God. That’s the kind of prayer that God really takes note of.

Hopefully, this has given you a little bit more insight and a little bit of an overview of the book of James. There is so much that is packed into the book of James. It is one of the most basic books of the New Testament in terms of practical day-to-day Christian living. It tells us the way that we should live our lives and conduct ourselves on a day-in, day-out basis. There is a very practical, basic approach towards applying the teachings of Jesus Christ in our own life. It’s

one that I think we can all profit from going back to again and again.

Next Bible study we will go through the books of 1 & 2 Peter; then we will have one more Bible study on this series. We will get into 1, 2, 3 John and Jude. That may seem like a lot to string together, but when you look at the fact that 2 and 3 John and Jude are all very short one-chapter books, you’re really not stringing that much together. 1 John is only five chapters. It’s a fairly short section. Basically, we have two more Bible studies in this brief series on the General Epistles. Hopefully those will be of help in terms of focusing in on some basic areas here in the Scriptures.

With that, we will be concluded this evening.

Bible Study # 45
December 12, 1989
Mr. John Ogwyn

General Epistles Series—1 & 2 Peter

This evening we **will be in the books of 1 & 2 Peter**. The Apostle Peter wrote them and they are called by his name. 1 Peter was written in the early-to-mid 60s A.D. We would date it approximately 65 A.D. 2 Peter we would date two to three years later—perhaps the winter of 67-68 A.D. There was not a long period between them. 2 Peter was clearly written at the very end of Peter's life. It was written, evidently, after the martyrdom of Paul or at least right around that time. Peter was martyred within a matter of months after Paul. 2 Peter would have been written shortly prior to Peter's martyrdom. We'll notice some of that as we go through the books.

The book of **1 Peter was written and addressed primarily to Israelite Christians scattered in the area that is up along the southern and western shore of the Black Sea—the area of what is now northern Turkey**. This is an area in which Paul never went.

1 Peter 1:1, you might just notice here, "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the pilgrims of the Dispersion [KJV, "strangers"—a term that was utilized to refer to Israelites] in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia..."

If you have a map in the back of your Bible, let's notice a little bit of the sequence of these areas; let's notice where they are located. You will notice that they are coming across from east to west. It comes across from Pontus, to the areas of Galatia and Cappadocia, to Asia, then to Bithynia. We're moving across from east to west.

As far as Galatia is concerned, there were two portions of Galatia—northern and southern Galatia. It's pretty clear, when we put the whole picture together, that northern Galatia was addressed by Peter. Southern Galatia is the area where Paul went. We know that the portions where Paul went are Derbe, Iconium and Lystra—those areas down on the southern portion of Galatia.

There was a difference in the peoples. The peoples scattered along the southern shore of the Black Sea were the remnants of some of the Israelite tribes that had been settled in those areas. In fact, the Gauls who crossed the Black Sea and invaded Europe gave their name to what is known as modern-day France. Gaul and

Galatia are both derived from the same word. The Gauls inhabited northern Galatia. It is from the southern coast of the Black Sea that the Gauls invaded Europe. The Gauls were ancestors of the French people, some of whom were actually settled in this area at that time.

Gaul, if you check it out, was derived from the Hebrew, "*Galad*," which was a form of Gilead. Gaul came to be applied to the descendants of Reuben because the land that Reuben anciently settled in was on the east side of the Jordan River in what is now modern-day Jordan. The east side of the Jordan River was the land of Gilead. That tribe was, in some cases, simply referred to as Gilead from the geographic location-place name. That's where Reuben settled at the time when Joshua brought the Israelites across to their inheritance (Joshua 13:8). This term "*Galad*" or "*Golwa*" is derived from "Gilead." It is the term from which Galatia was derived. They gave their name to that area of the southern portion of the Black Sea, and it was the name they took on up into Europe. That is just kind of an aside, but it's where the name came from.

Galatia came to be applied as a general place-name to central Asia Minor. At the time of the New Testament apostles, the southern portion of what had come to be designated by the Romans as Galatia was basically Greek Gentiles, but in the northern portion close to the Black Sea were Israelites.

We would note, when Peter begins to address these locations of Pontus, Cappadocia, Galatia, Asia and Bithynia, he is addressing—as you would come from east to west, going from Pontus to Cappadocia to Galatia, to Bithynia, to Asia—what would be a mail route. You can track that out, and it would make like a little bit of a circle around that area. That would be the logical sequence if you were coming from the east to the west.

I bring that up because Peter says in 1 Peter that he is writing from the city of Babylon.

1 Peter 5:13, he says, "She [the Church] who is in Babylon, elect together with you, greets you; ..." The city of Babylon, which Peter referred to, was a city that was built nearby but not exactly upon the location of ancient Babylon. It was the capital of the Parthian Empire in the east. There was still a very significant Israelite settlement in that area. There was a Jewish community in Babylon itself. Babylon is where Peter clearly spent a goodly portion of the latter years of his ministry. His headquarters was based from Babylon.

The Parthian Empire was what lay east of the Roman Empire. It was east of the River Euphrates, which meant it would include, let's say, portions of modern-day Iraq and virtually all of modern-day Iran. It stretched on into portions of what we would term today as Pakistan or India—kind of stretching up the border area of Pakistan and India, but it primarily consisted of Iran and portions of Iraq today. It was a sizable empire to the east.

I bring it up because there's no evidence that Peter was in Rome. Peter was not the first pope and he was not in Rome. There's no evidence that he was there, and there is plenty of evidence to show that he wasn't there. One of the most clear-cut evidence that Peter wasn't in Rome is that when Paul wrote the book of Romans, he saluted people by name. He is greeting them by name in the end of the book (Romans 16). Greetings to "so-and-so," to this one, and that one—he goes through and addresses them by name. He says "hello" to more people in the book of Romans than in any other book that he wrote, and he never so much as mentioned Peter. Now, if Peter was the pope in Rome and Paul writes a letter to the Roman Church and says "hello" to everybody except Peter, it would be quite an insult. Also, Paul wrote the book of Romans and told the Romans, 'I am anxious to come to you in order that you might be established' (Romans 1:11). Again, that would have been a terrible insult if Peter had been there since the mid-40s A.D. (according to the Catholic tradition, since about 44 or 45 A.D.) in the position of pope or bishop of Rome. That would have been a terrible insult. But, obviously, Peter was not there.

In fact, the Catholic Church is confronted with a dilemma because when Peter wrote 1 Peter 5:13, it is obvious he was writing from Babylon. You know what they say? Look it up in the Catholic Encyclopedia or Catholic Commentaries. They say that by Babylon, Peter really meant Rome. They say he was utilizing that name as symbolic of Rome. Why doesn't Babylon symbolize Rome, especially when you read of it in the book of Revelation? If Babylon symbolizes Rome when you read of it in Revelation, then why doesn't it symbolize it in the book of 1 Peter? If it does, it's got some pretty rough stuff to say about it. They're kind of on the "horns of a dilemma."

The book of Revelation is written in symbolism; symbolic terms are used. 1 Peter isn't written in symbolic terms. When it mentions Babylon, he

means Babylon. He is talking about a geographic place-name, not using terms in a symbolic way. There's no evidence that Babylon was used to refer to Rome until John wrote the book of Revelation, and it was utilized in a prophetic sense. The only thing the Catholic Church has come up with to try to put Peter in Rome is the fact that he said he wrote from Babylon and that Babylon was a reference to Rome in this particular case.

If he had been writing from Rome, his letter would have been traveling from the west to the east, and logically it would have been addressed to Asia, Bithynia, Pontus, Cappadocia, Galatia—or something of that sort. The letter would have traveled in a different way. When you look at the way the letter traveled, it is clear the letter came from the east to the west. It first went to Pontus, then down to Cappadocia, across to Galatia, up into Asia and up to Bithynia. It made the logical mail route coming from east to west. I think we can dismiss the idea that Peter was writing from Rome.

The only reason to identify Babylon that Peter wrote from with Rome is in order to preserve the Catholic tradition that Peter was in Rome as the first pope. We will go into that in a later Bible study on the history of the first-century Church (the lost century) and who the first pope really was. Some of these things can be interesting and intriguing. We don't have time to get into all of the details this evening.

It's clear from Matthew 10 that we would expect Peter to be writing primarily to an Israelite audience because that was the commission that Jesus gave to the 12 apostles. In Matthew 10:5-6, Jesus told the twelve not to go into the way of the Gentiles, but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Now, Paul was sent as the apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15; Galatians 2:7-8). God's work was organized.

God has always been the author of organization. He didn't have the various apostles tripping over one another, each going into the other's area and territory. I don't go over into other areas to do visiting and counseling or another minister coming over here to visit and counsel—just kind of "hodge-podge" around. There is organization. Galatians 2 makes it plain that Paul was assigned as the apostle to the Gentiles, just as Peter and the twelve were to the ten tribes of the house of Israel. We have that as a background for 1 Peter.

2 Peter was written basically to the same audience. It was written a little later, right at the end of Peter's life. It was written at a time when,

as we are going to see, the mystery of iniquity was at work and making inroads into the Church. Some of these Samaritans were utilizing many spurious gospels and epistles in order to trigger their deception. There were a lot of books that were, supposedly, written by some of the apostles. There were books that purported to be gospels accounts or epistles from some of the apostles.

2 Peter is written as a warning to the Church and also to demonstrate the need of a clear canon of New Testament Scripture that Peter was responsible for introducing at the end of his life. It was written just prior to his arrest and execution. We will note some of that. Let's just briefly survey the books. We will note certain material as we go through it.

1 Peter 1:1, he addresses, "the pilgrims [KJV, "strangers"]" in this area of what we would term northern Turkey.

He addresses those who are the elect.

Verse 2, "elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace be multiplied." Elect simply means "chosen"; to elect is to choose. The elect are those whom God has chosen to be a part of the firstfruits. We are elect "according to the foreknowledge of God the Father." God has determined ahead of time that we would have the *opportunity* of being part of the firstfruits. We're elect! What makes us elect? What sets the elect apart? We are set apart "in [through] sanctification of the Spirit." We're set apart and made holy by the indwelling of God's Holy Spirit. We are set apart through God's Spirit; the Spirit of God dwelling in us makes us holy. We are set apart to exemplify God's way through 'obedience and through the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.'

