

NEW TESTAMENT SURVEY

Seeing Jesus Christ, Savior of the World,
Throughout the New Testament

THE LAYOUT OF THE BIBLE

66 Books • One Story • One Savior

OLD TESTAMENT

39 books — written before Christ; promise & preparation

LAW	HISTORY	WISDOM / POETRY	MAJOR PROPHETS	MINOR PROPHETS
Genesis Exodus Leviticus Numbers Deuteronomy	Joshua Judges Ruth 1-2 Samuel 1-2 Kings 1-2 Chronicles Ezra Nehemiah Esther	Job Psalms Proverbs Ecclesiastes Song of Songs	Isaiah Jeremiah Lamentations Ezekiel Daniel	Hosea Joel Amos Obadiah Jonah Micah Nahum Habakkuk Zephaniah Haggai Zechariah Malachi

400 “silent years” — then the Word became flesh (John 1:14)

NEW TESTAMENT

27 books — Christ has come; the Gospel goes to the world

GOSPELS	HISTORY	PAULINE EPISTLES	GENERAL EPISTLES	PROPHECY
Matthew Mark Luke John	Acts	Romans 1-2 Corinthians Galatians Ephesians Philippians Colossians 1-2 Thessalonians 1-2 Timothy Titus Philemon	Hebrews James 1-2 Peter 1-2-3 John Jude	Revelation

OUR 13-SESSION JOURNEY THROUGH THE NEW TESTAMENT

1. Matthew	2. Mark & Luke	3. John
4. Acts 1-12	5. Acts 13-28	6. Rom & Gal
7. 1-2 Cor	8. Eph/Phil/Col/Phlm	9. Thess/Tim/Titus
10. Hebrews	11. Jas/1-2Pet/Jude	12. 1-2-3 John
13. Revelation		

Every book, every author, every era — pointing to Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world (Luke 24:27)

A 13-Session Middle School Curriculum
Covering All 27 Books of the New Testament
Prepared for Calvary Chapel Youth Ministry

Scripture quotations taken from the New King James Version®

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Also Included:

- Diagram 1: The Layout of the Books of the Bible
- Diagram 2: The Genealogy of Jesus Christ (Adam to Bethlehem — Joseph's & Mary's lines)
- Diagram 3: Map of the Holy Land in Jesus' Time
- Diagram 4: Map of Paul's Missionary Journeys
- Teacher Background Notes for every session
- One-page Student Handout for every session

HOW TO USE THIS CURRICULUM

This 13-session New Testament survey is designed for middle school students (roughly ages 11-14) meeting for 45-minute sessions. Each session includes: a Teaching Outline for the leader with timed talking points and NKJV Scripture references; Teacher Background Notes covering the historical and cultural context of that session's books; and a one-page reproducible Student Handout with a summary, fill-in-the-blank review, discussion questions, and a memory verse. A companion slide presentation (PowerPoint) and web app with downloadable handouts and after-session reflection quizzes accompany this book. Every session is built around the same conviction: from Matthew's first verse to Revelation's last chapter, the whole New Testament tells one unified story, and that story is Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world (Luke 24:27, John 5:39).

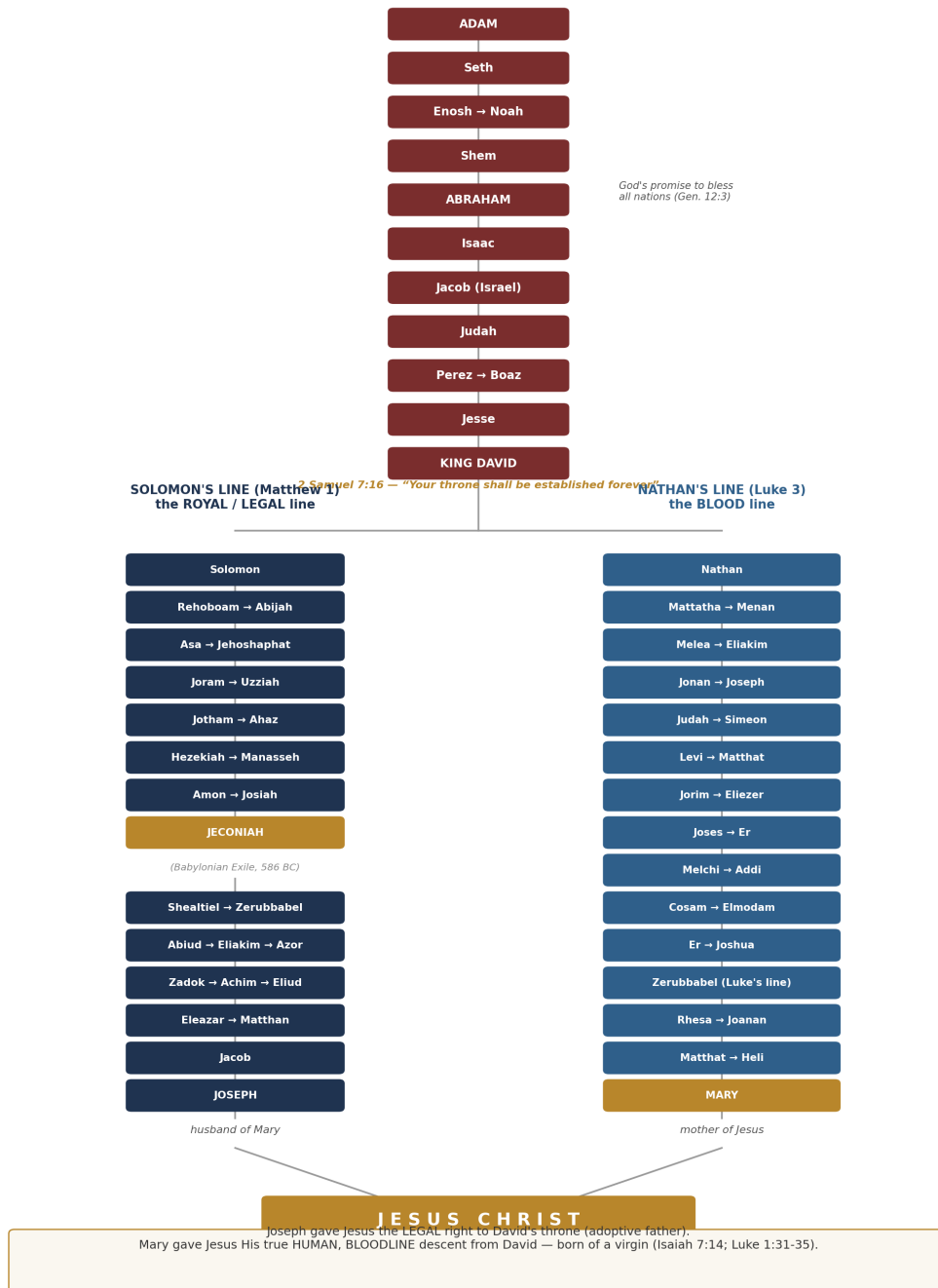
Suggested 45-Minute Session Flow:

- Opening Hook / Icebreaker (5 minutes)
- Main Teaching Points with Scripture (25-30 minutes)
- Christ Connection & Discussion Questions (5-10 minutes)
- Closing Prayer (2-5 minutes)
- Hand out the Student Handout to take home, and direct students to the web app for the after-session reflection quiz.

KEY DIAGRAM: THE GENEALOGY OF JESUS CHRIST

THE GENEALOGY OF JESUS CHRIST

From Adam to Bethlehem — Two Lines, One Savior (Luke 3:23-38 • Matthew 1:1-17)

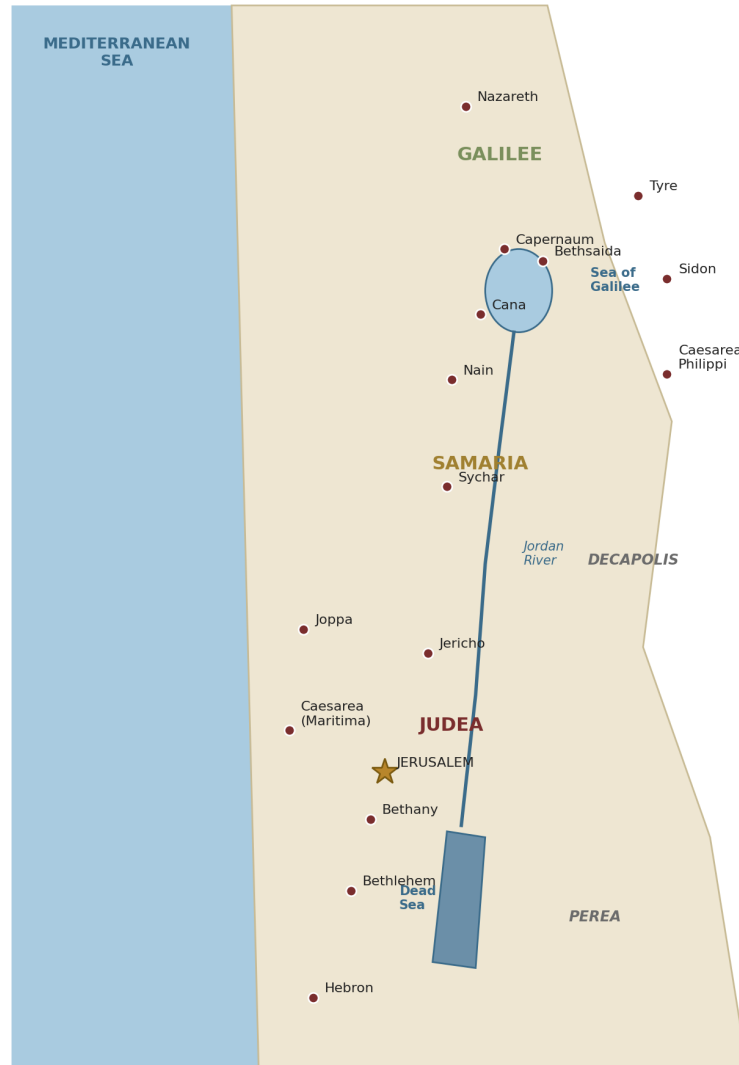


See Session 1 (Matthew) for teaching notes on Jesus' genealogy through both Joseph and Mary.

KEY MAP: THE HOLY LAND IN JESUS' TIME

THE HOLY LAND IN JESUS' TIME

(Schematic map — not to scale)



★ Jerusalem, City of the Great King (Matt. 5:35), was the center of Jesus' final week: His trial, crucifixion, and resurrection.

