

Trek Bible Readings, Year 2

Mark

Theme: Jesus the Servant

Author: John Mark

Date: A.D. 55-56

Verse: Mark 10:45

Mark is the shortest of the four Gospels. The author focuses on Jesus Christ as a servant, with particular emphasis on His ultimate service of dying on the cross. One third of the book deals with the events of the week leading up to the crucifixion. Mark's emphasis can be seen in Mark 10:45: *For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.* Mark includes many miracles that show Jesus' love for people. We read how Jesus healed many who were deaf, dumb or blind, raised a little girl to life, fed a hungry crowd of 5,000, and welcomed little children. Believers met in Mark's mother's house, and Peter visited there often. In fact, Peter was probably the source of much of Mark's information about the events of Christ's life.

Luke

Theme: Christ the Man

Author: Luke

Date: A.D. 63-68

Verse: Luke 19:10

Luke was a physician who often accompanied the apostle Paul on his missionary journeys. Luke's main purpose in his Gospel is to show Jesus Christ as a perfect man. It is from Luke that we get the most details of Jesus' birth and boyhood. He traces the genealogy of Christ back to Adam and continues through His life chronologically. Luke makes his purpose clear early on: *It seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught* (Luke 1:3-4). Luke's Gospel is actually Volume 1 — his history continues in the book of Acts. The parables in this Gospel reflect the deep concern Christ had for lost mankind as expressed in Luke 19:10: *For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.* Luke also wanted his readers to understand that there was a solid historical basis for believing in Jesus Christ. The well-known opening to the account of the birth of Jesus Christ is just one example of how he ties his history to events and people in the secular world. *In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria* (Luke 2:1-2).

Acts

Theme: The Early Church

Author: Luke

Date: About A.D. 60

Verse: Acts 1:8

Acts was written by the physician, Luke, and is a continuation of the Gospel of Luke. In it, he records the last acts of Christ on earth as He ascended to heaven to be with the Father.

The death and resurrection of the Messiah was prophesied in the Old Testament, but that didn't excuse the Jews of their guilt for killing Him. In the second chapter, Peter exhorts the Jews to repent of their sin and accept their Messiah. He offers them the kingdom they were promised by the prophets. Some Jews believed and were saved on the day of Pentecost, but most did not. The leaders of Israel were strong in their opposition and began persecuting the believers almost right away, eventually stoning Stephen.

But God is a God of grace, and He gave the Jews every chance. Throughout the book of Acts, we see Jews in almost every region of the civilized world hearing the message of the risen Messiah and rejecting it. Even Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, went to the Jew first. Finally, in Chapter 28, with the rejection of Christ by the Jews in Rome, God's chosen people are cast aside. Paul declared: *Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles ...* (Acts 28:28). (Of course, God's promises are unconditional and the Jews will once again receive the offer — and accept it — after the rapture.)

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God, in His foreknowledge, knew what choice the Jews would make. He didn't wait until Acts 28 to act. In Chapter 9, shortly after the stoning of Stephen, He appeared to Paul, the chief tormentor of the believing Jews, and saved him. Paul became God's messenger of a new gospel — that anyone, Jew or Gentile, could be saved by grace alone through faith alone without the law. Side by side with the history of the Jews' rejection of Christ as their Messiah is the spread of Paul's gospel through his three missionary journeys around Asia and Europe.

The final chapters record Paul's arrest and journey to Rome as a prisoner.

1 Corinthians

Theme: Christian Conduct

Author: Paul

Date: A.D. 55

Verse: 1 Corinthians 15:58

The apostle Paul established the Corinthian church during his second missionary journey. The people in the church were saved — Paul makes this very clear — but they weren't living like it. Paul calls them carnal, which means they were living in their old, sinful natures instead of in their new, Holy Spirit-powered natures. Paul corrects and instructs them on

- Divisions in the church caused by various members bragging about following different leaders
- Allowing a man living in open sin to be part of the fellowship
- Taking other Christians before secular courts instead of resolving their differences themselves
- Marrying nonbelievers
- Eating meat offered to idols
- Abusing the Lord's Supper
- Speaking in tongues which was causing confusion in the church
- Claiming there was no resurrection from the dead

Paul ends on a positive note, encouraging the Corinthians to walk with the Lord. Near the end of this letter, he writes: *Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain* (1 Corinthians 15:58).

2 Corinthians

Theme: Christian Righteousness

Author: Paul

Date: A.D. 56

Verse: 2 Corinthians 5:21

Not long after Paul sent the letter known as 1 Corinthians, he received word, probably from Timothy, that the church in Corinth was still having problems. Enemies, perhaps those who were encouraging the people to return to Judaism, had been opposing Paul and attacking his credentials. In response, Paul sent Titus with a second letter, which has not been preserved. Titus reported back to Paul that most of the members of the Corinthian church had resumed their loyalty to Paul's message of the gospel but that some were still in rebellion.