Verse 3, we are reminded, "...according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead..." We have a hope that is living, a hope that is alive—not a hope that is dead. Our hope is based on eternal life. Our hope is based upon the fact that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead. He didn't stay in that tomb; He came out. That living hope is defined.

Verse 4, "to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you..." Does that mean you go to heaven? Some read that verse and think, 'When we all get to heaven.' It doesn't say anything about going to heaven. We have an inheritance

that is incorruptible and undefiled. In other words, it doesn't deteriorate, rust, rot or decay. It is kept in a very safe place; it's kept in heaven. It is reserved in heaven. If it's in heaven and we are here, how are we going to get it? If the reward is in heaven and we are on earth, there are only one or two things that can happen. Either we have to go to heaven to get it or it has to come down here to us. Which is it?

Notice what Jesus says in the end of the book of Revelation.

Revelation 22:12, "'And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work.'" One of the last things Jesus said in the book of Revelation was "Behold, I come quickly, and My reward is with Me." Christ is going to bring the reward with Him when He comes. We are not going to heaven to get it. The reward is being *reserved* in heaven until Christ comes. And when He comes, He is going to bring the reward with Him to give us in accordance with what we have done. It's very clear when we look at 1 Peter 1:4 and put it together with Revelation 22:12 that Christ will bring that reward with Him when He comes.

1 Peter 1 describes this reward and the hope of which we are to have our hearts and minds set upon.

Verse 6, he tells us that even though, right now, we may be undergoing various trials and tests, we are to rejoice.

1 Peter 1:7, "that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes..." Gold deteriorates and will wear away a molecule at a time. Maybe you've had a piece of gold jewelry or ring for many years; you will notice that gradually it begins to wear away. It will smooth down and will gradually wear away. Gold will perish. The reward that God has for us and the character that we build is not something that will wear away and perish.

He compares the trial of our faith to being like gold. For gold to have value and to be used, it has to be refined. Precious metal has to be refined because normally there are impurities that are mixed in with it that have to be purged out and gotten rid of. To separate the pure metal from the impurities present in the ore, the ancient metal workers or silversmiths had an interesting approach in refining precious metal. Using silver for an example, the method that they had of being able to determine when the silver was pure and purified to the point that they wanted it, they would melt the silver, the impurities (the dross) would come to the top, and they would skim it.

Their method for determining when they had it right was that the silversmith would look into the molten metal, and when it had gotten to the point that he could see his own reflection without distortion, he considered that all the impurities were removed. It was considered finished and completely refined. Today, that's not the way they do it. We have a little more sophisticated technology.

There's a lot of analogy to be drawn by the way that it was anciently done. The trials, tests and difficulties that we go through are compared to fire. It is through fiery trials that our character is purged. The dross and the impurities are purged away. And, interestingly enough, what is God doing? Isn't He, in effect, looking into us, looking into our character until He can see His own reflection without distortion? Isn't that the kind of character that we are to be developing? We are to be developing the mind of Christ and the character and nature of God. Just as the ancient silversmith, the worker with precious metals, looked into the molten substance to see if their reflection was there without distortion, so, in effect, that is part of what we are going through as God is seeking to refine our character to reflect Him.

We find the tests, trials and difficulties that we go through mentioned here.

Verses 13-16, "Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance [We are not to go back and be the way we were when we didn't know any better.]; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, 'Be holy, for I am holy.'"

God says we are not to fashion and shape ourselves according to the former lusts—to the cravings, desires and pulls of human nature. We're not to be like the world. We are to be holy in all aspects of our conduct and in every area of our life because God is holy and He wants us to reflect His values. He wants us to reflect His nature.

Verses 17-21, "And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your sojourning here in fear [or, "reverence," as it actually means]; knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things [Our lives have not been purchased with money.], ... but with the precious blood of

Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you, who through Him believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God."

Verse 24, we are reminded, "... 'All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and its flower falls away...' " In other words, everything that appears so real and permanent to us is here today and gone tomorrow; it is just passing and transitory.

1 Peter 2:1, then we are told, going on from that, "Therefore, laying aside all malice, all guile, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking..." Lay aside the evil motives, the resentment, the play-acting, the envy, the gossip and the backbiting. Lay aside all of these things.

Verse 2, "as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby." The analogy God draws, in terms of the way we are to crave and desire God's Word, is in the same way that a little baby earnestly desires its mother's milk. Now, if there is ever an example of fervent desire, it's a little baby wanting to nurse. Any parent can remember. You can just see that little baby just bobbing its head just so anxious to get to it. It's like he has to have it and he has to have it right now. It is the exact description of this fervent desire, 'I have to have it and I've just got to have it right now.' It's kind of funny to watch them sometime, as to how excited they can get at mealtime when they are ready to nurse.

God points that out and He says look how a little baby earnestly desires his mother's milk because he needs that in order for him to grow. He says, 'You need to take a lesson from that little baby. You need to have the same attitude when it comes to My Word. You need to be just as eager and excited about My Word, about the milk of the Word, as a newborn baby is after his own mother's milk.' That's quite an analogy because you think about that little baby and the way he is. We realize that God wants us to recapture some of that zeal, that eagerness, that anticipation for learning more of His way because that's our spiritual nourishment.

Verse 4, then he tells us, "Coming to Him as to a living stone, ..." He draws an analogy here that describes us.

Verse 5, "you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." We're compared to living

stones. There is a spiritual temple being built. Think a little bit. Do you remember the most unusual aspect of the construction of Solomon's temple? If you had come there, it would have been the most unusual construction site you would have ever seen.

We are told back in 1 Kings 6:7 that there was not the sound of a hammer or of an axe at the temple site. Have you ever been to a construction site and you didn't have all this clang, clang, bang, bang? All of the stones were cut at the quarry and they exactly fit. Everything was brought to the site exactly pre-cut. Three thousand years ago that must have been pretty primitive, but their measurements weren't too primitive because they cut those stones to where they fit exactly. They didn't need to get the sledgehammer out to it.

Have you ever wondered why God did that? What was the big deal? Was God primarily concerned about the sound of hammers at the temple site? The construction of the temple, just as the construction of the tabernacle and the furniture for it, was symbolic. God instructed Moses to do it exactly the way He showed him in the Mount. Why? Because it symbolized something! When the time came for Solomon to build the temple, God instructed him how to do it. God inspired him exactly how it was to be done because it was symbolic of certain things.

We are compared to living stones. God is building up a spiritual edifice, a spiritual temple that is going to completely come together at the time of the resurrection. The construction site, so to speak—when the spiritual temple comes together at the resurrection—is not when God's going to get out the axe and hammer and start working on us. We're going to fit exactly because right now we are at the quarrying stage. That's why we get the knots on our head. He's banging away right now. There's a lot of banging and noise right now in our lives. The hammers, the axes and the saw, everything is at work right now trimming us to specification. When the time comes, we're going to fit. We're coming as living stones. Solomon's temple was built with physical stones—just plain old Jerusalem sandstones—but God's spiritual temple is being built, not with physical sandstone, but with living stones.

Verses 6-7, Jesus Christ Himself is compared to the chief cornerstone. In other words, the cornerstone is the one that is first laid and everything else derives from there in terms of its measurement. Everything has to fit around the

cornerstone. That's the one that is the basis by which everything else is measured out. What it amounts to is that we all have to fit around Jesus Christ. We have to be cut and shaped where we will fit with Him. That's quite an analogy describing how Christ is the chief cornerstone.

Verse 8, "...A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense." He has become a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense to some.

Verse 9, "But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light."

Verse 11, "Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts..." We are not part of this society. We are strangers and pilgrims.

Verses 13-14, "Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers..." We are to respect the laws of society, but we are not to be a part of it. We are not part and parcel of this society. We're strangers and pilgrims. In other words, we are passing through. Because this is not our society, we are not part and parcel of this world's military and political establishment. We are to submit ourselves to ordinances of man. We are to recognize and respect the laws of the land, but we are to realize that we are not a part of this society. There is that distinction. We are to try to set an example that people will notice in the way we live.

Verse 17, "Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king." We are to show proper love, respect and honor. We are to show proper esteem for others.

Verse 18, servants are enjoined to be subject to their masters, not simply to the ones that are good. There were, undoubtedly, those who were kind and considerate people. Just as today, some may work for a boss that is considerate and tries to be fair and equitable. There were servants then who had masters who sought to be just, masters who were equitable and reasonable men who tried to conduct themselves in an appropriate way. Peter says here to be subject to the harsh, not simply to the ones that do what they ought to do, because there are plenty of those that are the other way.

Verses 19-20, "For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. For what credit is it

if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer for it, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God.” When you get in trouble for something you did wrong and you take it in a decent attitude, God says, ‘Big deal! What does that count? You had it coming. You’re getting what you deserve. You are just simply receiving what you earned.’ If you haven’t done anything wrong and you take it in a proper attitude, this is commendable before God.

Verse 21, “For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps.” What were His steps?

Verse 22, He didn’t do any sin.

Verse 23, “who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, ...” Christ suffered. Sometimes, if we are going to live godly, we will have to suffer wrongfully. Will a Christian ever suffer wrongfully? Sure, sometimes. Christ did; Christ suffered wrongfully. He never suffered for what He did because He didn’t do anything wrong; He suffered for us. He left us an example that we should follow.

We realize that as a Christian there may be times when we are persecuted for righteousness’ sake. God takes special note when someone is receiving something that they did not incur. The character that is established and the attitude that is exemplified by one who suffers wrongfully is something God takes note of.

Christ set the perfect example.

Verse 24, “who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed.” We see that Christ paid the ultimate sacrifice. He gave His life for us. It is through His death that we have access to God. That access makes possible both our forgiveness of sin and our healing. That’s one of the benefits that we have as God’s people.