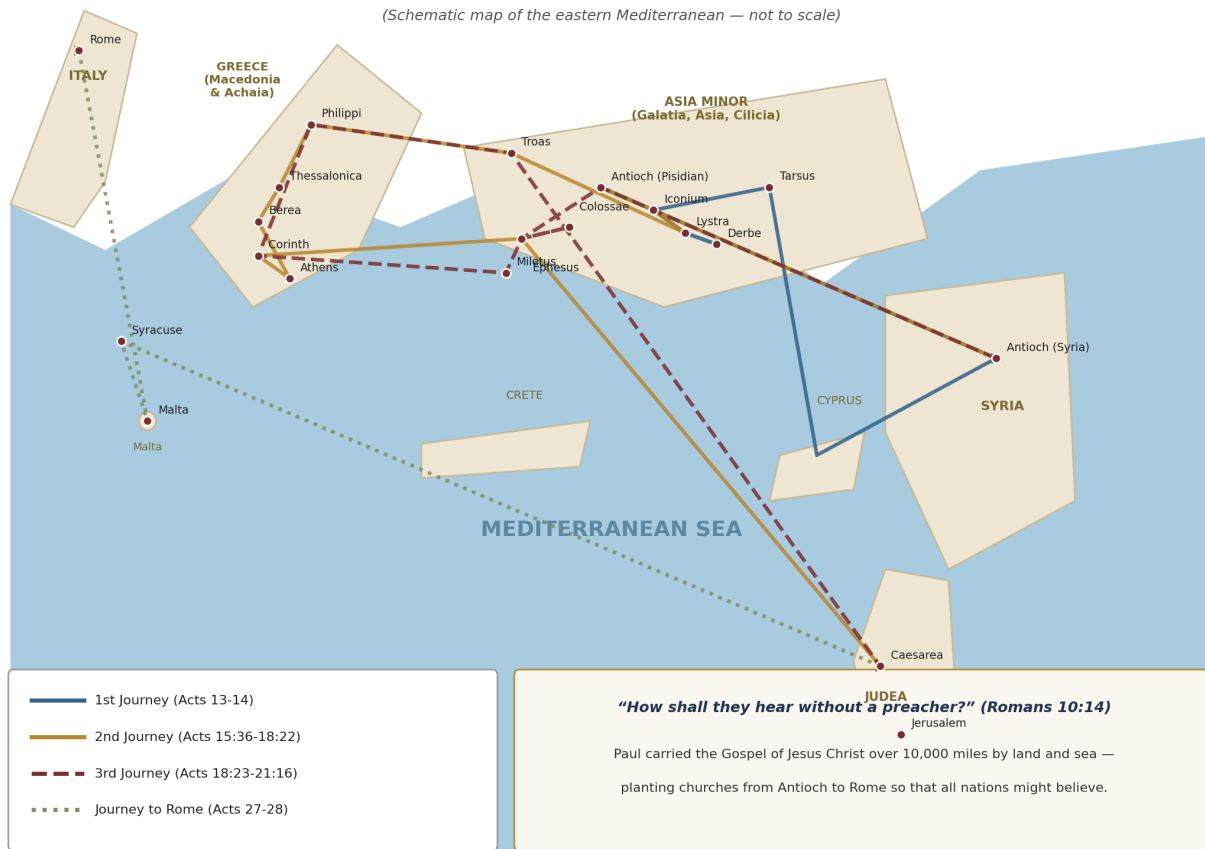
Jesus grew up in Nazareth (Galilee), was baptized in the Jordan, and ministered mostly around the Sea of Galilee before His last journey to Jerusalem.

Refer to this map throughout Sessions 1-4 as you teach Jesus' earthly ministry.

KEY MAP: PAUL'S MISSIONARY JOURNEYS

PAUL'S MISSIONARY JOURNEYS

(Schematic map of the eastern Mediterranean — not to scale)



Refer to this map throughout Session 5 and Sessions 6-9 as you teach Paul's letters.

SESSION 1

The King Arrives

Matthew

“And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins.”

— Matthew 1:21 (NKJV)

Big Idea

Matthew writes to Jewish readers to prove Jesus is the promised King — the Messiah who fulfills the Old Testament and brings the Kingdom of Heaven.

Session Objectives

- Explain why Matthew is placed first in the New Testament and who Matthew wrote to.
- Identify at least 3 Old Testament prophecies Matthew shows Jesus fulfilling.
- Understand the Sermon on the Mount as the King's description of life in His Kingdom.
- See Jesus' death and resurrection as the climax Matthew has been building toward.

SESSION 1 — TEACHING OUTLINE (45 MINUTES)

Opening Hook (5 min)

Ask: “If you were writing a book to convince your Jewish friends that someone was really and truly the King God promised centuries ago, what would you need to show them?” Let a few answer, then explain: that is exactly Matthew’s job in this book. Matthew, a former tax collector turned apostle (Matt. 9:9), writes to a Jewish audience and quotes the Old Testament more than any other Gospel writer — over 60 times — to prove one thing: Jesus of Nazareth is the promised Messiah-King.

Point 1: The King’s Credentials (10 min)

Read Matthew 1:1 together: “The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham.” Explain that a genealogy sounds boring to us, but to a Jewish reader it was a legal document proving royal and covenant credentials. Jesus is Son of Abraham (the promise-bearer, Gen. 12:3) and Son of David (the King, 2 Sam. 7:16). Point to the genealogy diagram from this unit and show how Joseph’s line (Matthew 1) gives Jesus the legal right to David’s throne. Then look at the fulfillment pattern: Matthew 1:22-23 (virgin birth, Isaiah 7:14), Matthew 2:5-6 (born in Bethlehem, Micah 5:2), Matthew 2:15 (called out of Egypt, Hosea 11:1). Every detail of Jesus’ arrival was written down hundreds of years before it happened.

Point 2: The King’s Kingdom (15 min)

Turn to the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). Explain this is the King’s own description of what life looks like under His rule — not a checklist to earn God’s favor, but a picture of hearts transformed by Him. Read the Beatitudes (Matt. 5:3-10) and briefly unpack how they turn the world’s values upside down (blessed are the poor in spirit, the meek, the persecuted). Highlight Matthew 5:17: ‘Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.’ Jesus didn’t cancel the Old Testament; He is what it was all pointing to. Also cover the parables of the Kingdom in Matthew 13 (the mustard seed, the pearl of great price) — the Kingdom starts small and is worth everything.

Point 3: The King’s Cross and Crown (10 min)

Explain that Matthew’s Jewish readers expected a conquering King, not a crucified One. Walk through Matthew 21 (the triumphal entry — fulfilling Zechariah 9:9) then jump to Matthew 27, where the very people expecting a king mock Jesus with a sign reading ‘THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS’ (Matt. 27:37) — said in mockery, but literally true. Read Matthew 28:5-6, the resurrection, and close with the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20): the King who has ‘all authority in heaven and on earth’ sends His followers to make disciples of all nations.

Christ Connection & Closing (5 min)

Matthew’s whole message: Jesus is not merely a good teacher — He is the promised King who came exactly as Scripture said He would, taught with authority, died as a substitute, and rose to rule forever. Close in prayer, thanking Jesus for being a King who keeps every promise.

Discussion Questions

- Why do you think Matthew starts his whole book with a genealogy? What was he trying to prove to his readers?
- Which Beatitude (Matt. 5:3-10) is hardest for you to live out, and why?
- The crowd mocked Jesus as ‘King of the Jews’ — but it was true. Why do you think God let that happen?

SESSION 1 — TEACHER BACKGROUND NOTES

Historical & Cultural Context

AUTHOR & DATE: Traditionally Matthew (Levi), a former tax collector and one of the Twelve Apostles, writing likely in the AD 50s-60s, possibly from Antioch of Syria, to a primarily Jewish-Christian audience.

HISTORICAL/CULTURAL CONTEXT: Tax collectors like Matthew were despised by fellow Jews as traitors who collaborated with Rome and often extorted extra money for themselves — which makes Jesus' choice of Matthew as a disciple a striking picture of grace. Judea in Jesus' day was under Roman occupation; Jewish hopes for a Messiah were often tied to political deliverance from Rome, which is part of why a suffering, crucified Messiah was so scandalous and unexpected. Genealogies mattered enormously in Jewish culture for establishing tribal identity, land inheritance, and — crucially for a king — legitimate royal descent from David. Matthew's frequent formula 'that it might be fulfilled' reflects a Jewish method of argument: proving a claim by piling up Scripture. The Sermon on the Mount would have reminded Jewish hearers of Moses delivering the Law from Mount Sinai — Matthew is subtly presenting Jesus as a greater Moses, and a greater Lawgiver, who can interpret and fulfill the Law with personal authority ('But I say to you...'). The Pharisees and Sadducees, two major Jewish religious/political parties, feature prominently in Matthew as Jesus' primary opponents — the Pharisees emphasized strict oral tradition and law-keeping, while the wealthier, priestly Sadducees controlled the Temple and denied the resurrection. Rome's governor Pontius Pilate held the sole legal authority to execute someone, which is why Jewish leaders had to bring Jesus to Pilate for a death sentence.

Timeline

c. 6-4 BC: Jesus born in Bethlehem → c. AD 27-30: Jesus' public ministry → c. AD 30: Crucifixion & Resurrection → Matthew written c. AD 50s-60s

SESSION 1 STUDENT HANDOUT

The King Arrives

Matthew

“And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins.”

— Matthew 1:21 (NKJV)

What We Learned Today

Matthew was a tax collector before Jesus called him to be a disciple (Matt. 9:9). He wrote his Gospel to Jewish readers to prove, using the Old Testament, that Jesus is the promised Messiah-King. Matthew organizes his book around five great blocks of Jesus' teaching, the most famous being the Sermon on the Mount (chapters 5-7). The book moves from Jesus' royal birth to His authoritative teaching and healing ministry to His death as King of the Jews and His resurrection, ending with His command to make disciples of all nations.

Fill in the Blank

1. Matthew wrote to prove Jesus is the promised _____.
2. Jesus said, 'I did not come to destroy but to _____.' (Matt. 5:17)
3. The sign on Jesus' cross read, 'THIS IS JESUS THE _____ OF THE JEWS.'
4. Jesus' final command was to make _____ of all nations.

Talk About It

- Why do you think Matthew starts his whole book with a genealogy? What was he trying to prove to his readers?
- Which Beatitude (Matt. 5:3-10) is hardest for you to live out, and why?
- The crowd mocked Jesus as 'King of the Jews' — but it was true. Why do you think God let that happen?

MEMORY VERSE

“You shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins.”

— Matthew 1:21 (NKJV)

SESSION 2

The King Arrives, Part 2

Mark & Luke

“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

— Mark 10:45 (NKJV)

Big Idea

Mark shows Jesus as the powerful, suffering Servant who acts fast and gives His life as a ransom; Luke shows Jesus as the compassionate Son of Man who came to seek and save the lost — including outsiders, the poor, and sinners.

Session Objectives

- Understand that each Gospel writer highlights a different, true picture of the same Jesus.
- Identify Mark's emphasis on action and Jesus as Suffering Servant.
- Identify Luke's emphasis on compassion, prayer, and Jesus' concern for outsiders.
- See how both books point to the cross as the center of Jesus' mission.

SESSION 2 — TEACHING OUTLINE (45 MINUTES)

Opening Hook (5 min)

Ask: “Have you ever seen the same event described by two different people, and each person noticed different details?” That’s what we get in the four Gospels — four true, complementary accounts of the same Jesus, like four camera angles on the same event. Today we look at Mark and Luke.

Point 1: Mark — The Servant Who Acts (12 min)

Explain that Mark is the shortest, fastest-moving Gospel, likely written for a Roman audience who valued action and power more than genealogy. Mark’s favorite word is ‘immediately’ (used over 40 times) — Jesus moves from miracle to miracle with urgency. Mark has almost no birth narrative; it opens with John the Baptist and Jesus’ baptism (Mark 1:9-11). Highlight Mark 10:45, the key verse: Jesus, though He has all power (calming storms, casting out demons, raising the dead), came ‘not to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.’ A ransom is a price paid to free a captive — Jesus’ death buys our freedom from sin. Note that roughly a third of Mark’s content covers just the final week of Jesus’ life — the cross is the goal of the whole book.

