

**Alfred Street Baptist  
Church Bible Study  
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An Introduction to the  
Epistles

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# WHAT IS AN EPISTLE?

- Epistle is another name for Letter.
- There are (21) letters called “Epistles” in the New Testament

# WHAT IS AN EPISTLE?

- **All of the Epistles were handwritten**
  - a) Not always by the author
  - b) Dictated and transcribed by another
  - c) Letters were hand-delivered
  - d) Messenger would report back to the author

- **THE EPISTLES (letters): Include the letters of Paul, Peter, John, James, Jude and the writer of Hebrews**

- Paul wrote (13) of the (21) letters
- Seven (7) of the others are named after the authors
- Hebrews – The author is unknown

("Hebrews" is so named for a group of people – Jewish Christians)

# WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT THE WRITER PAUL?

1. Born as a Jew in a family of Pharisees (Acts 23:6)
2. Of the Tribe of Benjamin (Phil. 3:5)
3. Born in Tarsus of Cilicia (Acts 9:11)
4. His name was Saul (after the first king of Israel)
5. He was called Paul (Acts 13:9)
6. He was a Roman citizen (Acts 16:37; 22:25)

# WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT THE WRITER PAUL?

6. He was a Roman citizen (Acts 16:37; 22:25)
7. He was well educated
8. Spoke several languages (Aramaic, Hebrew and Greek)
9. He was a tentmaker by profession (Acts 18:13)

# WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT THE WRITER PAUL?

## **10.** He was a persecutor of the Christian Church

- He was converted to Christianity on the Damascus Road (Acts 9)
- He traveled throughout Asia Minor to start churches in Gentile territory
- He made three missionary journeys
- Paul was arrested in Jerusalem (Acts 21-23)

# WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT THE WRITER PAUL?

## **10.** He was a persecutor of the Christian Church

- Prisoner in Rome (Acts 27-28) under house arrest
- Paul was martyred during Nero's persecutions in Rome 66/67 AD.

**WHICH WAS PAUL—A DISCIPLE OR  
AN APOSTLE?**

**DISCIPLE MEANS "FOLLOWER"**

**APOSTLE MEANS "MESSENGER"**

After the death and resurrection of Christ the 12 disciples were referred to as apostles because they had the special assignment of spreading the message of Jesus Christ to the world.

Since Paul was not one of the 12 disciples, some people questioned his authority as an apostle. Paul qualified as an apostle; however, because the resurrected Christ revealed Himself to Paul, so Paul had an opportunity to walk and talk with Jesus (Acts 9:3-18). Paul defends his credentials as an apostle in (2 Corinthians 10-13).

# THREE GROUPS OF "EPISTLES" FOR OUR CONSIDERATION

## 1. THE PAULINE EPISTLES

- Romans
- I Corinthians
- 2 Corinthians
- Galatians
- I Thessalonians
- 2 Thessalonians

# THREE GROUPS OF "EPISTLES" FOR OUR CONSIDERATION

## PAUL'S PRISON EPISTLES

- Colossians
- Philemon
- Ephesians
- Philippians

# THREE GROUPS OF “EPISTLES” FOR OUR CONSIDERATION

## 2. THE PASTORAL EPISTLES

- I Timothy
- 2 Timothy
- Titus

# THREE GROUPS OF "EPISTLES" FOR OUR CONSIDERATION

## 3. THE GENERAL EPISTLES

- Hebrews
- James
- I Peter
- 2 Peter
- I John
- 2 John
- 3 John
- Jude

# WHO WERE THESE EPISTLES (Letters) WRITTEN?

- THE FIRST CENTURY CHRISTIAN CHURCHES

The “church” was the group of Christians who met in homes.

- The Epistles were written after Christ’s resurrection and ascension to heaven.