It’s one of the benefits that we have by having access to God. Christ certainly made that possible. The healing that He made possible certainly includes the whole gamut, whether you’re talking in spiritual or emotional terms and certainly in physical terms because that is one of the blessings and benefits that God has made available to His people. Christ gave Himself for us. He suffered in our stead, dying in our stead. Through Him we have access to God, and through Him we have access to the benefits that

God extends—the benefits of God’s mercy, His forgiveness and of God’s healing.

In verse 18, he talks about servants; then in verses 19-21, he talks about Christians in general—those who suffer wrongfully.

1 Peter 3:1-2, then he says, “Likewise [in the same way] you wives, be subject to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of the wives, when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear [KJV, “respect”].” He addresses here the example that wives are to set.

Verses 3-5, “Do not let your beauty be that outward adorning of arranging the hair, of wearing gold, or of putting on fine apparel; but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible ornament of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God. For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, ...”

The word “adorned” is the word “*cosmos*” in the Greek. Interestingly enough, it is the same word that our modern English word “cosmetic” derives from. “*Cosmos*” in the Greek can be rendered several different ways, but in this context, it refers to “adorning.” The point that he is making is that it becomes a matter of priority. The world’s priority is on what goes on the outside. This is what life is all about to people in the world.

God says to His people (and specifically here addressing women), your life should not revolve around the outside but around the inside. The adornment that needs to be primarily focused upon is the inner person. The attitude, the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, is priceless in God’s sight. This is the ornament that the holy women of old utilized. It was an attitude that shined out. It is the inner person that manifests itself.

Obviously, this is not saying that you should never comb your hair and walk around in a sack all the time. I think we understand there are plenty of scriptures that show we should be properly neat and clean and groom ourselves appropriately. There’s nothing wrong with dressing nicely and tastefully and appropriate grooming. God is not saying you should never take a bath, never comb your hair and put on an old feed sack. That’s not what He is saying at all.

He’s talking about a set of priorities. He’s talking about what your life revolves around. Let’s face

it. In the world, in so many cases, the emphasis is on the external. All the things that can be put on the outside are considered what beauty is all about. What God thinks is beautiful is not something that derives from what you put on the outside. It derives from what you are on the inside. It's a matter of perspective and a matter of priority. This is an emphasis.

Verse 5, this is an example of the attitude of the holy women of old who trusted God and who were in subjection to their own husband. They had an attitude of respect.

Verse 6, "as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, whose daughters you are if you do good and are not afraid with any terror." That is kind of an obscure statement; it means as long as you do well and do not let anxieties unnerve you. It requires faith. God's government is based on faith. To step out and to show the proper respect for God's government in the home requires faith that God will do His part and make it work.

Our daughters grow up to aspire to being counted by God as a daughter of Sarah. That is a very complimentary term. God looks upon Sarah as one of the most outstanding women of the Bible. She was a remarkable person. You read what Sarah went through and you read that Sarah had trials.

Abraham may have been the father of the faithful, but he was not perfect. You go back and read the story, and you find out that he wasn't perfect in some of the things that he did. And Sarah wasn't perfect either. But there was an example, an attitude, something that God saw that He greatly valued in those two individuals. They were called out as a unique and special team. Peter hearkens and utilizes this. I think there is a lot to be gained from focusing on the details of this instruction.

Then he begins to go into instructions for the husbands.

Verse 7, "Likewise you husbands, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel," This term "weaker" could just as easily be rendered "fragile." The word literally means "more fragile." The point is that a husband is told to be understanding of his wife, to give honor and respect to his wife. There is a proper chivalry, a proper attitude of manners. Give honor to the wife as the one who is the more fragile, the more sensitive, perhaps the more easily hurt or crushed. There is generally a greater sensitivity that women have. They tend to be more sensitive emotionally, a little more sensitive in their

feelings. She is a little more fragile in that way. The husbands are told, 'Realize that your wives tend to be more sensitive; show special honor and respect towards them.'

There are many concepts of matters of chivalrous conduct that we should seek to practice in our own lives and certainly with our own wives. We want to teach our young boys to be polite, to treat the young ladies like ladies, to open and hold the door, to let the ladies go first and to show this kind of attitude of respect. It's proper and an appropriate kind of thing. Our society is so geared the other way that it takes a lot of instruction because that's not the message that they often get from society around.

Verse 8, "Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; ..."

Verse 9, "not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling," Have this attitude of being kind and giving a blessing.

Verse 7, he tells Christian husbands to deal with their wives in this way "that your prayers be not hindered." Certainly, if we don't fulfill our responsibilities in the way that we handle our life and our families, it can certainly impact our prayer life and our relationship with God.

Verses 14-15, "But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you are blessed. 'And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled.' But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense [KJV, "an answer"] to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear."

The context is suffering for righteousness' sake. When you're happy, even though you're suffering wrongfully, people can't figure that out. In that context, we're told to be ready to give an answer. If you really act like a Christian and live like a Christian, sooner or later somebody is going to ask you, 'What's with you? What's the source of this attitude, this peace that you have?'

Verse 17, we're told, 'If it is the will of God to suffer, it is a whole lot better to suffer for well-doing than for evildoing.'

This is the example that Christ had.

Verses 18-21, "For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water.

There is also an antitype which now saves us, namely baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscious toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” It’s compared to baptism.

What is this talking about? There are those who go off to great things. The Catholic Church teaches when Jesus was crucified, He went to hell and preached down there to all the souls in hell. Of course, He couldn’t have been there for three days and three nights because they only had Him dead for a day and a half. If He was doing that, He surely pulled a dirty trick on the people on the cross because He told the thief that, ‘Today you are going to be with Me’ (Luke 23:43). If that was the case and He went to hell, the thief surely got a surprise and wound up in the other place. You can’t have it both ways, as they sometimes tend to do.

Let’s notice the context. Jesus Christ died in the flesh. As a physical human being, He died. Through the power of the Spirit, He was made alive. It is through the power of that same Spirit, by that same spiritual power, that He went to the spirits in prison—not to men in prison, not to souls in prison—but to spirits in prison. God makes His angels spirits (Psalm 104:4), and here were spirits who were in prison. Here were spirits in restraint (“*tartaroo*” in the Greek). This is the only place where “*tartaroo*” is used; it refers to the place where these spirits (or angels) are under restraint. These spirits are fallen angels or demon spirits. Here was a time when Jesus exhorted certain demon spirits who were in prison or under restraint. God has placed certain restraints upon them. They were cast down to earth (Isaiah 14; Ezekiel 28). They had been, at various times, very disobedient.

The specific occasion that is addressed is the time when the “longsuffering [patience] of God waited in the days of Noah.” The time when Jesus did this was not when He was dead. It was the time when Noah was building the ark. It was many, many centuries earlier at the time when the ark was being built. In effect, things had been stirred up to the point that God was going to have to intervene and wipe out humanity from the face of the earth. He was wiping out life on the planet, and He was going to start over.

Evidently, at some point during the preparation of the ark prior to the flood, Jesus Christ addressed the demon spirits and exhorted and warned them. Their final fate and punishment has not yet been assigned to each of them because we are told in 1 Corinthians 6 that we will judge the

angels. We will have a part in judging them and giving a final sentence. Christ evidently exhorted them that they had better consider the consequences of what they were doing. He exhorted them that He was going to step in and put a stop to what they were doing. The magnitude of what they were doing was simply making it worse and harder on them. There was an exhortation, warning, and admonition to them at that time that their final judgment and sentencing had not yet been passed. They were simply getting themselves in deeper and deeper by the magnitude of some of what they were doing. He brings this in at this point.

1 Peter 4:1, “Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin...” Part of the purpose of going through trials and tests is that it enables us to grow. It helps us to overcome, to put sin behind us. It helps us to really get our priorities straight. It helps us to see things in proper perspective.

Verse 4, the world may think it strange that we don’t do the things that we used to do. They should notice a difference.

Verse 5, we are all going to give an account to Him who is ready to judge the living (KJV, “quick”) and the dead. The term “quick” simply means “those who are alive.” It doesn’t mean if you’re slow you won’t be judged. “Quick” means “those who are living”; it simply means that everybody is going to get judged. If you’re dead, you will be raised up and will be judged. If you’re still alive, then you’ll be judged, too. You’re either dead or alive. There’s not much way you can be in between—so that takes care of everybody.

Verse 6, “For this reason the gospel was preached also to those who are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit.” There are those who take that scripture and think they should preach to the dead. There are some who believe in being baptized for all their dead relatives. They think they can get people into heaven if they get baptized for them. Does this mean you should go down to the graveyard and preach to the dead? That wouldn’t do much good.

Ecclesiastes 9:5 says, “...the dead know nothing,” So, it’s not going to do any good to preach to them.

What does this mean, ‘the gospel was preached to the dead’? Notice what it says. “For this reason the gospel was preached [past tense] also

to those who are dead [present tense].” The verb tense makes it plain the gospel was preached (past tense) to those who are dead (present tense). Christ is going to come back and He’s going to judge everybody—both those who are still living and those who have already died. The fact that some have already died doesn’t mean the gospel was preached to them in vain. The gospel was preached, past tense, to those who are now dead. Christ is going to judge us all, whether we have already died or whether we are still alive. Obviously, the gospel was preached to those who are now dead—but when they were alive. It was preached, past tense, back when they were living. They are now dead, but that’s okay because Christ is going to return. They will be made alive, and judgment will be there.

Verse 8, we are admonished to have fervent love among ourselves. Love covers a multitude of sin.

1 Peter 4:12-13, “Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ’s sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.” When we are partakers of Christ’s suffering, we can rejoice because when His glory is revealed, we will be partakers of that, too. We should not be shocked or surprised when trials and tests come.

Verse 17, “For the time has come [right now] for judgment to begin at the house of God....” Judgment for us, for God’s people, for God’s Church, is right now. This is our time of judgment.

1 Peter 5:1-4, Peter ends up by admonishing the ministry to feed the flock that is among them, to set an example and to realize that Jesus Christ, the Chief Shepherd, will appear and demand an accounting.

Verse 5, “...‘God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.’”

Verse 6, we are to humble ourselves under His hand and He will exalt us.