Point 2: Luke — The Physician Who Cares (13 min)

Introduce Luke as a Gentile doctor (Col. 4:14) and careful historian (Luke 1:1-4) writing to a Gentile audience (Theophilus) to show that Jesus came for EVERYONE, not just the Jewish people. Luke is the only Gospel with the Christmas story told from Mary’s perspective, including the songs of Mary (the Magnificat, Luke 1:46-55) and the shepherds (Luke 2:8-20) — lowly shepherds, not rulers, get the first announcement. Highlight Luke’s special attention to: women, the poor, tax collectors, and sinners. Read the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32, summarize) and the story of Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10), landing on the key verse, Luke 19:10: ‘For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.’ Luke also emphasizes prayer — Jesus prays before every major event in His ministry.

Point 3: Two Pictures, One Savior (10 min)

Put the two together: Mark shows a powerful Servant-King in constant motion, giving His life as a ransom. Luke shows a compassionate Savior who deliberately seeks out the people everyone else overlooked. Both climax in the same place: the cross and the empty tomb (Mark 16; Luke 24). Read Luke 24:6-7, the angels’ announcement, and Luke 24:44-47 where the risen Jesus explains that everything written about Him in the Law, Prophets, and Psalms had to be fulfilled — tying directly back to what we learned about Matthew.

Closing (5 min)

Ask: which picture of Jesus — powerful Servant or compassionate Seeker — do you need most today? Close in prayer thanking Jesus that He is both strong enough to save and gentle enough to seek out the lost, which includes each of us.

Discussion Questions

- Why might it matter that we have four different Gospel writers instead of just one?
- Mark says Jesus came to ‘give His life a ransom for many’ — what does a ransom mean, and why did we need one?
- In Luke, Jesus goes out of His way for outsiders like Zacchaeus. Who are the ‘outsiders’ around you that Jesus might want you to reach out to?

SESSION 2 — TEACHER BACKGROUND NOTES

Historical & Cultural Context

AUTHOR & DATE: Mark (John Mark), a companion of both Peter and Paul, is traditionally seen as recording Peter's eyewitness preaching; written perhaps in Rome in the AD 50s-60s. Luke, a Gentile physician and traveling companion of Paul (see 'we' sections beginning in Acts 16), wrote both his Gospel and Acts as a careful two-part historical work addressed to 'most excellent Theophilus' (Luke 1:3), likely a Roman official or patron.

HISTORICAL/CULTURAL CONTEXT: Mark's fast pace and simple Greek, along with his need to explain Jewish customs (e.g., Mark 7:3-4) suggest a non-Jewish, likely Roman audience unfamiliar with Jewish practice — which fits with the tradition that Mark wrote in Rome. Roman readers admired power, action, and a hero's willingness to serve and sacrifice for others (a theme resonant with Roman ideals of honor), so Mark's portrait of Jesus as the powerful Servant who gives His life would have spoken directly into that culture. Luke, writing for a broader Greco-Roman audience, is unusually attentive to women (Elizabeth, Mary, Anna, the widow of Nain, Mary Magdalene) and to social outcasts — in the first-century world, women, the poor, and 'sinners' (a term often applied to those in dishonorable trades like tax collecting or prostitution) had little social status or legal standing. Tax collectors like Zacchaeus were Jews who collected taxes for Rome and were widely viewed as traitors and extortionists, since they could legally overcharge and pocket the difference. Samaritans, who appear favorably in Luke (the Good Samaritan, Luke 10), were a mixed-race, religiously distinct people whom most Jews despised and avoided — making Jesus' positive treatment of them radical. Luke's careful, orderly historical method (Luke 1:1-4) reflects the standards of Greco-Roman historiography of his day, lending credibility to his account.

Timeline

Mark written c. AD 55-65 (possibly earliest Gospel, using Peter's testimony) → Luke written c. AD 60s, paired with Acts as a two-volume history

SESSION 2 STUDENT HANDOUT

The King Arrives, Part 2

Mark & Luke

“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

— Mark 10:45 (NKJV)

What We Learned Today

Mark, likely writing down Peter's eyewitness memories for a Roman audience, presents Jesus as the powerful, active Servant of God who moves with urgency and gives His life as a ransom (Mark 10:45). Luke, a Gentile physician and careful historian, writes to show that Jesus came to seek and save ALL people — rich and poor, Jew and Gentile, respectable and outcast (Luke 19:10). Together, these two Gospels give us a fuller picture of the same Jesus we met in Matthew: strong enough to save, and compassionate enough to seek us out.

Fill in the Blank

1. Mark's favorite word, used over 40 times, is '_____.'
2. Jesus came 'to give His life a _____ for many.' (Mark 10:45)
3. Luke was a Gentile _____ (doctor) and careful historian.
4. 'The Son of Man has come to _____ and to save that which was lost.' (Luke 19:10)

Talk About It

- Why might it matter that we have four different Gospel writers instead of just one?
- Mark says Jesus came to 'give His life a ransom for many' — what does a ransom mean, and why did we need one?
- In Luke, Jesus goes out of His way for outsiders like Zacchaeus. Who are the 'outsiders' around you that Jesus might want you to reach out to?

MEMORY VERSE

“For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.”

— Luke 19:10 (NKJV)

SESSION 3

The Word Made Flesh

John

“But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.”

— John 20:31 (NKJV)

Big Idea

John writes so that his readers would believe Jesus is God Himself in human flesh, and that believing in Him is the only way to eternal life.

Session Objectives

- Explain how John's Gospel is different in structure and purpose from Matthew, Mark, and Luke.
- Identify at least 3 of Jesus' 'I AM' statements and their Old Testament connection to God's name.
- Understand John's stated purpose (John 20:31) for the whole book.
- Trace at least 3 of John's seven 'signs' (miracles) and what each reveals about who Jesus is.

SESSION 3 — TEACHING OUTLINE (45 MINUTES)

Opening Hook (5 min)

Ask: "If someone asked you, 'Who is Jesus, really?' — not just what He did, but WHO He is — what would you say?" That is exactly John's question. Unlike Matthew, Mark, and Luke (called the 'Synoptic' Gospels because they share a similar outline), John is structured completely differently and focuses on the deep identity of Jesus as God.

Point 1: In the Beginning Was the Word (10 min)

Read John 1:1-3 and John 1:14 together. Explain 'the Word' (Greek: Logos) as John's way of describing Jesus as God's eternal self-expression — present at creation, and now 'become flesh' to live among us. This is the clearest statement in the whole Bible that Jesus is fully God and fully man. Connect back to Genesis 1: the same One who spoke light into existence stepped into His own creation as a baby in Bethlehem.

Point 2: I AM (12 min)

Explain that when Moses asked God's name at the burning bush, God said, 'I AM WHO I AM' (Exodus 3:14). Show students that Jesus uses this exact divine name for Himself seven times in John, each with a picture: 'I AM the Bread of Life' (6:35), 'I AM the Light of the World' (8:12), 'I AM the Good Shepherd' (10:11), 'I AM the Resurrection and the Life' (11:25), 'I AM the Way, the Truth, and the Life' (14:6). Point out John 8:58-59 — when Jesus said 'before Abraham was, I AM,' the Jewish leaders picked up stones to kill Him for blasphemy, because they understood exactly what He was claiming: to be God.

Point 3: Signs That Point to the Savior (10 min)

Explain that John organizes much of his book around seven miraculous 'signs' — not just to show off power, but each one is a signpost pointing to who Jesus is. Briefly cover: turning water to wine (John 2, revealing His glory), healing the man born blind (John 9, He is the Light of the World), and raising Lazarus from the dead (John 11, He is the Resurrection and the Life). Read John 11:25-26 as a class.

Point 4: The Purpose Statement & the Upper Room (8 min)

Read John 20:30-31 aloud — John tells us directly why he wrote: not to record everything Jesus did, but so readers would BELIEVE Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and have life in His name. Briefly mention John 13-17 (the Upper Room, the night before the crucifixion) where Jesus washes the disciples' feet (13:1-17, a picture of humble love) and promises the Holy Spirit (John 14:16-17) — setting up next week's study of Acts.

Closing (5 min)

Ask: of all the 'I AM' pictures, which one means the most to you right now, and why? Close in prayer, thanking Jesus for being both fully God and near enough to know us.

Discussion Questions

- What does it mean that 'the Word became flesh'? Why does it matter that Jesus is both fully God and fully human?
- Which 'I AM' statement of Jesus speaks to something you're facing this week?
- John says he wrote his book so we would BELIEVE. What does it look like to really believe in Jesus, not just know facts about Him?

SESSION 3 — TEACHER BACKGROUND NOTES

Historical & Cultural Context

AUTHOR & DATE: The apostle John, son of Zebedee, one of Jesus' inner circle (with Peter and James), traditionally writing from Ephesus late in his life (c. AD 85-95), likely the last of the four Gospels.

HISTORICAL/CULTURAL CONTEXT: By the time John wrote, the church had spread across the Roman world and was facing early challenges to a right understanding of who Jesus is (early forms of what would become the Gnostic heresy denied that Jesus was truly human, or truly divine, or both). John's emphatic statements about Jesus' full deity ('the Word was God') and full humanity ('the Word became flesh') address this head-on. The term 'Logos' (Word) had rich meaning both in Jewish thought (God's powerful, creative speech in Genesis 1, and personified Wisdom in Proverbs 8) and in Greek philosophy (the Logos as the rational principle ordering the universe) — John uses a term both Jewish and Greek readers would recognize, and fills it with new meaning: the Logos is a Person, Jesus Christ. The divine name 'I AM' (Hebrew: YHWH, from Exodus 3:14) was considered so sacred that devout Jews would not even pronounce it aloud, substituting 'Adonai' (Lord) instead — which is exactly why the religious leaders react with such horror and attempt to stone Jesus in John 8:58-59: they understood His statement as a direct claim to be the God of Israel. The phrase 'the Jews' in John (used often to describe Jesus' opponents) refers specifically to the hostile religious authorities in Jerusalem, not to Jewish people generally (John himself, his readers, and Jesus were all Jewish) — an important distinction for students to understand rightly. Samaria (John 4) was viewed with contempt by many Jews due to a centuries-old religious and ethnic divide, making Jesus' extended, respectful conversation with the Samaritan woman especially countercultural.

Timeline

John, last surviving apostle, writes c. AD 85-95 from Ephesus, decades after Matthew/Mark/Luke, to deepen belief in Jesus' full deity

SESSION 3 STUDENT HANDOUT

The Word Made Flesh

John

"But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name."

— John 20:31 (NKJV)

What We Learned Today

John, the 'disciple whom Jesus loved,' writes a Gospel unlike the other three — focused less on a chronological life-story and more on WHO Jesus is. John opens by declaring Jesus is the eternal Word of God who 'became flesh and dwelt among us' (John 1:14). Throughout the book, Jesus applies God's own covenant name, 'I AM,' to Himself with pictures like Bread of Life, Light of the World, Good Shepherd, and Resurrection and the Life. John records seven miraculous signs that point to Jesus' identity as the Son of God, and states his purpose plainly: 'these are written that you may believe... and that believing you may have life in His name' (John 20:31).

Fill in the Blank

1. 'In the beginning was the _____, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.'
2. 'And the Word became _____ and dwelt among us.' (John 1:14)
3. Jesus said, 'Before Abraham was, _____.' (John 8:58)
4. John wrote so that we would _____ Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. (John 20:31)

Talk About It

- What does it mean that 'the Word became flesh'? Why does it matter that Jesus is both fully God and fully human?
- Which 'I AM' statement of Jesus speaks to something you're facing this week?
- John says he wrote his book so we would BELIEVE. What does it look like to really believe in Jesus, not just know facts about Him?