Paul wrote 2 Corinthians to defend his ministry and authority as an apostle and to rejoice in those who had repented ... *I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting ...* (2 Corinthians 7:9). The apostle then switches topics and encourages the Corinthians to keep their promise to give a large gift to the church in Jerusalem. *But as you excel in everything — in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you — see that you excel in this act of grace also* (2 Corinthians 8:7). Paul then finishes with a message for those still in rebellion against him. *Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? — unless indeed you fail to meet the test!* (2 Corinthians 13:5).

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Galatians

Theme: Christian Liberty

Author: Paul

Date: A.D. 55

Verse: Galatians 5:1

Galatians is Paul's angriest letter. He wrote it to the church in Galatia, which he'd founded on his second missionary journey. The members of the church were being swayed from their faith by the Judaizers — men from Jerusalem who were trying to force the Gentiles to obey the Jewish law. In the letter, Paul corrects two errors. He explains that: 1) Man's salvation is not dependent upon him keeping parts of the law, in addition to faith in Christ. 2) The justified believer cannot become perfect by keeping the law. In this epistle, Paul wrote the most severe warnings against those who preach another gospel, and he made it clear that the law is not binding on Christians. The Christian life is not doing things to be saved or to gain special favor from God. The two systems, law and grace, cannot exist together. Paul ends the letter with a clear explanation of how we are to live under grace.

1 Thessalonians

Theme: Christ's Return

Author: Paul

Date: A.D. 51

Verse: 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18

Thessalonica was the capital city of the Roman province of Macedonia (Greece). Paul visited and started the church on his second missionary journey, but was forced out of town by the Jewish leaders. Paul received word that the members of the church were remaining true to the faith and resisting all opposition. He wrote from Corinth to say: ... *we have been comforted about you through your faith. For now we live, if you are standing fast in the Lord* (1 Thessalonians 3:7-8).

Paul also used the letter to explain God's revelation to him regarding the rapture of the Church before the tribulation and establishment of Christ's millennial kingdom and how it would affect those who had already died in Christ.

2 Thessalonians

Theme: Stand Firm

Author: Paul

Date: A.D. 51

Verse: 2 Thessalonians 2:15

Just a few months after Paul sent the first letter to the church in Thessalonica, he received the news that a misunderstanding had risen. Somebody had written a letter in Paul's name claiming that the day of the Lord (Christ's second coming to earth, at the end of the tribulation) had already occurred. As a result, some members of the church had stopped working. The apostle explained to the Christians that they were mistaken. He assured them that the day of the Lord won't happen until after the *man of lawlessness* (the Antichrist) has come.

1 Timothy

Theme: Leadership

Author: Paul

Date: A.D. 63

Verse: 1 Timothy 6:12

Paul's first letter to his young friend and coworker, Timothy, was a manual on effective leadership in the churches in Ephesus and other Asian cities. He stresses the importance of holding sound doctrine (Chapter 1); instructs on proper worship (2-3); warns against false teachers (4); teaches about church discipline (5); and explains the duties of a pastor (6). Paul's message can be summed up by 1 Timothy 4:11-16: *Command and teach these things. Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity ... devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. Do not neglect the gift you have ... Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress. Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching ...*

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2 Timothy

Theme: Endurance

Author: Paul

Date: A.D. 67

Verse: 2 Timothy 3:16-17

At the end of Paul's life, when he knew he was about to die, he wrote this letter to Timothy. He was in Rome, enduring a much harsher imprisonment than he'd faced on earlier occasions. Christian persecution under Emperor Nero was in full force. Most of Paul's friends, afraid for their own lives, had abandoned him. Paul told Timothy to stand firm and ... *share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God* (2 Timothy 1:8).

Paul foresaw an increase in apostasy (rejection of faith) and wickedness (the result of apostasy) and warned Timothy to watch out. The apostle filled the letter with advice and encouragement for the young man who was facing the challenges of pastoring the church in Ephesus, but he kept returning time and again to one theme — the importance of remaining true to Scripture.

- Paul received the truth directly from God and communicated it to Timothy. Now Timothy was to consider that truth something valuable that was committed to his care and to guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit (2 Timothy 1:13-14).
- Timothy needed to be diligent to labor to discover the truth of the Word, and to have the courage of his convictions (2:15).
- Timothy was to study the Word because it would teach him doctrine, point out and correct errors in his life, straighten him out when he got off the path and educate and discipline his character (3:16-17).
- Timothy was to preach the Word every chance he had, to correct those on the wrong path and to encourage those on the right path (4:2).