Verses 7-8, “casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you. Be sober, be vigilant;”

Verse 13, Peter closes by mentioning that he is writing from Babylon; this was his headquarters at this time.

In 2 Peter, Peter addresses the same basic group.

2 Peter 1:4-5, “by which has been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith...”

Then he goes through and enumerates seven characteristics: virtue, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness and love. These are to be added to faith.

Verse 9, he tells us that if we lack these things, we’re blind.

Verse 10, he goes on to tell us that if we do these things, we shall never stumble.

In verses 4-10, Peter tells us a sure-fire means to guarantee that we will never “fall by the wayside.” He tells us how to go about being productive and growing spiritually. There is a tremendous amount that is packed into these verses. These verses are certainly a way of ensuring that we will grow in grace and in knowledge (2 Peter 3:18). We will not “fall by the wayside” if we are putting these things into practice.

Verse 12, “Therefore I will not be negligent to remind you always of these things, though you know them, and are established in the present truth.” He said, ‘I want to continually remind you of these things. I know you’ve heard it, but I want to always remind you.’

Verses 13-14, “Yes, I think it is right, as long as I am in this tent [as long as I am still living], to stir you up by reminding you, knowing that shortly I must put off my tent,” In other words, ‘I am going to die.’ Peter said, ‘As long as I am alive and here in the flesh, I think it’s important that I stir you up and remind you of these things. I realize that I’m not going to be around a whole lot longer.’

Verse 15, “Moreover I will be careful to ensure that you always have a reminder of these things after my decease [after I am dead].” Clearly this is a reference to a permanent canon of Scripture that Peter was responsible for bringing about. This would ensure that the things he had reminded and exhorted the brethren might be remembered after he was dead and gone.

In verse 16, you notice there is a change from first person singular to first person plural. In verses 12, 13, 14 and 15, he said “I”—first person singular. He says, “I will not be negligent...I think it is right...I must put off my tent...I will be careful.”

Verses 16-19, notice the switch, “For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For He received from God the Father honor and glory when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory: ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.’ And we heard

this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain. We also have the prophetic word made more sure [KJV, “a more sure word of prophecy”], ...”

Sometimes the word “we” can get read over, but it’s important to note because it points out something very specific. Who is the “we”? Clearly it is those who were with Jesus in the holy mountain who heard the voice from God that said, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” Who was that? You go back to Matthew 17 and it is clearly defined.

Matthew 17:1-2, “Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, brought them up on a high mountain ..., and was transfigured there before them.”

Verse 5, “...a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, ‘This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!’” Who heard that? Peter, James and John were the ones with Jesus in the holy mount.

James the brother of John had been martyred. He was the first of the apostles martyred. We have reference to it in Acts 12, which is dated about 44 A.D. James the brother of John was killed with a sword (verse 2). James the brother of John was the first one of the twelve that was martyred. James was long dead, and that meant that Peter and John were the only two still living. There had only been three originally; one was dead, so that meant Peter and John were the only individuals living who had been with Jesus on the mountain. They had seen Him transfigured and heard the voice from heaven that announced, “This is My beloved Son.” Therefore, the ones who had the sure word of prophecy were Peter and John.

2 Peter 1:19, “We also have the prophetic word made more sure [KJV, “a more sure word of prophecy”], ...”

Verse 16, ‘We have not come off and followed cunningly devised fables. We saw; we were there. We (Peter and John) have the sure word of prophecy.’ They were the ones that God utilized to give us the New Testament. They were set aside through this unique experience. They were imparted with what Peter terms here as the “sure word of prophecy.” They were the ones that God utilized to designate what would be New Testament Scripture.

Peter singles this out, as he tells them, ‘I am going to die. I’ve been reminding you of these things, and I want to make sure that after I’m gone, you will continue to be reminded. We (John and I) have the sure word of prophecy.

You take heed to what we say as opposed to what others may say.’

Peter then begins to warn them.

2 Peter 2:1, “But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies,”

This was specific reference to the problems that came into the first-century Church. It describes what resulted in bringing together and what became the great false church.

We have already commented on 2 Peter 1:15 that Peter was putting together this canon of Scripture so that after he was dead, there would be a permanent record that would be available to continually remind them.

Then in chapter 2, Peter begins to point out these false prophets. He brings out the fact that God will deal with everyone in His time. God knows those that are His.

Verse 4, He dealt with the angels who sinned. Verse 5, He dealt with the world at the time of Noah.

Verse 6, He dealt with Sodom and Gomorrah. Verse 7, He delivered Lot and then dealt with Sodom and Gomorrah. God knows who’s who.

Verse 15, God described those who followed the way of Baalam, who loved the wages of unrighteousness. Baalam was willing to preach anything for a price.

Verse 18, it described individuals speaking great swelling words of emptiness [vanity], who seek to entice those that have come into the group and to lure them back.

We are told in verses 20-21 that it is better never to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and turned away from it. You’re better to have never had your opportunity than to have had it and “blown” it. That’s what he is saying, which evidently was the case with some of these.

2 Peter 3:1-2, “Beloved, I now write to you, this second epistle (in both of which I stir up your pure minds by way of reminder), that you may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Savior...”

Here Peter is equating the New Testament with the Old Testament in terms of authority. He said, ‘I want you to remember the Bible and what it says in the Bible. I want you to remember what was spoken before by the holy prophets (the Old Testament) and the commandments of us the apostles of the Lord.’ Peter is equating the

commandments that the apostles gave with the writings of the prophets of the Old Testament.

He is explaining this because at the time Peter is writing (up until that point), when you said “Bible” or when you talked about “Scripture,” you were talking about what we think of as the Old Testament. That had been the Bible—the Scriptures—for many, many years. That had been the Bible, and these other things had been letters. There had been a letter from Paul or a letter from Peter, a letter from this one or that one. This is a clear designation of which books were official, and he is putting them on the same par with the prophets of old. He is saying that the writings of the apostles and the writings of the prophets of old are to be mutually adhered to.

Verses 3-4, he then says, “knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lust, and saying, ‘Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation.’” There will come those in the last days who follow their own lusts and desires and who say, ‘Where is the promise of His coming? Things just go on the way they always have.’

Verses 5-7, he then says, ‘they are willingly ignorant of the fact that God has intervened in the past. They ignore the evidence of the flood. They ignore that God has stepped into history and judged the world in times past, and He will do so again.’

Verses 8-9, “But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise,” God has not forgotten what He said. He has a time plan; a day is representative of a thousand years. God is going to do what He says He is going to do.

Verse 13, “Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.” We are looking for something that is to come.

Verse 15, then he ends up by reminding them of what Paul had written. All the things Paul wrote had been gathered together. He reminds them that Paul wrote some things that are difficult to be understood. They can be taken out of context and misunderstood.

Verse 16, “as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which those who are untaught and unstable twist [KJV, “wrest”] to their own destruction, as they do also the rest

of the Scriptures.” They take it out of context. That’s what it means to “wrest”; it means “to pry loose.” If you wrest something loose, that means you are prying it loose. The way people misunderstand Paul is by taking what he said out of context, prying it loose from the overall context in which it’s written. They take it out and say Paul did away with the law—which he didn’t.

But he wrote some things that are not easily understood unless you really carefully examine the context in which he says them. Peter addresses that and equates what Paul wrote with all the other scriptures.

Why did he write 2 Peter? He summarizes his purpose of writing.

2 Peter 3:1-2, “Beloved, I now write to you this second epistle [Those of you in Spokesman Club, this is called SPS—Specific Purpose Statement.] (in both [both letters I wrote] of which I stir up your pure minds by way of reminder) [of trying to remind you of something], that you may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Savior.”

In other words, he wanted to stir them up to study the Bible—the Old Testament, which they already had and the New Testament, which God was using Peter to compile. He wanted to stir them up, to continue to go back over the Bible, to pay heed to it, to be reminded of what God was doing and of God’s plan and purpose.

I hope that from this survey, this overview, we can perhaps have a little more insight into some of the things that God revealed through Peter. There is a lot that is packed in here.

I am passing out questions on 1, 2, 3 John and Jude. That sounds like a lot of books when you “rattle them off,” but when you look at the number of pages involved, it is very short. Since 2 & 3 John and Jude each consist of one short chapter, I don’t think that will be too lengthy a set of scriptures to study between now and next time. We will focus in on these very important books. You can’t always equate length with importance. A lot can be packed into a short space.

When we conclude the epistles of John and Jude, we will have completed this short series on the General Epistles and we will be prepared to launch another Bible study series. I think, at this time, we will get into the Major Prophets. There is so much going on and happening in the world that I think that it would do us well to go back and take note of Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

We will find that today's and tomorrow's headlines are already in the Bible.
With that we will conclude.

Bible Study # 46
December 20, 1989
Mr. John Ogwyn

General Epistles Series—1, 2, 3 John and Jude

This evening we want to finish up this short series that we have had on the General Epistles. We are going to do so by **focusing in on the epistles of John (1, 2, 3 John) and also the book of Jude—a short one-chapter book.**

All three of John's books were written near the close of the first century A.D. John was the last of the apostles to die. He outlived the others of the twelve by close to 30 years. He lived into the late 90s A.D.—close to about 100 A.D. John clearly, at that time, would have been close to 100 years of age; he lived to a very advanced age.

He was in exile for a period of time in the 90s A.D. on the isle of Patmos. Patmos is a small island off the coast of Asia Minor (what is today modern-day Turkey). He was placed in exile by Emperor Domitian. This exile ended about 96 A.D. John had been in Ephesus prior to his exile. In the latter years, he was in Ephesus for several years. He was exiled from Ephesus to the island of Patmos, yet he did have mail contact. It was from the island of Patmos that he wrote most of the writings for which he is noted.

The book of Revelation, in particular, was written at that time. He wrote to the Churches in Asia Minor. This is the area around Ephesus—the very area to which the book of Revelation was addressed. It was addressed to the seven Churches of Asia Minor.

John was released from exile in 96 A.D. After his return from exile on the island of Patmos, evidently he returned to Ephesus where he was said to have died in 98 A.D. John was writing toward the close of the early apostolic era of the Church. He was addressing problems that needed to be addressed. The books that he wrote put, in a sense, the final touches of the New Testament.