MEMORY VERSE

"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us... full of grace and truth."

— John 1:14 (NKJV)

SESSION 4

The Church Is Born

Acts (chapters 1-12)

“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

— Acts 1:8 (NKJV)

Big Idea

Acts shows the risen and ascended Jesus continuing His work through the Holy Spirit and the early church, as the Gospel spreads from Jerusalem outward exactly as He promised.

Session Objectives

- Understand Acts as 'Part 2' of Luke's account, and its role as a bridge between the Gospels and the Epistles.
- Explain the significance of Pentecost and the coming of the Holy Spirit.
- Trace the Gospel's spread from Jerusalem to Judea/Samaria in Acts 1-12.
- See Peter's role and Stephen's martyrdom as turning points that scatter the Gospel outward.

SESSION 4 — TEACHING OUTLINE (45 MINUTES)

Opening Hook (5 min)

Ask: “Jesus rose from the dead and then went back to heaven — so is His work on earth over?” Explain that Acts (written by Luke as a sequel to his Gospel, see Acts 1:1) answers with a resounding NO. Acts could be called ‘the Acts of the Holy Spirit,’ because it shows Jesus continuing His work on earth through His Spirit-filled church.

Point 1: The Promise and Pentecost (12 min)

Read Acts 1:8, the key verse and outline for the whole book: witnesses in Jerusalem (chs. 1-7), Judea and Samaria (chs. 8-12), and to the end of the earth (chs. 13-28). Then read Acts 2:1-4, the day of Pentecost: the Holy Spirit comes with wind, fire, and the disciples speaking in other languages so that Jews gathered from many nations each hear the Gospel in their own tongue (Acts 2:6-11). Explain Pentecost was already a Jewish harvest festival (50 days after Passover) — God chose this exact moment to launch a new kind of harvest: souls. Peter preaches the first Gospel sermon (Acts 2:14-41) and 3,000 people are saved in one day. The church is born.

Point 2: The Church Grows and Faces Opposition (12 min)

Describe the early church's life together (Acts 2:42-47): devoted to teaching, fellowship, breaking bread, prayer, and radical generosity. Then show growing conflict: Peter and John are arrested and boldly declare, ‘there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved’ (Acts 4:12, the memory verse). Introduce Stephen, the first Christian martyr (Acts 6-7) — his execution in Acts 7:54-60 seems like a tragedy, but note Acts 8:1, 4: persecution SCATTERS believers out of Jerusalem, and ‘those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word.’ God turns opposition into expansion.

Point 3: The Gospel Breaks Every Barrier (10 min)

Cover Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26-39, briefly) — the Gospel reaches Africa. Then the dramatic conversion of Saul (soon to be Paul) on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-19) — the church's fiercest enemy becomes its greatest missionary; read Acts 9:15. Finally, cover Peter and Cornelius (Acts 10) — God gives Peter a vision to show him the Gospel is for Gentiles too, not just Jews (Acts 10:34-35). This is a massive turning point: the church is no longer only Jewish.

Closing (6 min)

Summarize: in just 12 chapters, the Gospel moves from a locked room of fearful disciples to reaching Jews, Samaritans, an African official, and now Gentiles — exactly as Jesus promised in Acts 1:8, and exactly because the same Holy Spirit who filled the first believers is still at work today. Close in prayer, asking for boldness like Peter's and John's.

Discussion Questions

- Why do you think God chose to pour out the Holy Spirit on the Jewish festival of Pentecost?
- Stephen's martyrdom looks like a defeat, but God used it to scatter the Gospel further. Has God ever turned something hard in your life into something good?
- Peter had to learn that the Gospel was for Gentiles too, not just Jews. Are there people you're tempted to think are ‘not the type’ God would save?

SESSION 4 — TEACHER BACKGROUND NOTES

Historical & Cultural Context

AUTHOR & DATE: Luke, physician and companion of Paul, writing as the second half of his two-volume work (Luke-Acts), likely completed in the early AD 60s.

HISTORICAL/CULTURAL CONTEXT: Pentecost (Greek for 'fiftieth,' called the Feast of Weeks in the Old Testament, Lev. 23:15-21) was one of three major Jewish pilgrimage festivals, drawing Jewish worshipers from across the Roman world and beyond to Jerusalem — explaining why Acts 2:9-11 lists such a wide range of nations and languages present to hear the Gospel that day. The Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council of 70 elders plus the high priest, held religious authority over Jewish life and could try religious offenses, but under Roman occupation lacked authority to carry out executions themselves (hence Jesus' trial had to go to Pilate) — Stephen's death (Acts 7) may reflect a mob action rather than a fully legal execution. Samaritans (Acts 8) were descendants of intermarriage between Israelites and foreign peoples after the Assyrian conquest of the northern kingdom (722 BC), and were regarded by many Jews as religiously compromised half-breeds — Jesus and then the apostles reaching out to Samaria (fulfilling Acts 1:8's 'Judea and Samaria') was a significant barrier-crossing. Ethiopia (Acts 8) represented, in the ancient world, one of the farthest-known nations to the south — a fitting early sign that the Gospel was for 'the end of the earth.' A 'God-fearer' like Cornelius (Acts 10), a Roman centurion, was a Gentile who worshiped the God of Israel and followed Jewish ethics without becoming a full convert (which for men required circumcision) — Peter's vision and visit to Cornelius' house crossed a major social and religious barrier, since observant Jews avoided eating with or entering the homes of Gentiles (Acts 10:28). Damascus, where Saul was converted, was a major city in the Roman province of Syria with a significant Jewish population, reachable by a roughly six-day journey from Jerusalem.

Timeline

c. AD 30: Ascension & Pentecost → c. AD 30s: Stephen martyred, Saul converted → c. AD 40s: Peter & Cornelius, Gospel to Gentiles begins

SESSION 4 STUDENT HANDOUT

The Church Is Born

Acts (chapters 1-12)

“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

— Acts 1:8 (NKJV)

What We Learned Today

Acts is Luke's second volume, picking up right where his Gospel ends. Jesus ascends to heaven and promises His followers power through the Holy Spirit to be His witnesses 'in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth' (Acts 1:8) — the outline for the whole book. At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit comes and the church is born; Peter preaches and 3,000 believe in one day. Despite arrest, threats, and the martyrdom of Stephen, the young church grows and the Gospel breaks through barrier after barrier: to Samaritans, to an Ethiopian official, to the persecutor Saul (soon to become Paul), and finally to Gentiles through Peter and Cornelius.

Fill in the Blank

1. 'You shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the _____.'
(Acts 1:8)
2. On the Day of _____, the Holy Spirit came upon the believers.
3. 'There is no other _____ under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.' (Acts 4:12)
4. _____ was the first Christian martyr.

Talk About It

- Why do you think God chose to pour out the Holy Spirit on the Jewish festival of Pentecost?
- Stephen's martyrdom looks like a defeat, but God used it to scatter the Gospel further. Has God ever turned something hard in your life into something good?
- Peter had to learn that the Gospel was for Gentiles too, not just Jews. Are there people you're tempted to think are 'not the type' God would save?

MEMORY VERSE

“Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

— Acts 4:12 (NKJV)

SESSION 5

Paul's Early Journeys

Acts (chapters 13-28)

“But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.”

— Acts 20:24 (NKJV)

Big Idea

God takes the Gospel of Jesus Christ, through the tireless ministry of Paul, from Antioch to the very heart of the Roman Empire — fulfilling Jesus' promise that the Gospel would reach 'the end of the earth.'

Session Objectives

- Trace the basic route and highlights of Paul's three missionary journeys using the map.
- Understand key moments: the Jerusalem Council, Paul in Athens, and Paul's arrest.
- See Paul's unshakeable commitment to the Gospel despite suffering.
- Preview how Acts 13-28 sets up the letters Paul will write (studied in Sessions 6-9).

SESSION 5 — TEACHING OUTLINE (45 MINUTES)

Opening Hook (5 min)

Show the map of Paul's missionary journeys. Ask: "What would it take for you to travel thousands of miles, on foot and by ship, facing shipwrecks, beatings, and prison — to tell people about someone you love?" That is Paul's story in Acts 13-28.

Point 1: Sent Out from Antioch (8 min)

Read Acts 13:1-3: the church at Antioch, under the Holy Spirit's direction, commissions Barnabas and Saul (now called Paul) for the first missionary journey. Using the map, trace journey 1 briefly: Cyprus, then into Asia Minor (Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe). Note Acts 14:19-20 — Paul is stoned and left for dead at Lystra, yet gets up and keeps preaching the very next day.

Point 2: The Jerusalem Council — Grace, Not Law (10 min)

Explain the major controversy in Acts 15: must Gentile believers keep the Jewish law (especially circumcision) to be saved? Read Acts 15:11: 'we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they.' The Council settles it: salvation is by grace through faith in Christ alone, for Jew and Gentile alike. This decision protects the Gospel of grace and sets up everything Paul will later write in Romans and Galatians.

Point 3: Second and Third Journeys — Onward to Europe (12 min)

Using the map, trace journey 2: Paul, guided by a vision of a man from Macedonia (Acts 16:9-10), crosses into Europe for the first time — Philippi (where he and Silas are jailed and sing hymns at midnight, Acts 16:25), Thessalonica, Berea, and Athens. At Athens (Acts 17:22-31), Paul preaches to Greek philosophers at the Areopagus, brilliantly connecting their own altar 'TO THE UNKNOWN GOD' to the true God who raised Jesus from the dead. Then Corinth, where Paul stays 18 months (Acts 18:11). Briefly trace journey 3: Paul spends over two years in Ephesus (Acts 19), a hub for planting churches across the province of Asia — setting up several of Paul's letters we'll study soon.

Point 4: Arrest, Trials, and Rome (8 min)

Read Acts 20:24, the key verse — Paul's life motto. Explain that Paul, warned repeatedly of suffering ahead, returns to Jerusalem anyway, is arrested (Acts 21), and appeals to Caesar as a Roman citizen (Acts 25:11) — which sends him to Rome. Cover the dramatic shipwreck on the way (Acts 27) and Acts 28's ending: Paul under house arrest in Rome, still 'preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him' (Acts 28:31).

Closing (7 min)

Point out: Acts ends without telling us Paul died — on purpose. The story of the Gospel spreading isn't finished; it continues through every believer today, including us. Read Romans 1:16 together as this week's memory verse. Close in prayer for boldness like Paul's.

Discussion Questions

- Paul got up and kept preaching after being stoned and left for dead (Acts 14:19-20). What keeps you going when following Jesus gets hard?
- At the Jerusalem Council, the church decided salvation is by grace, not by keeping rules. Why is that such good news?
- Paul said 'none of these things move me... so that I may finish my race with joy' (Acts 20:24). What is your 'race' — what has God called you to do?

SESSION 5 — TEACHER BACKGROUND NOTES

Historical & Cultural Context

AUTHOR & DATE: Luke continues his account, likely an eyewitness to portions of these travels himself (note the shift to 'we' in Acts 16:10 and following).