# **WHO WERE THESE EPISTLES (Letters) WRITTEN?**

- Churches throughout the Roman Empire
- Many churches Paul had established

# WHAT WAS THE PURPOSE OF THESE EPISTLES (Letters)?

- To respond to some concern/issue within the church
- In anticipation of certain problems
- To provide guidance for certain situations

# WHAT WAS THE PURPOSE OF THESE EPISTLES (Letters)?

- To provide guidance for certain situations
  - For Correction
  - To Rebuke
  - For Encouragement
  - To Explain certain doctrinal issues

# WHAT WAS THE PURPOSE OF THESE EPISTLES (Letters)?

- To provide guidance for certain situations
  - To give godly instruction for godly living
  - To provide lessons about how a Christian grows into a deeper relationship with God

# WHAT WAS THE PURPOSE OF THESE EPISTLES (Letters)?

- To provide guidance for certain situations
  - To stay in touch with these fledgling churches

# **EXERCISE FOR YOUR INPUT AND** **STUDY**

See Handout

# THE PAULINE EPISTLES

Romans—Christian Faith (The Gospels examined the life of Christ; now Paul examines how a Christian is changed by the death of Christ).

# THE PAULINE EPISTLES

- Romans sets forth the need and plan for salvation
- We were spiritually dead (Rom. 3:23)
- Christ made us spiritually alive (Rom. 6:23)
- Struggle between dead and alive (Rom. 7:15)

# **I and 2 Corinthians—Instructions to Immature Christians**

- These letters give life lessons on how to live as Christians (1 Cor. 12;13; 6:19-20).

# Galatians—Born (Again) to be Free.

- Free from religious rules (Gal. 3:26)
- Free from the power of sin (Gal. 5:21-5:22)

# **I and 2 Thessalonians—Stand firm in the faith (I Thess. 5:23)**

- Second Coming of Christ
- The rapture of believers
- Corrects errors regarding Christ's second coming

# PAUL'S PRISON EPISTLES

## Colossians—Get Back to the Basics.

- Easily influenced by false teachers
- Jesus is all that matters
- Let Christ be reflected at home, work, and in the church (Col. 2:8-10).

# Philemon—Freedom in Christ

- Philemon was a slave owner
- Onesimus escaped and went to Paul in Rome.
- Onesimus was considered a runaway slave.
- Paul sends him back with this letter.

# **Ephesians—Speaks to the importance of being a part of the body of Christ**

- God's limitless love for them (Eph. 3:18-19)
- Our faith in Christ should affect our lifestyle (Eph. 5:21-6:9)

# Philippians—A cause for Rejoicing

- Despite difficult times, we still have joy
- It's Because of all that Christ has done for us

# THE PASTORAL EPISTLES

## I and 2 Timothy—Pursue a Godly Life

- Paul was in prison when he wrote this letter
- Remain faithful to that which you have been taught (2 Tim. 3:14)
- Be an example to all believers (2 Tim. 4:12)

# Titus—Think Right in order to Live Right

- Titus was a young pastor of several small churches
- Instructions for Christian Leaders
  - a) Character counts
  - b) Follow sound teachings
  - c) Submit to civil authorities (Titus 2:12-13)

# THE GENERAL EPISTLES

## Hebrews—Compilation of a Bible in the Bible

- Gives a clear picture of how God has chosen to operate now and for all eternity.
- Major themes and major people from the Old Testament.

# THE GENERAL EPISTLES

## Hebrews—Compilation of a Bible in the Bible

- God spoke through the Prophets; now God speaks through His own Son.

# THE GENERAL EPISTLES

## James—Real Faith

- Faith produces good deeds (good works)
- Our works will not save us; we are saved to work (James 2:17)

# THE GENERAL EPISTLES

## I Peter and 2 Peter—Life is Tough

- Jewish Christians who were scattered and suffering because of their faith.
- Christ gives you the power and perspective to endure tough times.

# THE GENERAL EPISTLES

## I, 2 and 3 John—Love Letters

- Love letters that talk about loving God, loving God's Word and showing love to others (2 John 6).

# THE GENERAL EPISTLES

## Jude—Defend the Truth

- Warns against false teacher
- Protect the truth of the Christian Faith
- We can, when we mature spiritually (Jude 3)

**WHY WOULD THESE CHRISTIANS  
CLING TO A BELIEF THAT CAUSED  
THEM SO MUCH PAIN AND  
SUFFERING?**

**READ: (I Peter 1:3-5)**