We focused last time on how Peter was responsible for collecting together the books that comprise most of our New Testament. We focused on how Peter had borne testimony of the fact that he and John had been given that sure word of prophecy (2 Peter 1). Peter was responsible for collecting probably 22 books of the New Testament, which would be all of the New Testament books except John's five books. In that sense, 22 books would have corresponded exactly with the Jewish reckoning of the number

of books in the Hebrew Bible. What Peter did (even though it was what God wanted at that time) was not the final capstone. There was information that yet needed to be written. At the time Peter died, in the late 60s (just prior to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.), events had not yet come to the point where some of these final things needed to be written.

John wrote and was able to address things from a perspective of 30 years down the road from the time of the rest of the New Testament. Many of the problems that were in the beginning stages at the time that Peter addressed it—or James or Paul addressed it—had continued on and developed further for a period of about 30 years. The heresies that had begun to creep in ultimately gave rise to the false church—the false church that calls itself “Christian” yet does not practice the religion of Jesus Christ.

2 Thessalonians 2:7, Paul said when he was writing in the 50s A.D., ‘the mystery of lawlessness is already at work.’ The mystery religion of lawlessness was already at work even in the 50s A.D. Paul spoke in the book of Galatians of some coming and bringing another gospel (Galatians 1:6-7).

In the book of Acts written by Luke under Paul's auspices, we were introduced to an individual by the name of Simon the Sorcerer or Simon the Magician known in history as Simon Magus.

Acts 8:9-23, Simon Magus was the religious leader of the Samaritans. He was an individual who professed Christianity and yet never truly repented. Peter rebuked him very strongly when Simon sought to purchase with money the office of an apostleship in the New Testament Church. Peter rebuked him very strongly. It is clear that while Simon was baptized and professed belief in Christ, he never repented.

In verse 20 that is stated very clearly because Peter told him, “Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money!” ‘Your money is going to go where you are and you are both going to burn up. Your money perishes with you because you have thought this.’ We are introduced to something just kind of on the surface level.

Verses 10-11, we are told that this man was the great religious leader of the Samaritans and that all of them paid attention to him. We are introduced to that fact in other books.

In 2 Peter 2:1, for instance, we are told that ‘false prophets were creeping in.’ There were things that were being taught by some who were seeking to water down the gospel message and

to undermine the importance of keeping the commandments and obeying God. There was a different message that was coming in and being introduced.

Now, when John was writing 30 years later down the line, many of these heresies had developed to the point that, in some cases, certain whole Churches were, literally, being taken over by the heretics and true Christians put out (3 John 9-10). Many of the so-called Gnostic heresies (“Gnostic” means “we know”) dated back to Simon the Magician and gave rise to a lot of teachings of the professing Christian Church. Perhaps we can go into that at a later Bible study.

In the books of John, we have, in a sense, a final admonition to a Church that had lost a lot of its first love. The Church at Ephesus typified the first stage of the Church of God (Revelation 2: 1-7). The Church at Ephesus typified the whole beginning stage or era of the Church. That Church was rebuked because they lost their first love. The Church to which John is writing had lost its first love and, as a result, it did not have the power of God to really resist the insidious encroachments of the heretics.

The books that John wrote, particularly 1, 2, 3 John, serve not only as a warning to the Church of that day, but they also provide for us a record of what actually transpired. It gives us the beginning of the events that developed. Many historical writers say that with the conclusion of the New Testament, a curtain rang down on Church history. We aren't really able to penetrate that curtain for almost the best part of a century. Towards the end of the second century when the curtain begins to rise, the church that calls itself “Christian” is in so many ways totally different from the Church of which we read in the book of Acts.

This has puzzled many of the historians. We see Easter being substituted for Passover. We see a controversy having erupted and Easter having replaced Passover. We see Sunday worship having replaced the Sabbath, and we see the introduction of the mass and things of that sort taking the place of the Passover service. We see the introduction of many things that are radically different from the Church of which we read in the book of Acts.

The books of 1, 2, 3 John serve not only as a warning to the Church of that day, but they also serve to record for us what actually transpired that eventually resulted in what developed into the Roman Catholic Church. What we see

starting here ultimately developed into the Catholic religion of the fourth century, which came to dominate the visible Church.

There were many different heretical movements that entered into the Church through the first century. One of these emerged, and by the time of the fourth century, with the political muscle of the Emperor Constantine, the brand of religion that had come to dominate in Rome was made the official religion. Everybody was expected to conform to that religion or they had to flee outside the bounds of the Roman Empire to avoid persecution.

Constantine saw the need, as he viewed it, to put the empire together with religion. He could see that nobody believed the old Roman religion any more. There was a need to have the unifying force of religion. He could see the vitality of the Christian religion. But there were different approaches and different variations to that, and he took the side of the bishop of Rome. He called a church council at Nicea and enforced that particular brand on everyone.

The books of John show us the beginnings of the heresies that gave rise to these events. It is a warning to us by way of example. The authority of John's epistles and their authenticity are easily attested to from the earliest times in the area to which they were addressed—the Churches of Asia Minor. In the area of the Churches of Asia Minor, the books of 1, 2, 3 John and Revelation were never questioned; there's never any question recorded in terms of the authenticity of these books.

Even Catholic historians preserved the writings of Polycarp, for instance, who was a disciple of the Apostle John and wrote in the 140s A.D. Polycarp was involved in a dispute with the bishop of Rome over the issue of Passover and the importance of observing the Holy Days. There are records that are preserved that date back to that time.

In those areas, there was never any question that John wrote these books and of their authority. The only places where we find the authority and the authenticity of these books questioned at early times was in Rome and perhaps in Alexandria, Egypt, and some of the areas that took their cue from Rome. The reason they were questioned was because there was an attempt to undermine them. It was an unsuccessful attempt. It was an attempt to undermine them because of the indictment that they contained. Because they were uncomfortable with the message, they

sought to attack the messenger and to try to cast doubt on the credibility.

Jude wrote the book of Jude. Jude was the brother of James who wrote the book of James, which makes him also the half-brother of Jesus Christ. It was written about the same time that Peter wrote 2 Peter. **Jude is a book that primarily warns about the advancing heresies of the day.** It was evidently addressed to the same areas that James had addressed his Epistle. It was written to pretty much the same audience that James had written to. It was written a little later than James who had written in the latter 60s A.D. It was written after James' martyrdom, in a sense, as kind of a warning to those areas. Jude was written earlier than the Epistles of John, but there is a sequence that we have already gone through on James, Peter, John and Jude as to why that was the logical sequence. Even though John's works were written later, they were inserted between the writings of Peter and Jude because of the subject matter and the flow that it gave.

We pick it up in **1 John**. We will notice some things as we go through the book of 1 John. One thing that ought to be readily apparent is that there are *two basic themes* that John stresses all through 1 John. One theme has to do with the importance of love—real and true love—toward God and toward neighbor. John stresses the subject of love and he also stresses the subject of keeping the commandments. He stresses *law and love*. He stresses commandment keeping and love over and over and over. If you go through the book of John, you'll see he talks about this type of thing.

In 1 John 1, he starts out by discussing the subject of fellowship. Brethren, the basis of our fellowship in the Church is explained right here in 1 John 1:3. Sometimes we hear the term "disfellowship." That's a term that's used in the Bible. It refers to someone who is put out or excluded from the fellowship of the Church. Many times that term has been used, and we have not understood where it originates. Why do we use that term? It's the term the Bible uses. But why does the Bible use that term? Notice what we're told about fellowship and we'll understand if we make the connection.

1 John 1:3, "that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ." That is the basis of our fellowship, our communion and our close intimate family

relationship. John is saying, 'The things that I know, I am going to tell you because I want us to have a close relationship with one another. I want us to have fellowship and a close communion. I want us to have a close, intimate family relationship with one another.'

He goes on to say that close relationship, that fellowship that we have, is not simply with one another—that fellowship is with God the Father and with Jesus Christ.

Verse 5, then he continues, "This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all."

There are many places in the Bible where it talks about God's word being a lamp to our feet, a light to our paths (Psalm 119:105).

1 John 1:5-7 talks about the analogy of light and darkness and that God is the source of light. Revelation 1:16 talks about how, in His glorified state, Jesus' face shone as the sun in its glory. It is that sense of light chasing out darkness.

Whoever came into this room first this evening flipped a light switch. Here was a room that was dark and, all of a sudden, light came on and filled the room; now everybody can see. If the light suddenly went off, we would have trouble seeing where we are. That's the analogy that is used to refer to this whole world. God is the source of light. His truth is light. It comes out from Him. There is no darkness, no spiritual darkness, in God. God is perfect. He is complete. His Word is truth (John 17:17).

1 John 1:6, "If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth." The point is you can't run with the devil and walk with God.

Amos 3:3, "Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?" If we have fellowship with God, that means we are where God is. We're walking with God, which means we agree with God. You can't have fellowship with God if you don't agree with Him.

That's why the devil doesn't have fellowship with God. Because the devil didn't agree, he was cast out of heaven. It talks about the angels that "kept not their first estate."

Jude 6, KJV, "And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, ..." They were cast down to the earth (Isaiah 14; Ezekiel 28).

Jude 13, "...wandering stars for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever."

If you have fellowship with somebody, the basis of fellowship is because you have something in common; you are where they are.

In 1 John 1:6-7, John says that if we say we're in fellowship with God, but our lives reflect darkness, then we're lying. We're not in fellowship with God unless we're dwelling in the light. God is in the light—the light of His way, His truth. You can't be in close contact and fellowship with God, walking with God, have that relationship with God and be living like the world—living in spiritual darkness.

1 John 1:7, “But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, . . .” The basis of our fellowship with one another is, first and foremost, our fellowship with God and with Christ. We have fellowship with Them when we're where They are—which is in the light. If we are outside the circle of light, if we're over here in the darkness, then we don't have fellowship with Them. If we don't have fellowship with Them, we don't have a basis for fellowship with one another. The basis of fellowship for the people of God is that we're in fellowship with God and with Christ.