Near the end of the letter, Paul wrote about his own ministry in words that should be the pattern for every believer: *I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith* (2 Timothy 4:7).

Titus

Theme: Encouragement

Author: Paul

Date: A.D. 63

Verse: Titus 2:11-13

Titus was a young Greek coworker whom Paul used as proof that a Gentile could be saved without being circumcised or following the Jewish law (Galatians 2:3). Some years later, Paul left Titus on the island of Crete to ... *put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town* ... (Titus 1:5). This letter was the apostle's instructions on how to carry out those tasks. Scattered through the book, Paul includes statements that explain the spiritual truth behind his practical teaching.

Philemon

Theme: Forgiveness

Author: Paul

Date: A.D. 61

Verse: Philemon 1:14

In his other letters, Paul lays out the doctrine given to him by the Holy Spirit and explains how we should live in light of that doctrine. In Philemon, we see an illustration of what that teaching and application looks like in an actual, real-life situation. Philemon, to whom the letter is addressed, was a believer living in Colossae. He was a man of considerable wealth. Onesimus, his runaway slave, had recently been led to the Lord by Paul, who was imprisoned in Rome. With this letter, Paul was sending Onesimus back to Colossae, and he begged Philemon to receive his slave as a Christian brother. "If Onesimus has done you any wrong or owes you anything," Paul wrote, "you can hold me responsible." Paul's love and concern for His friends and fellow believers is evident throughout the short letter.

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1 John

Theme: Fellowship

Author: John

Date: A.D. 90

Verse: 1 John 1:7

The word love appears 52 times in some form in 1 John. Love is one of the characteristics that define God: ... *God is love ...* (1 John 4:16). God's love is unconditional, untainted by impure motives and does not take into account our worthiness to be loved. It's also an active love because God wants the best for those He loves. That's why God sent His Son as a sacrifice for our sins.

On our own, we are incapable of loving God, but we can love God ... *because He first loved us* (1 John 4:19). God's love makes it possible for us to love and it provides us with motivation to love God and others. We are so secure in God's love that we have no reason to fear. At the same time, we must be careful not to love anything more than we love God. If we do, it's possible that we don't love God at all (1 John 2:15).

But don't we all fail to love God frequently? Remember, God's love is unconditional. He doesn't expect us to be perfect, but He does expect us not to habitually choose the things of the world over Him. And when we fail ... *we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous* (1 John 2:1).

2 John

Theme: Steadfastness

Author: John

Date: A.D. 90

Verse: 2 John 1:5

John's second letter was written to a Christian woman and her children. This woman often showed hospitality in her house, probably offering food and lodging to other Christians who were traveling in the area. John commended her for walking in the truth, but warned her that false teachers were also out and about. He wanted her to stand fast in her faith and not associate with those who taught falsehood. He probably had in mind the Gnostics, who denied that Christ was human or even that He had a physical body.

3 John

Theme: Walk in Truth

Author: John

Date: A.D. 90

Verse: 3 John 1:4

John wrote this letter to a man name Gaius, who also provided hospitality to traveling Christians. The apostle was very happy when he said to Gaius: I have heard ... *the brothers came and testified to your truth, as indeed you are walking in the truth* (3 John 1:3). But there was a man in the local church named Diotrephes who was opposed to Gaius' ministry. Evidently, he wanted to be in charge and didn't want any interference from John or anybody else. John encourages Gaius to avoid Diotrephes and his faction and, instead, to imitate Demetrius, a man who ... *has received a good testimony from everyone, and from the truth itself ...* (3 John 1:12).

Jude

Theme: Keep the Faith

Author: Jude

Date: A.D. 70-80

Verse: Jude 1:3

We don't know very much about Jude. He is described as the brother of James, which would make him a half-brother of Jesus Christ. He was writing to a group of believers who were under attack by false teachers ... *who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ* (Jude 1:4).

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These evil men were fellowshiping with the believers and tempting them to fall into sin. Jude reminded the believers that the apostles (Paul and Peter) had warned them in advance that this would happen. He compares the false teachers to Cain, Balaam and Korah, and, in some of the most descriptive language in the Bible, calls them ... *waterless clouds, swept along by winds; fruitless trees in late autumn, twice dead, uprooted; wild waves of the sea, casting up the foam of their own shame; wandering stars, for whom the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved forever* (Jude 1:12-13).

Jude also reminded the believers how God has dealt with the wicked in the past, the Egyptians, the fallen angels, and the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah. He used a lot of strong words, but he ended his short book with strong words of praise in Jude 1:24 for ... *Him who is able to keep you from stumbling ...* even in the face of strong opposition.