HISTORICAL/CULTURAL CONTEXT: The Roman Empire in Paul's day had built an extensive network of roads and enjoyed the 'Pax Romana' (Roman peace), which, combined with the widespread use of Greek as a common trade language, made long-distance travel and communication far easier than in earlier centuries — providential timing for the rapid spread of the Gospel. Roman citizenship, which Paul held by birth (Acts 22:28), was a valuable legal status granting protections such as the right to a fair trial and the right to appeal directly to Caesar (which Paul exercises in Acts 25:11) — non-citizens had far fewer legal protections and could be flogged or executed with little process. The city of Philippi was a Roman colony with many retired soldiers and civic pride in its Roman identity, which is part of why the accusation against Paul and Silas emphasizes that they are Jews promoting customs 'not lawful for us... being Romans' (Acts 16:20-21). Athens was the historic center of Greek philosophy and religion, filled with temples and idols to many gods (Acts 17:16); the altar 'TO THE UNKNOWN GOD' that Paul references reflects an actual Greek practice of erecting altars to unnamed deities to avoid offending any god they might have overlooked. Ephesus was a major commercial city and home to the Temple of Artemis (Diana), one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, which fueled a lucrative trade in silver shrines (Acts 19:24) — explaining the riot when Paul's preaching threatened that business. The Jerusalem Council's decision (Acts 15) addressed a real and urgent controversy, since many Jewish believers assumed that becoming a follower of the Jewish Messiah required also becoming Jewish (via circumcision and law-keeping) — the Council's ruling that Gentiles need not become culturally Jewish to be saved was foundational for the Gospel's spread across the Gentile world.

Timeline

c. AD 46-48: 1st journey → c. AD 49: Jerusalem Council → c. AD 49-52: 2nd journey → c. AD 53-57: 3rd journey → c. AD 60-62: Rome

SESSION 5 STUDENT HANDOUT

Paul's Early Journeys

Acts (chapters 13-28)

"But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God."

— Acts 20:24 (NKJV)

What We Learned Today

Acts 13-28 follows Paul's three missionary journeys and his final journey to Rome, tracing the Gospel from the church at Antioch across Asia Minor and into Europe — Philippi, Thessalonica, Athens, Corinth, and Ephesus — covering thousands of miles despite beatings, stoning, shipwreck, and imprisonment. The Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) settles a crucial question: salvation is by grace through faith in Christ, not by keeping the Jewish law, for Jew and Gentile alike. Paul is eventually arrested in Jerusalem, appeals to Caesar, and the book ends with Paul in Rome, still boldly preaching the Kingdom of God 'with all confidence, no one forbidding him' (Acts 28:31).

Fill in the Blank

1. At the Jerusalem Council, the church agreed that we are saved by _____, not by keeping the law. (Acts 15:11)
2. Paul preached at the Areopagus in the city of _____. (Acts 17)
3. Paul's life motto: 'none of these things move me... so that I may finish my _____ with joy.' (Acts 20:24)
4. Acts ends with Paul under house arrest in _____, still preaching boldly.

Talk About It

- Paul got up and kept preaching after being stoned and left for dead (Acts 14:19-20). What keeps you going when following Jesus gets hard?
- At the Jerusalem Council, the church decided salvation is by grace, not by keeping rules. Why is that such good news?
- Paul said 'none of these things move me... so that I may finish my race with joy' (Acts 20:24). What is your 'race' — what has God called you to do?

MEMORY VERSE

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes."
— Romans 1:16 (NKJV)

SESSION 6

Grace Alone

Romans & Galatians

“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.”

— Romans 3:23-24 (NKJV)

Big Idea

Romans and Galatians are Paul's clearest, most passionate explanations of the Gospel: we are made right with God not by keeping the law, but by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

Session Objectives

- Explain the basic flow of the Gospel argument in Romans: sin, justification, sanctification, glorification.
- Understand 'justification by faith' in simple terms a middle schooler can grasp.
- Understand why Paul writes so forcefully in Galatians against 'adding' works to grace.
- Identify the 'fruit of the Spirit' as the natural result of a Spirit-filled life, not a rulebook.

SESSION 6 — TEACHING OUTLINE (45 MINUTES)

Opening Hook (5 min)

Ask: "If you had to earn God's love by being good enough, how would you know when you'd done enough?" Let students wrestle with this. Explain that this exact question drives two of Paul's most important letters: Romans and Galatians.

Point 1: Romans — Everyone Needs Grace (12 min)

Explain Romans is Paul's most organized explanation of the Gospel, written to a church he had not yet visited. Walk the basic outline: Romans 1-3 shows EVERYONE — Gentile and Jew — is guilty before God. Read Romans 3:23, the key verse: 'all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.' But immediately, verse 24: we are 'justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.' Explain 'justified' simply: it means God declares us 'not guilty' — completely forgiven and made right with Him — not because we earned it, but because Jesus paid for it. Read Romans 5:8, the memory verse: God proved His love by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners, not after we cleaned ourselves up.

Point 2: Romans — New Life and Nothing Can Separate Us (10 min)

Briefly cover Romans 6 (we are no longer slaves to sin), Romans 8 (life in the Spirit), and close with Romans 8:38-39: nothing 'shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.' Mention Romans 12:1-2 as the hinge of the letter: because of God's mercy, we offer our lives to Him — grace leads to a transformed life, not a license to sin.

Point 3: Galatians — Don't Add to Grace (13 min)

Explain the situation: false teachers in Galatia were telling Gentile believers they also needed to be circumcised and keep the Jewish law to be truly saved — adding works to grace. Paul is furious (read Galatians 1:6-7, his shock that they are so quickly deserting the true Gospel). Read Galatians 2:20: 'I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me... who loved me and gave Himself for me.' Explain Galatians 3:1-3 (Paul's blunt question: did you begin by the Spirit, only to try to be made perfect by human effort now?). Land on Galatians 5:1: 'Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free.'

Point 4: The Fruit of the Spirit (7 min)

Read Galatians 5:22-23 together: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Explain this is FRUIT — something the Holy Spirit grows in us naturally as we walk with Him — not a checklist we force ourselves to perform to earn God's approval. Contrast with the 'works of the flesh' listed just before (Gal. 5:19-21) if time allows.

Closing (3 min)

Summarize: Romans and Galatians both shout the same truth — you cannot earn what Jesus already paid for. Grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. Close in prayer, thanking Jesus that His love isn't a reward for being good, but a gift for the guilty.

Discussion Questions

- Why is it good news that God 'justifies' us freely by grace instead of requiring us to earn it?
- Paul says in Galatians 2:20 that Christ lives in him. What does it look like for Christ to live through you this week?
- The fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23) grows naturally, like fruit on a tree — it's not forced. How is that different from just trying really hard to be good?

SESSION 6 — TEACHER BACKGROUND NOTES

Historical & Cultural Context

AUTHOR & DATE: The apostle Paul wrote Galatians to churches he had planted in the region of Galatia (central Asia Minor), likely one of his earliest letters (c. AD 48-49), and Romans to the church in Rome (which he had not yet visited) around AD 57, likely from Corinth near the end of his third missionary journey.

HISTORICAL/CULTURAL CONTEXT: 'Justification' was originally a legal/courtroom term in both Jewish and Roman contexts, referring to a judge's verdict declaring someone innocent or in the right — Paul uses this vivid legal picture to describe our standing before God: not merely forgiven, but formally and permanently declared righteous because of Christ's work, not our own. The controversy behind Galatians (often called the 'Judaizer' controversy) arose because certain Jewish-background teachers insisted Gentile converts must be circumcised and keep the Mosaic law to be fully saved and accepted — circumcision was the ancient sign of the Abrahamic covenant (Gen. 17), so this wasn't a minor issue but touched on the very identity of God's people and the sufficiency of Christ's work. Paul's blunt, almost angry tone in Galatians (compared to his other letters) reflects how seriously he viewed this threat to the Gospel of grace. Roman religion and society operated heavily on a system of reciprocal favors and earned honor (patron-client relationships, where gifts required repayment) — Paul's Gospel of unearned grace, freely given to the underserving, cut sharply against the grain of both Jewish legalism and Roman social expectation. The church at Rome likely included both Jewish and Gentile believers who had experienced real tension (Jewish Christians had been expelled from Rome under Emperor Claudius around AD 49 and were only recently able to return), which is part of why Romans carefully addresses both groups and their equal need for, and equal access to, grace.

Timeline

Galatians written c. AD 48-49 (possibly Paul's earliest letter) → Romans written c. AD 57 from Corinth, near the end of the 3rd journey

SESSION 6 STUDENT HANDOUT

Grace Alone

Romans & Galatians

"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."

— Romans 3:23-24 (NKJV)

What We Learned Today

Romans is Paul's most complete explanation of the Gospel: all people — Jew and Gentile alike — are sinners who fall short of God's glory (Rom. 3:23), but are justified (declared 'not guilty') freely by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ (Rom. 3:24). This leads to a transformed life in the Spirit and the astonishing promise that nothing can separate us from God's love (Rom. 8:38-39). Galatians was written because false teachers were telling believers they needed to add law-keeping to faith in order to be saved. Paul responds forcefully: we are saved by grace alone, and the Spirit produces His own fruit in us (Gal. 5:22-23) — love, joy, peace, and more — as we walk by faith, not by trying to earn God's favor.

Fill in the Blank

1. 'All have sinned and fall short of the _____ of God.' (Romans 3:23)
2. We are '_____ freely by His grace.' (Romans 3:24)
3. 'I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but _____ lives in me.' (Galatians 2:20)
4. Name three of the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23): _____, _____, _____

Talk About It

- Why is it good news that God 'justifies' us freely by grace instead of requiring us to earn it?
- Paul says in Galatians 2:20 that Christ lives in him. What does it look like for Christ to live through you this week?
- The fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23) grows naturally, like fruit on a tree — it's not forced. How is that different from just trying really hard to be good?

MEMORY VERSE

"But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."
— Romans 5:8 (NKJV)

SESSION 7

The Church at Corinth

1 & 2 Corinthians

“And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.”

— 1 Corinthians 13:13 (NKJV)

Big Idea

Paul corrects a messy, divided, immature church at Corinth with patient love, reminding them (and us) that the cross of Christ, not human wisdom or status, is the foundation of the church and the center of real love.

Session Objectives

- Understand the kinds of problems the Corinthian church struggled with, and why Paul had to address them so directly.
- Explain 1 Corinthians 13 in context as a description of real, Christ-like love, not just a wedding verse.
- Understand the importance of the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15.
- See Paul's model of pastoral honesty and grace in 2 Corinthians, especially around suffering and forgiveness.

SESSION 7 — TEACHING OUTLINE (45 MINUTES)

Opening Hook (5 min)

Ask: “Have you ever been part of a group — a team, a class, a friend group — that had a LOT of drama and division?” That’s the church at Corinth: a wealthy, worldly, spiritually gifted but deeply messy church that Paul loves enough to correct honestly.

Point 1: A Church Full of Problems (12 min)

List quickly, using 1 Corinthians: division into rival groups following different leaders (1 Cor. 1:10-13), tolerating serious sin in the church without addressing it (1 Cor. 5), suing each other in pagan courts (1 Cor. 6:1-8), confusion about marriage and singleness (1 Cor. 7), eating food sacrificed to idols and how it affects weaker believers (1 Cor. 8), and chaos in worship gatherings, especially around spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12, 14). Explain: rather than writing them off, Paul patiently corrects them, because he loves the church Christ died for.