When our actions take us outside of fellowship with God and Christ, it excludes us from any longer having a basis to fellowship with one another. That's what the term “disfellowship” means. It simply means “somebody who is removed from the fellowship.” They are no longer in fellowship because they are no longer living like God's people live.

Look around. Most of you here wouldn't even know one another if it wasn't for the truth of God. That's what brought most of us together. We represent a wide variety of backgrounds: different ages, different ethnic backgrounds, different educational backgrounds, different interests, different social backgrounds and different economic circumstances. Most of us would be total strangers to one another.

The thing that gives us what we have in common is the truth of God. If we weren't all in the Church, we wouldn't all be sitting here. We wouldn't know one another. We might not even like one another. We probably wouldn't have gotten to know one another well enough to know whether we liked one another or not. The basis of what brings us together is our relationship with God. We can't lay aside the relationship with God and expect to maintain the relationship and the rapport we have with one another. The reason we can be in agreement with one another is because we agree with God; when we cease

agreeing with God, we no longer agree with the people of God.

Heresies were creeping in. There were various problems that were coming in. John is addressing the subject. John is laying a foundation and explaining what is the basis for true Christian fellowship. The basis is not some mistaken idea of love and that you tolerate all kinds of sins and heresies, where you kind of put up with everything. The very basis of Christian fellowship is, first and foremost, fellowship with God. That's the basis of our fellowship with one another. Mistaken ideas come in and sometimes people don't understand.

One person explained it, and I thought he put it very aptly. Years ago, back in the mid-70s when certain ones were seeking to water down various things and bring in all kinds of things, they kept talking about being open-minded. One minister finally pointed out that there was a vast difference between being open-minded and empty-headed. Some failed to see the difference.

This was a problem in the New Testament period. They failed to really see the difference. They confused love with toleration of sin and heresies. They allowed certain of these problems to grow and to fester; it was not dealt with in accordance with God's government and God's way. Because it was not dealt with in the way that it would have been dealt with at an earlier time, some of the problems grew to the point of what we see happened. John is explaining things and is setting the stage.

Then he continues and talks about forgiveness of sin. He talks about the fact that if we say we don't have sin, we are kidding ourselves. We all have sinned and made mistakes. When we seek to excuse and justify ourselves, we're just kidding ourselves.

Verse 8, “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” When we justify and excuse ourselves, then we're not getting anywhere. That's not the way to get out from under guilt. The human way to get out from under guilt is to want to blame somebody else. People have an excuse.

Ever notice when things go wrong and some governmental investigative body starts calling all these people in. Everybody has an excuse; it's always somebody else's fault. The ideal thing is that somebody has died, then they can all blame it on him—he's not around to defend himself. The guy that's dead can be the ideal scapegoat because you can't ask him any questions. This is

human nature. People have been “passing the buck” ever since God asked Adam ‘Why did you do it?’ Adam “passed the buck” to Mrs. Adam. The whole human race took a lesson from that and has been doing it ever since. God wasn’t impressed then and He’s not any more impressed now. That’s not the solution. How do you get out from under guilt? –The solution?

Verse 9, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” –Not by making excuses and justifications and blaming others, but by confessing our sins, by facing the truth and admitting it. The way to get out from under guilt is to be forgiven—to have God clean us up. There’s a way out from under guilt. We don’t have to live under guilt. God holds out mercy, but mercy is contingent upon judgment. If we won’t bring ourselves under judgment, God will have to.

1 John 2:1, “My little children, these things I write to you, that you may not sin.” John is telling us the importance of not sinning. John is stressing this because some of the heresies that were coming in were based on the idea that you don’t have to keep the law—that it’s not necessary to really obey. They claimed that’s what grace is all about and that the law is done away. Peter warned that certain ones were taking what Paul wrote and were twisting it out of context (1 Peter 3:16). Peter had warned them about that almost 30 years earlier. The process had continued and had grown so that some were taking things Paul had written—how we are justified by faith—out of context and using that as though the law was done away.

Verses 1-2, continuing, “...And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the whole world.” John says, ‘I am telling you not to sin, but if you do, we have an Advocate with the Father. Jesus Christ is the propitiation (payment) for our sins.’

Verses 3-6, “Now by this we do know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, ‘I know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.” John is stressing over and over that we have to obey; we have to do what God says.

Verse 7, he says, ‘I am not telling you something new. I’m telling you something that you’ve had from the beginning.’

Then he begins to stress the importance of loving one another.

Verses 9-10, “He who says he is in the light [if we say that we’re obeying God], and hates his brother, is in darkness until now. He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him.” If we really love our brother, we’re abiding in the light, and we’re not going to be an occasion for stumbling. The word in the Greek is “scandal of stumbling.” There is no scandal of stumbling in him; that is an important aspect. If we are really doing what we should do, our conduct is not going to be a scandal. We’re not going to be involved in scandalous conduct—carousing around and escapades that cause a source of stumbling to others. We are going to be careful where we go and what we do.

Verse 12, he says, “I write to you, little children, ...” John is in his 90s when he is writing this. That’s his perspective as he looked at the people in the Church.

Verse 13, he talks to fathers and to young men of the importance of obeying God and of overcoming the wicked one.

Verse 15, “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.” He addresses the subject of not loving the world. Don’t be in love with this world. Don’t be in love with this world’s values, its ways or its set of priorities. He brings out that the world’s set of values and God’s set of values are totally different and distinct. You can’t really love God and love the world at the same time.

He summarizes the value system of this world.

Verse 16, “For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world.” What it feels like, what it looks like and to what extent is it going to impress other people—this is the value system the world revolves around. That is something that is passing away, and if you focus on that, you are going to pass away with it.

Verse 17, “And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.”

Verse 18, he brings up the subject of antichrist. There are many antichrists. Antichrists are those who are against Christ or whose message is against Christ.

Verse 19, “They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would [no doubt] have continued with us;” Here are those who had been in fellowship with the Church who had gone out. They had left the fellowship of the congregations and were bringing in many of these heresies. They had separated themselves.

Verse 20, “But you have an anointing [KJV, “unction”] from the Holy One, and you know all things.” What did he mean by that?

Verse 27, “But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things,” The term “anointing” is talking about the outpouring of God’s Holy Spirit or the indwelling of God’s Holy Spirit. “Unction from the Holy One” or “anointing from the Holy One” simply means the receiving of God’s Holy Spirit—“the anointing which you have received from Him.”

When the ministry anoints you with oil, such as when we pray for someone’s healing, the oil is a symbol. Olive oil is used in the Bible as symbolic of God’s Holy Spirit. The physical anointing with oil is simply an outward symbol of the reality, which is the outpouring of God’s Holy Spirit.

The audience to whom John was writing had an outpouring of God’s Holy Spirit. God had given them His Spirit. They knew and understood these things.

He says this outpouring of the Spirit, “which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing [or outpouring of the Spirit] teaches you concerning all things, and is true.” What did he mean when he said, ‘you don’t need anybody to teach you?’ What was John doing when he wrote this letter? Wasn’t he instructing them?

The point is that the basis of the teachings of many of these heretics was a development of the mystery religion. The idea was: ‘You can’t understand the Bible; you don’t need to study the Bible. We’ll tell you what it means. You can’t understand. You have to be initiated in the mysteries. It’s all written in allegories and it doesn’t mean what it says.’ That was the way they sought to do away with it. They claimed it didn’t literally mean what it said; it was an allegory, an illustration. They claimed these physical stories were simply to illustrate a

spiritual truth. They spiritualized away all of the literal accounts of everything that happened.

John is saying you don’t need somebody else to come along and interpret. You have God’s Holy Spirit and you can understand. The Bible isn’t written in some way that a converted mind doesn’t understand. That doesn’t mean that there is not a need for a ministry or for teaching. But we don’t tell you in the Church that you don’t need to study the Bible—that you can just take our word for what it means. Some of you may come out of a church where you were basically told that. We don’t tell you that. Yes, you can understand it if you are yielded to God.

Psalm 111:10, “...A good understanding have all those that do His commandments.” If you are really acting on what God is teaching you, if you really act, obey and do what God says, you will grow in understanding. God’s Spirit will lead you into a deeper understanding. John is stressing to them the opposite of what many of these heretics were telling them. That was what he is stressing right here.

1 John 3:1, “Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!”

Verse 2, “...it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.” That’s what we are going to be like in the resurrection. We are going to be like God. We are going to be like Jesus Christ. If you want to know what you are going to be like in the resurrection, study and see what God is like. We are His children and it’s not demonstrable yet—we don’t see what we are going to be like in the resurrection—but we are going to be like Him.

Verse 4, KJV, is a very familiar scripture, “Whosoever commits sin transgresses also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.” That’s what sin is! People will tell you the law is done away. Well, if the law is done away, so is sin.

Verse 5, John, again, is stressing, “...He was manifested [talking about Christ] to take away our sin, and in Him there is no sin.”

Verse 6, “Whoever abides in Him does not sin.” If we are abiding in Christ, if we are letting Christ live His life in us, we are following Him and are not sinning because Christ didn’t sin. To the extent that we are really walking with God, we are not going to sin either. When we sin, it’s because we’re not walking with God; we’re not abiding with Christ.

Verse 7, “Little children, let no man deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous,” Why did John have to say something so self-evident? There were those who were saying that wasn’t necessarily so—you don’t really have to do anything. The Gnostics had really sought to kind of spiritualize away the statements in the Bible. Their teaching was that the Bible was written in some kind of unintelligible allegory that only those initiated into the mysteries could understand. Once you get people away from the Bible, then you can introduce all kinds of human tradition and custom and just go on from there. John makes it plain, “if you do righteousness, you are righteous.”

Verse 8, “He who commits sin is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning.” It’s a matter that Christ is righteous; if we are going to be righteous, we have to live like Him. The devil sins; if we are going to sin, we’re living like the devil. It’s our choice. It’s our choice between right and wrong, good and bad, God and the devil.

Verse 9, when the time comes that we’re ultimately born of God, we won’t sin at all because we are born of God.

Verse 10, “In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother.” We demonstrate who our Father is by the way we act.

Verse 11, John stresses again, “For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.”

1 John 3:9 makes plain that when we are born of God, we can’t sin.

1 John 1:7-8 bring out that we still sin from time to time right now, so we are obviously not born of God yet. We are not yet born; we are begotten. God’s Spirit is in us.

1 John 3:2 says it does not yet appear what we shall be. We’re His sons. We’re begotten sons and we will be born. When He returns, we are going to be like Him. We are going to be changed, transformed—born again. We are going to be born a second time, not born of a literal human mother but born of the Spirit.

John 3:6, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” Right now we are flesh, but we shall be spirit.

John stresses the subject of love and the fact that we can’t be born into God’s Kingdom if we have enmity toward a brother.

1 John 3:14-17, “...He who does not love his brother abides in death. Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?”

We are to give, to help, to sacrifice. We are to give of ourselves and of our time. We are to give of our life. What is your life? Your life is composed of time. If we perceive and really grasp God’s love, we’re going to demonstrate that in our dealings. An evidence of not having God’s love is if we have this world’s goods, we see a brother in need and refuse to do what we can to help. You can’t say that’s really a manifestation of the love of God. If we are in a position to help someone and we just turn our back—if we don’t have a caring and compassionate attitude—that’s not God’s way.

Verse 18, “My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.” Certainly there is a matter of wisdom. Sometimes there may be factors where we need to get some counsel in terms of the best way to help someone. Sometimes a person is bringing a problem or problems on themselves and the best help is to let them learn a lesson. But we are to have an attitude of wanting to give, wanting to help, wanting to share—not to just stand by and have this attitude of selfishness, not having this attitude of, ‘I am going to take care of me, and I don’t care what happens to you.’ We live in a world that is very much that way, a very self-centered world. People are going to take care of “number one” and not have a concern for helping others. We are instructed to love one another in deed and in truth.

Verse 22, John tells us, “And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.”

We are going to look at two keys to answered prayers. One of the keys to answered prayers is obedience. Whatever we ask we receive because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing to Him. We are obeying God.

1 John 5:14, the second key is given, “Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.”

John mentions two keys to answered prayer:

(1) *obedience to God* and (2) *ask in accordance with God's will*.

1 John 4:1, “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test [KJV, “try”] the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.” Again, he warns that not everybody is what they say they are. Because of all the problems that were extant, he was warning them to not think that everybody is what they say they are. He told them to try the spirits. He tells us how to do that.

Isaiah 8:20, “To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.” If they speak not according to the law and the testimony, it’s because there’s no truth in them. He tells them to try the spirits. There are many false prophets.

1 John 4:2, KJV, “Hereby know you the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God...” What did he mean by that?

Matthew 24:5, “For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am Christ,’ and will deceive many.”

Matthew 15:9, Christ talked about people worshipping Him in vain, teaching the doctrines of men.

Matthew 7:21, He talked about those who would say, ‘Lord, Lord.’ But Jesus said, “‘Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he that does the will of My Father in heaven.”

What did John mean when he said, “Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God”? Part of the understanding comes from the most literal translation of verse 2; the tense of the verb “is come” in the Greek is the present progressive. ‘Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ is coming (present progressive) is an evidence of God.’ That is the fact that the Spirit of God—the teaching of God’s Spirit, the confession, the admission, the acknowledgment that Jesus Christ comes into our flesh (into our life) to live His life in us—“is come” in the present tense.

John 16:7, “Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him [It] to you.” Jesus described how He would send the Comforter and that it was expedient for us that He should go away. Jesus Christ comes into us.

Philippians 2:5, the Apostle Paul tells us, “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ

Jesus...” Christ is coming to live His life in Christians through the Holy Spirit.

1 John 4:12, “No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides [present progressive] in us, and His love has been perfected in us.”

Galatians 2:20, Paul says, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.” ‘What I am doing, I am not simply doing on my own. It is Christ living in me because He is alive. He has been resurrected and He is at the right hand of the Father. He is dwelling in me through the power of the Spirit of God to live His life in me. I have surrendered myself to Him to where He is my Lord and my Master. I am getting out of the way and letting Him live in me.’ John brings out that this is the test.

Satan always mixes a little truth in with his heresy. He has a variety of heresies and each one will have maybe a little glimmer of truth. But one thing Satan is never going to stress is the fact that you have to let Christ live His life in you. That is what Satan does not want. The evidence of the true Spirit of God is the acknowledgment and the teaching that we have to yield ourselves for Christ to come into our flesh, to dwell in us and to live His life in us.

1 John 4:4, “...He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.”

Verse 6, “We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.” He is showing that there were those who were going to listen to what he had to say, and there were those who wouldn’t.

Verse 7, “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; ...”

Verse 8, “...God is love.”

Verses 10-11, “In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.”

Verse 13, “By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit.”

Verse 19, “We love Him because He first loved us.” That’s why we love God. We learn to love. God loved us first. He took the first step. Because God loves us, we learn to respond to that love. That’s the way a little child learns to love. A little child responds to his parents’ love. Little children who grow up in a house where

there isn't love grow up very stunted emotionally. They need to have that love demonstrated to them in order to learn to love and to respond to that love. We learn to love God because God first loved us.

Verse 18, "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear...." If we really grasp the depth of God's love and God's mercy, there is a confidence that we have.

Verse 20, we can't love God and hate our brother. The love of God and the love of the brethren go hand in hand. If we love God, we need to love our brother also.

1 John 5:2-3, as we continue, "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. For this is the love of God that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome [KJV, "grievous"]." This is how the love of God is defined. The commandments tell us how to love God and how to love our brother. The first four commandments tell us how to love God; the last six commandments tell us how to love our brother. The love of God is not just a feeling or emotion; it's not just this feeling in your heart somewhere. It is a way of living and an attitude.

1 John 5:1, "Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ [the Messiah] [Now if you really believe that, you are going to act on it.] is born [the better rendering is "begotten"] of God, and everyone that loves Him who begot, loves him also who is begotten of Him." The sense here is "begotten," not "born." If we really believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Anointed of God, the coming Lord of lords and King of kings, then we are begotten children of God and we love God and God's children. You have to take what John said in its own context.

Verse 5 talks about overcoming the world.

Let's notice something.

Verse 6, "This is He who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ; not only by water, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who [which] bears witness, because the Spirit is truth."

Verses 7-8, "For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness on earth: the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree as one."

You will find in the NKJV Bible and in many other translations, a footnote that says, "NU, M omit the words from 'in heaven' (v. 7) through 'on earth' (v. 8). Only four or five very late

manuscripts contain these words in Greek." The words "in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness on earth:" are words that don't exist in any of the original Greek manuscripts. It's not something that existed in any of the early Greek manuscripts. It first existed in the Latin version of the Bible (the Vulgate) when it was inserted in the Middle Ages. Any commentary will point that out.

The reason it's in the KJV translation of the Bible is because the KJV translation was made from the Greek manuscript published by Erasmus of Rotterdam who flourished just prior to the beginning of the Protestant Reformation. He flourished right around the beginning period of the Protestant Reformation in the late 1400s. He published a Greek New Testament text. The first text that he published got him in "hot water" because the text that he produced did not have this verse in it, though this verse appeared in the Latin Vulgate, which was the only place that it appeared. It wasn't in any of the Greek. This really drew the wrath of the church there in Europe when Erasmus published his text and he didn't have this "proved" text to the trinity. Because there is no "proved" text to the trinity, this one had been inserted. It created quite a stir. In fact, Erasmus was threatened with his life. When they explained it to him that way, he kind of "saw the light." When he republished his text, he put in what they told him to put in when it came to this verse—which did not come out of any of the Greek manuscripts but simply came out of the Latin.

It is not something we have a monopoly on. If you check it out in any good commentary or scholarly Bible dictionary, they all admit that there's no evidence that this was ever part of the original text. It was inserted into a Latin manuscript. The KJV was translated from the Greek text published by Erasmus. The only problem with it was the fact that when the pressure got put on Erasmus, he decided discretion was the better part of valor; rather than have his head chopped off, he stuck in this fictitious verse that he was pressured to put in.

Verses 6-7 should read, "...And it is the Spirit who [which] bears witness, because the Spirit is truth. For there are three who bear witness...."

Verse 8, which would probably be verse 7, would read, "...the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree as one." —The Spirit (God's Spirit), the water (baptism) and the blood (of Jesus Christ).

Verse 9, “If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater; for this is the witness of God which He has testified of His Son.”

Verses 11-12, “And this is the testimony: that God has given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.”

Verses 16-17, “If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin which does not lead to death, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not leading to death. There is sin leading to death. I do not say that he should pray about that. All unrighteousness is sin, and there is sin not leading to death.” He describes the unpardonable sin and the fact that we can pray for a sin not leading to death.

Verse 19, “We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one.” New English Bible, “...the whole godless world lies in the power [rule] of the evil one.”

Verses 20-21, “And we know the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life. Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.” Already idolatrous objects of worship were beginning to come in. John concludes here.

Then we have the very short little book of **2 John**.

2 John 1 is addressed to the elect lady and her children. There’s been a lot of speculation as to whom John meant by this.

2 John 4, after his greeting, he says, “I rejoice greatly that I found some of your children walking in truth, as we received commandment from the Father.”

Verses 6-7, “This is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, that as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it. For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming [or, “is coming”] in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.”

There are many who say that Christ does not come to live His life in us. They say He did it all for us, and He is not coming (present progressive) to live His life in us. They don’t believe that it is not we who live, but Christ living in us. They say you don’t have to yield yourselves to Christ living in you. There are many deceivers that say that.

Verses 9-10, John continues, “Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him [KJV, “neither bid him Godspeed”].” John is warning them that there were false brethren. There were those who were sowing discord. There were those who were bringing in heresies. John said, ‘Don’t have this distorted concept of love, to think that you just tolerate heresy and lawless actions. If somebody comes bringing you another doctrine, don’t invite him in, don’t wish him well, don’t help him out. If you do, you’re part of it.’