Point 2: The Most Excellent Way — Real Love (12 min)

Set up 1 Corinthians 13 in context: right in the middle of Paul’s correction about spiritual gifts (which the Corinthians were using to show off and compete), Paul says there’s ‘a more excellent way’ (1 Cor. 12:31). Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 together slowly: ‘Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up...’ Point out this isn’t a romantic wedding verse first and foremost — it’s a description of how Jesus loved, and a mirror showing us where we fall short. Read 1 Corinthians 13:13, the key verse: faith, hope, and love remain, and love is the greatest.

Point 3: If Christ Is Not Risen... (8 min)

Introduce 1 Corinthians 15, Paul’s great resurrection chapter. Some in Corinth doubted there would be a future resurrection of believers. Read 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 (the Gospel in a nutshell: Christ died, was buried, rose again, according to the Scriptures) and 15:14, 17: ‘if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile... you are still in your sins.’ The resurrection isn’t optional decoration on the Gospel — it IS the Gospel’s proof and power. Close this point with 15:57: ‘thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.’

Point 4: 2 Corinthians — Weakness, Comfort, and a New Creation (8 min)

Explain 2 Corinthians is Paul’s most personal, vulnerable letter, defending his ministry after some in Corinth questioned his authority. Read 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 (God as ‘the God of all comfort’ who comforts us so we can comfort others) and 2 Corinthians 12:9-10, where Paul learns that God’s grace is sufficient and His strength is made perfect in weakness. Read the memory verse, 2 Corinthians 5:17: in Christ, we are a ‘new creation.’

Closing (5 min)

Ask: which of Corinth’s problems (division, pride, misusing gifts, doubting the resurrection) do you see echoes of in your own youth group or friend group? Close in prayer for real, patient, Christ-like love among the group.

Discussion Questions

- Which phrase from 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 is hardest for you to actually live out this week?
- Why does it matter so much that Jesus physically rose from the dead (1 Cor. 15:14, 17)? What would be different if He hadn’t?
- Paul learned that God’s strength is made perfect in weakness (2 Cor. 12:9). Can you think of a time God used a weakness of yours for something good?

SESSION 7 — TEACHER BACKGROUND NOTES

Historical & Cultural Context

AUTHOR & DATE: Paul, writing to the church he had founded in Corinth during his second missionary journey (Acts 18), sent 1 Corinthians from Ephesus (c. AD 53-55) and 2 Corinthians from Macedonia (c. AD 55-56) after further news and a painful visit.

HISTORICAL/CULTURAL CONTEXT: Corinth was a wealthy, cosmopolitan Roman trade city, strategically located on a narrow isthmus connecting two major seaports, which made it a hub of commerce, travel, and cultural mixing — and also of moral looseness; the city was so associated with sexual immorality that the Greek verb 'to Corinthianize' meant to live a debauched life, connected in part to the temple of Aphrodite overlooking the city. Corinthian culture prized rhetorical skill, status, and public displays of wisdom and eloquence, which explains the church's temptation to elevate certain teachers as celebrities (1 Cor. 1-4) and to treat spiritual gifts as a competitive status symbol rather than a means of serving others in love. Roman courts and the patron-client social system meant that lawsuits (1 Cor. 6) were often less about justice and more about public honor and shame, and wealthier citizens generally received favorable treatment — which makes Paul's rebuke of believers suing each other before pagan judges especially pointed. Meat sold in the marketplace (1 Cor. 8, 10) had frequently first been offered in sacrifice at a pagan temple, a normal part of civic and social life in a Greco-Roman city, creating genuine conscience issues for new believers coming out of idol worship. The resurrection of the body (1 Cor. 15) was a strange, even offensive, idea to many Greeks, who in Platonic thought often viewed the physical body as inferior to the spirit and something to escape rather than something to be resurrected and glorified — explaining why some in the Corinthian church doubted a future bodily resurrection even while believing in Christ. Paul's opponents in 2 Corinthians (sometimes called 'super-apostles,' 2 Cor. 11:5) apparently boasted in credentials, eloquence, and personal strength, which is the backdrop for Paul's countercultural boast in his own weaknesses (2 Cor. 11-12).

Timeline

1 Corinthians written c. AD 53-55 from Ephesus during the 3rd journey → 2 Corinthians written c. AD 55-56 from Macedonia

SESSION 7 STUDENT HANDOUT

The Church at Corinth

1 & 2 Corinthians

“And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.”

— 1 Corinthians 13:13 (NKJV)

What We Learned Today

1 and 2 Corinthians are letters from Paul to a wealthy, gifted, but deeply divided and immature church in the city of Corinth. In 1 Corinthians, Paul addresses division, tolerated sin, lawsuits, confusion about marriage, and chaos over spiritual gifts — and in the middle of it all, gives the church (and us) the most beautiful description of real love in the Bible (1 Cor. 13). He also defends the bodily resurrection of Jesus as the non-negotiable foundation of the Gospel (1 Cor. 15). In 2 Corinthians, a more personal letter, Paul defends his ministry, describes God's comfort in suffering, and reminds believers that in Christ, we are a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17).

Fill in the Blank

1. ‘Love suffers long and is _____; love does not envy.’ (1 Corinthians 13:4)
2. ‘And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is _____.’ (1 Cor. 13:13)
3. ‘If Christ is not risen, your faith is _____.’ (1 Corinthians 15:14, 17)
4. ‘If anyone is in Christ, he is a new _____.’ (2 Corinthians 5:17)

Talk About It

- Which phrase from 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 is hardest for you to actually live out this week?
- Why does it matter so much that Jesus physically rose from the dead (1 Cor. 15:14, 17)? What would be different if He hadn't?
- Paul learned that God's strength is made perfect in weakness (2 Cor. 12:9). Can you think of a time God used a weakness of yours for something good?

MEMORY VERSE

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.”

— 2 Corinthians 5:17 (NKJV)

SESSION 8

Christ in All Things

Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon

“And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist... that in all things He may have the preeminence.”

— **Colossians 1:17-18 (NKJV)**

Big Idea

Written from a Roman prison, these four short letters overflow with joy and show that Jesus Christ is supreme over all creation, the church, and every relationship — including the most difficult ones.

Session Objectives

- Recognize these four letters as Paul's 'Prison Epistles' and understand the significance of joy written from chains.
- Explain Ephesians' picture of the church as one body, united in Christ.
- Understand Philippians' call to joy and Christ's humility (the 'Christ hymn' of Phil. 2).
- Explain Colossians' emphasis on the supremacy of Christ over all things.
- Understand Philemon as a real-life picture of the Gospel applied to a broken relationship.

SESSION 8 — TEACHING OUTLINE (45 MINUTES)

Opening Hook (5 min)

Ask: "Where were you when you wrote your happiest letter or text to a friend?" Now reveal: Paul wrote Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon — four letters full of joy, unity, and hope — while chained up in a Roman prison. Circumstances didn't determine Paul's joy; Christ did.

Point 1: Ephesians — One Body in Christ (10 min)

Explain Ephesians 1-3 celebrates all that God has done for us in Christ (chosen, adopted, redeemed, sealed with the Spirit) and Ephesians 4-6 explains how to live it out. Read Ephesians 2:8-10: 'For by grace you have been saved through faith... it is the gift of God, not of works.' Then Ephesians 2:14-16: Christ has broken down the wall of division between Jew and Gentile, making them 'one new man,' one body, the church. Briefly mention the 'armor of God' (Eph. 6:10-18) as how we stand firm in this unity against spiritual attack.

Point 2: Philippians — Joy and Humility (12 min)

Explain Philippians is Paul's 'joy letter' — the words 'joy' and 'rejoice' appear repeatedly despite Paul writing from prison. Read Philippians 4:4: 'Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!' Then teach the 'Christ hymn' of Philippians 2:5-11: Jesus, though He was God, 'made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant ... He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.' Because of this, 'God also has highly exalted Him' and one day every knee will bow. This is the pattern for our own humility (Phil. 2:3-5). Close with the memory verse, Philippians 4:13, in its context of contentment (4:11-12): Paul isn't claiming he can do anything he wants, but that Christ gives him strength to be content in any circumstance.

Point 3: Colossians — Christ Is Supreme (10 min)

Explain false teaching in Colossae was diminishing who Jesus is, mixing in other philosophies and spiritual practices. Paul responds with one of the highest statements about Christ in the Bible. Read Colossians 1:15-17: Jesus is 'the image of the invisible God,' all things were created 'through Him and for Him,' and 'in Him all things consist' (hold together). Read the key verse, Colossians 1:18: Christ has 'the preeminence' (first place) in everything — creation, the church, and our lives. Mention Colossians 3:1-2, 23: since we've been raised with Christ, we set our minds on things above, and whatever we do, we do 'as to the Lord.'

Point 4: Philemon — The Gospel in a Real Relationship (8 min)

Tell the story: Onesimus, a runaway (and possibly thieving) slave belonging to Philemon, a believer, meets Paul in prison and becomes a Christian. Paul sends him back with this short, personal letter, asking Philemon to receive Onesimus back 'no longer as a slave but... a beloved brother' (Philemon 1:16). Read Philemon 1:17-18: Paul offers to pay any debt Onesimus owes — a real-life picture of what Jesus does for us, taking our debt upon Himself so we can be welcomed as family.

Closing (5 min)

Summarize: from a prison cell, Paul shows us Christ who unites us (Ephesians), gives us joy (Philippians), holds all things together and deserves first place (Colossians), and restores broken relationships (Philemon). Close in prayer for joy and unity.

Discussion Questions

- Paul wrote about joy from a prison cell. What does that teach you about where real joy comes from?
- Philippians 2:5-11 shows Jesus humbling Himself. What's one practical way you could 'have this mind' (be humble) this week?
- In Philemon, Paul asks for a slave to be received as a 'beloved brother.' Is there a relationship in your life that needs the Gospel applied to it like this?

SESSION 8 — TEACHER BACKGROUND NOTES

Historical & Cultural Context

AUTHOR & DATE: Paul, writing all four letters during his first Roman imprisonment (c. AD 60-62), likely under a relatively lenient form of house arrest described in Acts 28:16, 30-31, where he was chained to a Roman guard but could receive visitors and write freely.

HISTORICAL/CULTURAL CONTEXT: Roman imprisonment awaiting trial (as opposed to imprisonment as a punishment) could involve being chained continuously to a soldier, who would be rotated in shifts — meaning Paul had a literal captive audience of Roman soldiers hearing the Gospel for months, which may explain his comment in Philippians 1:12-13 that his chains have actually advanced the Gospel, becoming known 'throughout the whole palace guard.' Ephesus (backdrop for Ephesians, though many scholars see it as a circular letter meant for several churches in the region) was religiously diverse, with the temple of Artemis and widespread practice of magic and spiritual power (Acts 19:19) — relevant to Ephesians' strong emphasis on spiritual warfare and Christ's authority over 'principalities and powers' (Eph. 6:12). Philippi, a Roman colony populated significantly by retired military veterans, prized Roman citizenship, status, and rank — which makes Paul's description of Jesus giving up divine status to take the humble 'form of a bondservant' (Phil. 2:6-7) especially countercultural, and his reminder that believers' true 'citizenship is in heaven' (Phil. 3:20) a pointed contrast to Roman civic pride. Colossae, a smaller city in the Lycus Valley, was facing a blend of false teaching (sometimes called the 'Colossian heresy') that mixed Jewish legalism, ascetic practices, and worship of angels or spiritual powers — all of which diminished Christ's unique sufficiency, prompting Paul's soaring statements of Christ's supremacy in Colossians 1. Slavery in the Roman world (the background of Philemon) was widespread and different from later race-based chattel slavery, though still often brutal; a runaway slave like Onesimus could legally be severely punished or even executed by his owner — which makes Paul's request that Philemon receive Onesimus back 'as a brother' (Philemon 1:16), and Paul's offer to personally cover any debt, a radical and costly appeal grounded entirely in the Gospel.

Timeline

Written c. AD 60-62 during Paul's first Roman imprisonment (Acts 28)

SESSION 8 STUDENT HANDOUT

Christ in All Things

Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon

“And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist... that in all things He may have the preeminence.”

— **Colossians 1:17-18 (NKJV)**

What We Learned Today

Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon are known as Paul's 'Prison Epistles,' written while he was in chains in Rome — yet they overflow with joy, hope, and truth. Ephesians describes how Christ saves us by grace and unites Jew and Gentile into one body, the church. Philippians calls believers to rejoice always and to imitate Christ's humility, who humbled Himself even to death on a cross and was then highly exalted. Colossians declares the supremacy of Christ over all creation — 'that in all things He may have the preeminence' (Col. 1:18). Philemon is a short, personal letter asking a slave-owner to forgive and receive back his runaway slave as a brother in Christ — a living picture of the Gospel.

Fill in the Blank

1. 'For by _____ you have been saved through faith... it is the gift of God.' (Ephesians 2:8)
2. 'Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, _____!' (Philippians 4:4)
3. Christ is 'before all things, and in Him all things _____.' (Colossians 1:17)
4. Paul asks Philemon to receive Onesimus back as a beloved _____.

Talk About It

- Paul wrote about joy from a prison cell. What does that teach you about where real joy comes from?
- Philippians 2:5-11 shows Jesus humbling Himself. What's one practical way you could 'have this mind' (be humble) this week?
- In Philemon, Paul asks for a slave to be received as a 'beloved brother.' Is there a relationship in your life that needs the Gospel applied to it like this?

MEMORY VERSE

“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

— Philippians 4:13 (NKJV)

SESSION 9

Waiting for Jesus' Return

1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus

“For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout... and thus we shall always be with the Lord.”

— **1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 (NKJV)**

Big Idea

Paul encourages young churches and young pastors to live faithfully and hopefully while they wait for Jesus' certain return, holding fast to sound teaching from God's Word.

Session Objectives

- Understand the Thessalonian letters' teaching on Christ's return and how believers should live in light of it.
- Understand the 'Pastoral Epistles' (1-2 Timothy, Titus) as Paul's personal instructions for church leadership.
- Explain the importance of Scripture (2 Tim. 3:16-17) and sound doctrine.
- See Paul's example of finishing well (2 Timothy 4:7).

SESSION 9 — TEACHING OUTLINE (45 MINUTES)

Opening Hook (5 min)

Ask: "If you knew for certain that something big and wonderful was going to happen, but not exactly when — how would that change how you live today?" That's exactly the situation of the Thessalonian church, and it's our situation too, waiting for Jesus' return.

Point 1: 1 & 2 Thessalonians — Living in Hope (12 min)

Explain Paul planted the Thessalonian church quickly (Acts 17) and had to leave suddenly due to persecution; he writes to encourage a young, suffering church. Some believers were worried about loved ones who had died before Jesus returned — had they missed out? Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17 (the key verse passage): believers who have died will rise first when Christ returns, then those still alive will be caught up together with them to meet the Lord — 'and thus we shall always be with the Lord.' Read 1 Thessalonians 4:18: 'comfort one another with these words.' Then briefly cover 2 Thessalonians, written shortly after to correct confusion (some thought the day of the Lord had already come) and to encourage steady, faithful work while they wait (2 Thess. 3:10-13).

Point 2: 1 & 2 Timothy — Guarding the Good Deposit (13 min)

Introduce Timothy as Paul's young protege, now a pastor in Ephesus. Explain 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus are called the 'Pastoral Epistles' because they give personal instruction on leading a church. Read 1 Timothy 4:12: 'Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity' — encourage students that God can use them now, not just when they're older. Cover 1 Timothy 3's qualifications for elders/overseers briefly (character matters more than talent). In 2 Timothy, Paul's final letter written near his death, read 2 Timothy 3:16-17, the memory verse: all Scripture is God-breathed and useful for teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness — explain this is one of the clearest verses in the whole Bible on why we trust and study the Bible. Close with 2 Timothy 4:6-8, Paul's remarkable finish line: 'I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith... there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness.'

Point 3: Titus — Good Works Flow from Grace (8 min)

Explain Titus was another of Paul's young coworkers, left on the island of Crete to organize churches there. Read Titus 2:11-14: 'the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness... we should live soberly, righteously, and godly.' Point out the order: grace comes first, and produces good works — good works don't earn grace, they flow from it (this connects back to what we learned in Romans and Galatians).

Closing (7 min)

Summarize: these five letters teach us to live with hope (Thessalonians), to trust and guard God's Word and to serve faithfully whatever our age (Timothy), and to let grace produce good works in us (Titus) — all while we wait for Jesus' certain return. Close in prayer, asking God to help the group live ready and unashamed.

Discussion Questions

- How does knowing Jesus is coming back change the way you think about today?
- Paul told young Timothy not to let anyone look down on him for his age (1 Tim. 4:12). What's one way you can be an example to others right now, at your age?
- Titus 2:11-14 says grace teaches us to live godly lives. How is that different from trying to be good in order to earn grace?

SESSION 9 — TEACHER BACKGROUND NOTES

Historical & Cultural Context

AUTHOR & DATE: Paul wrote 1 & 2 Thessalonians early in his ministry (c. AD 50-51) shortly after founding the church in Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-9). The Pastoral Epistles (1 & 2 Timothy, Titus) come from later in Paul's life, likely after a release from his first Roman imprisonment and a period of further ministry, with 2 Timothy written from a second, harsher imprisonment shortly before his execution (c. AD 66-67, under Emperor Nero).

HISTORICAL/CULTURAL CONTEXT: Thessalonica was a major, prosperous port city and the capital of the Roman province of Macedonia, situated on the important Via Egnatia trade road — its mixed population and strong local emphasis on loyalty to the Roman emperor (the imperial cult) meant that proclaiming Jesus, not Caesar, as Lord and King (as in Acts 17:7) was seen as a politically subversive claim, contributing to persecution against the young church. Confusion about the timing of the 'day of the Lord' addressed in 2 Thessalonians may have been fueled partly by a forged letter claiming to be from Paul (2 Thess. 2:2), showing the early church already had to guard against false teaching attributed to apostolic authority. Timothy pastored in Ephesus, a large, influential city where false teachers were apparently promoting speculative myths and genealogies (1 Tim. 1:3-4) and an overly ascetic teaching that forbade marriage and certain foods (1 Tim. 4:1-3). The qualifications for elders and deacons (1 Tim. 3) reflect the ancient world's concern for household management as a training ground for public leadership — a man's ability to manage his own household well was seen as directly relevant to his fitness to help lead the church, itself often described as God's household or family. Crete, where Titus ministered, had a longstanding, even proverbial, reputation in the ancient world for dishonesty and poor character (Titus 1:12 quotes a Cretan's own poet calling Cretans 'liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons'), context for why Titus needed to appoint qualified elders and establish sound teaching there. Paul's final imprisonment, described with urgency and cold in 2 Timothy 4:9-13, 21 ('bring the cloak... and the books, especially the parchments... do your utmost to come before winter'), reflects the harsher conditions of a capital trial under Nero, near the traditional date of Paul's execution by beheading in Rome.

Timeline

1 & 2 Thessalonians c. AD 50-51 (among Paul's earliest letters) → 1 Timothy & Titus c. AD 62-64 → 2 Timothy c. AD 66-67, Paul's final letter before his death

SESSION 9 STUDENT HANDOUT

Waiting for Jesus' Return

1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus

"For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout... and thus we shall always be with the Lord."

— 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 (NKJV)

What We Learned Today

1 & 2 Thessalonians comfort a young, persecuted church with the hope of Jesus' return, assuring them that believers who have died will rise to meet the Lord together with those still living (1 Thess. 4:13-17), while calling them to steady, faithful living as they wait. 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus, called the 'Pastoral Epistles,' are Paul's personal letters to two young church leaders. They emphasize guarding sound doctrine, godly character in leadership, the God-breathed authority and usefulness of Scripture (2 Tim. 3:16-17), and how God's grace teaches us to live godly lives, with Paul modeling how to finish the Christian race well (2 Tim. 4:7).

Fill in the Blank

1. Believers in Christ will always be _____ the Lord. (1 Thessalonians 4:17)
2. 'Let no one despise your _____, but be an example.' (1 Timothy 4:12)
3. 'All Scripture is given by _____ of God.' (2 Timothy 3:16)
4. Paul said, 'I have fought the good fight, I have finished the _____.' (2 Timothy 4:7)

Talk About It

- How does knowing Jesus is coming back change the way you think about today?
- Paul told young Timothy not to let anyone look down on him for his age (1 Tim. 4:12). What's one way you can be an example to others right now, at your age?
- Titus 2:11-14 says grace teaches us to live godly lives. How is that different from trying to be good in order to earn grace?

MEMORY VERSE

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness."

— 2 Timothy 3:16 (NKJV)

SESSION 10

Jesus, Our Great High Priest

Hebrews

“Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession... let us come boldly to the throne of grace.”

— Hebrews 4:14-16 (NKJV)

Big Idea

Hebrews shows that Jesus is superior to everything in the Old Testament system — angels, Moses, the priesthood, and the sacrifices — because He is the final, perfect, once-for-all sacrifice and High Priest who gives us direct access to God.

Session Objectives

- Understand why Hebrews repeatedly argues that Jesus is 'better' or 'greater' than Old Testament figures and institutions.
- Explain what a high priest did in the Old Testament, and how Jesus fulfills and exceeds that role.
- Understand Hebrews 11 as a 'Hall of Faith' and its connection to persevering in faith.
- See Hebrews' warning passages as calls to hold fast to Christ, not abandon Him.

SESSION 10 — TEACHING OUTLINE (45 MINUTES)

Opening Hook (5 min)

Ask: “Have you ever gone back to something old and familiar because something new felt risky or hard?” Explain: Hebrews was likely written to Jewish believers tempted to drift back to old, familiar Jewish religious practices under pressure and persecution. The author's whole argument: don't go back — Jesus is BETTER than everything you'd be going back to.

Point 1: Better Than Angels, Better Than Moses (10 min)

Read Hebrews 1:1-3: God has spoken fully and finally through His Son, who is 'the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person.' Show how chapters 1-2 argue Jesus is greater than angels (who are merely 'ministering spirits,' Heb. 1:14) and chapter 3 argues Jesus is greater than Moses — Moses was a faithful servant IN God's house, but Christ is the Son OVER God's house (Heb. 3:5-6).

Point 2: A Great High Priest (15 min)

Explain simply what a high priest did in the Old Testament: once a year, on the Day of Atonement, the high priest alone entered the Most Holy Place in the Temple to offer blood sacrifice for the sins of the people (briefly reference Leviticus 16) — but he had to do this every single year, because animal sacrifices could never fully take away sin (Heb. 10:1, 4). Read Hebrews 4:14-16, the key verse: we have a great High Priest, Jesus, who can sympathize with our weaknesses because He was tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin — so we can come BOLDLY to God's throne, not fearfully. Then read Hebrews 9:11-12 and 9:26 (summarize): Christ entered the true Most Holy Place in heaven with His own blood, ONCE, obtaining eternal redemption — no more repeated sacrifices needed. Read Hebrews 10:19-22: because of Jesus' blood, we can enter God's presence with boldness and a clean conscience.