Verse 12, “Having many things to write to you, I did not wish to do so with paper and ink; ...” He had some names to name and some specifics to say. God did not have some of those things written down in detail because, frankly, some of the very ones whose names John was going to name were the ones, in some cases, who wound up actually helping to preserve the Book. God did not choose to have some of those things spelled out in that way. But John just mentions that there were specifics that he was going to explain in more detail when he would see them face-to-face.

3 John 2, “Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers.” God desires good things for us. He desires that we may prosper and be in health physically in the same way that we might prosper and be in health spiritually. God’s first concern is for our spiritual well being, but He is concerned for our physical well being as well. God does desire good things for us.

Verse 4, “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.”

As we continue, notice what John says—notice the state that the Church was getting into.

Verses 9-10, “I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us. Therefore, if I come, I will call to mind his deeds which he does, prating against us with malicious words. And not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to, putting them out of the church.”

1 John 2:19, when John wrote 1 John, he said, “They went out from us, but were not of us; ...” By the time he wrote 3 John, perhaps a couple of years later, the situation had progressed to the point that, in some cases, the heretics were

literally taking over congregations and putting true Christians out. This was the situation that was becoming extant in the Roman world at the close of the first century A.D.

There were many heretical groups that acknowledged the name of Christ but did not practice the doctrine of Christ. There were a variety of different heresies that were extant. The truth was being undermined. John was bearing witness of the truth. He was, in a sense, laying emphasis on the things that needed to be emphasized in that context. That's why additional books needed to be written to the New Testament.

3 John:11, he says, "Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God." He says not to follow that which is evil.

Verses 13-14, "I had many things to write, but I do not wish to write to you with pen and ink; but I hope to see you shortly, and we shall speak face to face."

Then there is a somewhat unique situation. There is no "Amen." There are only three books in the New Testament that do not conclude with "Amen": the book of Acts, the book of James and the book of 3 John. "Amen" signifies completion and finality. The book of Acts does not have an "Amen" because there is not that note of finality. It is the acts or the actions of the apostles, but there is much that was not recorded. The rest of the story wasn't recorded.

There were reasons for that. There was information God did not choose to have preserved in the Scriptures for us. And yet He made it plain that, in a sense, you look elsewhere for the information because there is no "Amen" at the end of the book. The book of Acts ends and we don't have the actions of the rest of the twelve. We don't know where the twelve went after they disappeared from Judea. We don't know where they went. We are not told in the book of Acts where they went. We are told where Paul went, up until the end of his first Roman imprisonment.

When you look at the commission to the twelve, Jesus told them they were not sent to the Gentiles but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matthew 10:5-6). Acts 9:15, Paul was told that his commission was to bear the name of Christ before the Gentiles, before kings and before the children [house] of Israel. Those three were his commission and in that order. The book of Acts tells you the story of Paul going before the Gentiles and before kings. But the third part of

Paul's commission to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (the children of Israel) is not recorded because God allowed the identity of Israel and where the 12 tribes went to be lost from view.

The story of the actions of the twelve and the story of Paul's final portion of his ministry is not recorded because it would have made plain where the tribes of Israel were at that time. The book of James is addressed to the 12 tribes scattered abroad. Normally, there would have been names and place-names given at the end of the book saluting certain individuals. Again, that information is left out because it would have made plain where the 12 tribes had been scattered.

In 3 John, there were things and details that if John had written them, it would have clearly named names of actually some of the earliest church fathers. It would have named some of the ones who were responsible for what has developed into the professing Christian church. There was information that God simply did not allow. God did not want some of the specifics recorded in that way; so it ends not entirely complete.

Let's notice, briefly, the book of **Jude**. Again, Jude is a short one-chapter book. Jude was written approximately the same time as 2 Peter or a little while earlier than that.

Verse 1, Jude was the brother of James.

Jude 3, "Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints." Here was Jude in the 60s A.D. telling the Church to 'earnestly contend for the faith once delivered' because heresies had crept in. That's something that God wants us to be conscious of.

Verse 4, "For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ."

The situation at the time Jude wrote was that it was necessary to earnestly contend for the faith once delivered because there were heresies that were creeping in. There were certain men who had crept in who were turning the grace of God into lawlessness. Jude tells us that certain ones have crept in.

Paul said in 2 Thessalonians 2:7 that 'the mystery of iniquity was already at work' in the 50s. Jude tells us in the 60s that 'certain men had crept in unaware (unnoticed) and had sought to turn the

grace of God into lawlessness’—to do away with the law.

1 John 2:19, John says, “They went out from us, but they were not of us;” ‘They had gone out from us because they were not of us.’ By the time he wrote 3 John, he said they were taking over and were putting true Christians out of the Church. This was a progression of the story of the incursion of heresies into the visible Church. Jude then reminds the Church of God’s judgment and that God will deal with these things—He will deal with these individuals.

Jude 9, he talks about showing proper respect.

Verse 11, “Woe to them! For they have gone in the way of Cain, have run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit [KJV, “reward”], and perished in the rebellion of Korah.” The “way of Cain” was the way of “get” for self. The “error of Balaam for reward” was for profit. Balaam was willing to preach anything for a price. The “gainsaying of Korah”—Korah sought to usurp the priesthood for himself. We see this attitude of “get.” We see the attitude that Balaam sought to introduce. Balaam introduced the attitude of compromise that would bring about the destruction of God’s people. Korah sought to usurp the authority and the government that God had.

Verse 12, “These are spots in your love feasts, while they feast with you without fear, serving only themselves; ...” Here they were pretending to be part of the Church. They were taking part in the feasting and things of this sort. They were feeding themselves without fear.

Verses 12-13, continuing “...they are clouds without water, carried about by the winds; late autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, pulled up by the roots; raging waves of the sea, foaming up their own shame; wandering stars for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever.”

Jude begins to illustrate the power behind the throne. This is descriptive of demon spirits who are really the power behind the throne.

Verses 14-15, Jude then shows that Christ is going to come and He is going to deal with these things, with these individuals.

Verse 16, “These are murmurers, complainers, walking according to their own lusts;”

Verses 18-19, “how they told you that there would be mockers in the last time who would walk according to their own ungodly lusts. These are sensual persons, who cause divisions, not having the Spirit.” (KJV), “These be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit.”

We are told to look to Jesus Christ, to recognize that and to have our focus on what God is doing. Hopefully, from some of this, we begin to get a little bit of a focus as to the events that were going on in the latter part of the New Testament period. We see the events that were shaping up and the things that were developing that ultimately gave rise to a Church that, in the midst of history, disappears. And when the curtain is pulled back, what we see on the scene is not what we read of in the Gospels and Acts. We see a church using the name of Christ but not following His teachings. How did that occur? A lot of the understanding of that is given in 1, 2, 3 John and the book of Jude.

John lays great emphasis on the importance of love—love to God and love of the brethren. John lays emphasis on the fact that we are to love, but we cannot separate love from obedience. Real love involves keeping the commandments. That is the basis of our relationship with God and our relationship with the brethren.

Jude warns of heresies. He warns of the necessity of earnestly contending for the faith once delivered. One thing that we ought to note is the tendency of human nature to run down. Throughout the Scriptures, from the beginning and all the way down, is the story of God’s people. The tendency of human nature is toward compromise, toward watering down, toward letting down the barriers. It is toward blending in and being absorbed with the world around.

When you go through the story of Israel in the Old Testament—when you go through the story of the judges, the kings and all through the Old Testament—over and over again that was the problem. The tendency of human nature, the tendency of the people of God, has always inevitably been to wear down. They get stirred up and are zealous for a short time, but then that begins to wear down. The tendency is to begin to compromise here and there, to begin to blend in, to begin to lose that distinction and that separate identity and to blend in with the world. That’s kind of a summation, but when you go through the Old Testament, you find that cycle repeated over and over again.

It happened even in the context of the New Testament Church. When you read the seven stages through which the Church would pass, which is outlined in Revelation 2 and 3, we see that up and down, up and down. That is the tendency.

And, brethren, we have to recognize that tendency in our own lives. It’s not simply that it

was the tendency of the ancient Israelites in the time of the judges or kings. It's not simply that that was the tendency then, and we think, 'How could those people in the early New Testament Church do things like that? How could they begin to drift away from the truth? They had heard it from the apostles. They had seen some of these things. They had gone through these things. How could that happen?' It's not simply a matter of dead history. We look at it and we say, 'We don't see how those people could be so carnal.' Is that what we think of when we read the book of Numbers? Do we think, 'If I had been back there, I wouldn't have done anything like that. It would have been Moses and me. We would have been standing up there—three of us going into the Promised Land—Joshua, Caleb and me.' We just automatically think that. We assume we would have done it, and all the others wouldn't have.

We have to realize that this is here as a testimony and a witness to us. This is my tendency and this is yours. It is the tendency of human nature. The tendency of the people of God is to start out all fired up, begin to let down and eventually begin to water down, compromise and blend in. That goes along until something happens that kind of stirs things up and "lights the fire" again. The only trouble is that in the last go-around, those who can be stirred up by nothing else are going to get stirred by the tribulation.

It's important that we read some of these things and realize that this is not simply a matter of history. It's not something that only God's people in the early New Testament period had to be warned of. They are not the only ones who had to be encouraged, stirred up, and made conscious of loving and obeying God and loving the brethren. They were not the only ones warned of being separate from the world and contending for the faith once delivered. They are not the only ones warned of being zealous, maintaining that identity and that distinction as a peculiar people. It is something that *applies to us*.

We have to watch because the same things that came on them are there to come on us. The same tendencies of human nature have been repeated over and over. Hopefully, we study the Bible; we study these accounts, not simply from a standpoint of those long dead, but to realize that it also applies to each of us. If we're not careful, we will fall into the same trap because so many have had to contend with it. Those are the tendencies for all of us, but with God's help, we don't have to go that route. We can learn. We

can apply and maintain through God's help that faithfulness to God and His way that God wants to characterize in all of us as His people.

With that we will conclude the General Epistles this evening. When we start up Bible study again, we will begin a series on the Major Prophets. I think we will see that Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel have an awful lot to say about today's world news. They have a lot to say about the headlines of today and tomorrow and the weeks and months immediately ahead of us. That will be a timely subject, and I think we will get into that next time.