Point 3: The Hall of Faith (10 min)

Introduce Hebrews 11, often called the 'Hall of Faith': Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Moses, and many others who trusted God without seeing the full picture. Read Hebrews 11:1 (faith defined) and 11:6 ('without faith it is impossible to please Him'). Connect directly into Hebrews 12:1-2, the memory verse: since we're surrounded by this great 'cloud of witnesses,' we run our own race, 'looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross.'

Point 4: A Warning to Hold Fast (5 min)

Briefly mention the warning passages scattered through Hebrews (e.g., Heb. 2:1, 6:4-6, 10:26-31) urging readers not to drift away or fall back, but to hold fast to Christ, who alone provides a perfect and permanent salvation.

Closing (5 min)

Ask: what 'old thing' might be tempting you to drift away from wholehearted trust in Jesus? Close in prayer, thanking Jesus for being the perfect, once-for-all sacrifice and High Priest who gives us bold access to God.

Discussion Questions

- Why did the Old Testament sacrifices have to be repeated over and over, but Jesus' sacrifice only needed to happen once (Heb. 10:1, 10:12)?
- Hebrews 4:16 says we can come 'boldly' to God's throne. Does prayer feel bold and confident to you, or fearful? Why?
- Look at Hebrews 12:1-2 — what 'weight' or sin might you need to lay aside to run your race well?

SESSION 10 — TEACHER BACKGROUND NOTES

Historical & Cultural Context

AUTHOR & DATE: The author of Hebrews is unnamed and has been debated since the earliest centuries of the church (suggestions include Paul, Barnabas, Apollos, and others); it was likely written before AD 70, since it discusses the Temple sacrificial system in the present tense without any mention of its destruction by Rome, which would have been an obvious and powerful argument to include had it already happened.

HISTORICAL/CULTURAL CONTEXT: The original audience appears to have been Jewish Christians facing social pressure, persecution, and possibly the temptation to return to traditional Judaism and its Temple worship to avoid further suffering (Heb. 10:32-34 references past persecution they endured). Understanding the Old Testament sacrificial and priestly system is essential background: the Aaronic priesthood (descended from Moses' brother Aaron) mediated between God and Israel, offering regular sacrifices for sin, while the high priest alone entered the innermost sanctuary of the Tabernacle/Temple, the Most Holy Place, once a year on the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) to make atonement for the nation's sins (Lev. 16) — a system requiring constant repetition since animal blood could not actually remove sin (Heb. 10:4), only symbolically cover it until the true sacrifice came. The author's argument about Melchizedek (Heb. 7), a mysterious priest-king from Genesis 14 who blessed Abraham and to whom Abraham paid a tithe, draws on a Jewish tradition of seeing Melchizedek as a type pointing to a priesthood superior to and older than the Levitical priesthood (which didn't yet exist in Abraham's day), supporting the case that Christ's priesthood supersedes the entire Aaronic/Levitical system. Access to the Most Holy Place was so restricted that even the high priest could enter only once a year, with elaborate precautions, underscoring the significance of Hebrews' claim that believers now have direct, ongoing, 'bold' access to God's presence through Christ (Heb. 10:19-22) — and connecting to the historical detail, recorded by early Jewish and Christian sources, that the Temple veil separating the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place tore at the moment of Jesus' death (Matt. 27:51).

Timeline

Author unknown (possibly Apollos, Barnabas, or another apostolic associate); written c. AD 60s, likely before the Temple's destruction in AD 70

SESSION 10 STUDENT HANDOUT

Jesus, Our Great High Priest

Hebrews

“Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession... let us come boldly to the throne of grace.”

— **Hebrews 4:14-16 (NKJV)**

What We Learned Today

Hebrews was written to Jewish believers tempted to abandon Christ and drift back to the old religious system under pressure. The author argues throughout that Jesus is superior to everything that came before Him: greater than angels, greater than Moses, and the perfect and final High Priest. Unlike the Old Testament high priests who had to offer sacrifices again and again, Jesus offered Himself once for all, so that we can come boldly to God's throne of grace (Heb. 4:16). Hebrews 11, the 'Hall of Faith,' celebrates believers throughout history who trusted God without seeing everything, calling us to run our own race of faith 'looking unto Jesus' (Heb. 12:2).

Fill in the Blank

1. We have a great _____ who has passed through the heavens. (Hebrews 4:14)
2. 'Let us come _____ to the throne of grace.' (Hebrews 4:16)
3. 'Without _____ it is impossible to please Him.' (Hebrews 11:6)
4. We run our race 'looking unto Jesus, the author and _____ of our faith.' (Hebrews 12:2)

Talk About It

- Why did the Old Testament sacrifices have to be repeated over and over, but Jesus' sacrifice only needed to happen once (Heb. 10:1, 10:12)?
- Hebrews 4:16 says we can come 'boldly' to God's throne. Does prayer feel bold and confident to you, or fearful? Why?
- Look at Hebrews 12:1-2 — what 'weight' or sin might you need to lay aside to run your race well?

MEMORY VERSE

“Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.”

— Hebrews 12:2 (NKJV)

SESSION 11

Faith That Works

James, 1 & 2 Peter, Jude

“Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.”

— James 2:17 (NKJV)

Big Idea

James, Peter, and Jude write practical letters to scattered, suffering believers, showing that real, saving faith always produces genuine action, endurance, and a guarded devotion to truth.

Session Objectives

- Understand James' teaching that genuine faith produces good works, without contradicting Paul's teaching on grace.
- Explain 1 Peter's message of hope and how to respond to suffering by following Christ's example.
- Understand 2 Peter and Jude's shared warning against false teachers.
- See how these 'General Epistles' apply the Gospel to everyday, practical living.

SESSION 11 — TEACHING OUTLINE (45 MINUTES)

Opening Hook (5 min)

Ask: "If you said you loved basketball but never played, watched, or talked about it, would anyone believe you?" That's James' point about faith: real faith SHOWS itself.

Point 1: James — Faith That Works (12 min)

Introduce James, likely the half-brother of Jesus, writing very practically to Jewish believers scattered by persecution. Read James 1:22: 'be doers of the word, and not hearers only.' Read James 2:14-17 and the key verse, James 2:17: 'faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.' IMPORTANT teaching point: James is not contradicting Paul (Romans/Galatians, session 6) — Paul argues we are saved BY faith, not by works; James argues that real faith ALWAYS produces works. A tree doesn't grow fruit to become a tree; it grows fruit because it IS a tree. Briefly mention James' other practical topics: taming the tongue (James 3), avoiding favoritism (James 2:1-9), and prayer (James 5:13-16).

Point 2: 1 Peter — Hope in Suffering (13 min)

Introduce Peter writing to believers scattered across the Roman Empire (1 Peter 1:1) who are facing suffering and persecution for their faith. Read 1 Peter 1:3-4: we have been born again to a living hope through Christ's resurrection, to an inheritance that can never perish. Read the memory verse, 1 Peter 2:24: Christ bore our sins in His body on the cross so that we could live for righteousness — 'by whose stripes you were healed.' Read 1 Peter 2:21: Christ suffered for us, 'leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps' — we don't just believe in Jesus, we follow His pattern, even through suffering. Close with 1 Peter 5:6-7: humble yourselves, casting all your care upon Him, 'for He cares for you.'

Point 3: 2 Peter & Jude — Guard the Truth (10 min)

Explain that 2 Peter and Jude, written close together and covering similar ground, warn the church against false teachers who were twisting grace into an excuse for sin and denying truth about Christ's return. Read 2 Peter 1:20-21: prophecy didn't come from human will but as men were 'moved by the Holy Spirit' — Scripture is trustworthy. Read 2 Peter 3:9: God is patient, 'not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance' — that's why Jesus hasn't returned yet. Read Jude 1:3: believers must 'contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.' Close with Jude's famous benediction, Jude 1:24-25: God 'is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless... with exceeding joy.'

Closing (10 min)

Summarize: James says real faith acts. Peter says real faith endures suffering with hope, following Christ's example. Jude and 2 Peter say real faith guards the truth against distortion. All four point back to the same Gospel: Christ's suffering and resurrection changes how we live, suffer, and stand firm. Close in prayer for faith that shows itself in action, endurance, and truth.

Discussion Questions

- James says faith without works is dead. How would someone know YOUR faith is alive, just by watching your actions this week?
- 1 Peter 2:21 says Christ left us an example to follow in suffering. What's a hard situation where you could follow His example of trusting God instead of retaliating?
- Jude calls believers to 'contend earnestly for the faith.' What does that look like for a middle schooler today?

SESSION 11 — TEACHER BACKGROUND NOTES

Historical & Cultural Context

AUTHOR & DATE: James, likely the half-brother of Jesus and leader of the Jerusalem church (Acts 15), may have written the earliest book in the New Testament, possibly around AD 44-49. Peter, the apostle, wrote 1 Peter around AD 62-64 and 2 Peter shortly before his death (traditionally under Nero's persecution, c. AD 64-68); Jude, likely another half-brother of Jesus (and brother of James), wrote around the same time, sharing much content with 2 Peter.

HISTORICAL/CULTURAL CONTEXT: James writes 'to the twelve tribes who are scattered abroad' (James 1:1), referring to Jewish Christians dispersed outside Judea, likely due to persecution following Stephen's death (Acts 8:1) — a community facing economic hardship, internal favoritism toward the wealthy (James 2:1-9), and the temptation to see faith as mere intellectual assent divorced from a transformed life. Peter's audience in 1 Peter, scattered across five Roman provinces in Asia Minor (1 Peter 1:1), faced social ostracism, slander, and increasing hostility as the Roman world grew more suspicious of Christians as a strange, exclusive sect that refused to participate in emperor worship and traditional civic religion — a tension that would soon explode into open, state-sponsored persecution under Emperor Nero after the great fire of Rome in AD 64, which Nero blamed on Christians. Peter's own approaching martyrdom (which Jesus had predicted, John 21:18-19, and which Peter references in 2 Peter 1:14) gives added weight to his call to hold fast and follow Christ's example even unto death; church tradition holds that Peter was crucified in Rome, reportedly upside down at his own request, feeling unworthy to die in the same manner as his Lord. The false teachers combated in 2 Peter and Jude appear to have promoted a form of teaching that used the doctrine of grace as a license for immoral living ('turning the grace of our God into lewdness,' Jude 1:4) while also mocking belief in Christ's promised return (2 Peter 3:3-4) — both letters draw on vivid Old Testament examples of judgment (fallen angels, the flood, Sodom and Gomorrah) that would have been well known to a Jewish-background readership as sobering warnings.

Timeline

James c. AD 44-49 (possibly the earliest NT book) → 1 Peter c. AD 62-64 → 2 Peter & Jude c. AD 64-68

SESSION 11 STUDENT HANDOUT

Faith That Works

James, 1 & 2 Peter, Jude

“Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.”

— James 2:17 (NKJV)

What We Learned Today

James, likely Jesus' half-brother, writes a very practical letter insisting that real, saving faith always produces action — 'faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead' (James 2:17). This doesn't contradict salvation by grace through faith alone (Romans/Galatians); it explains that genuine faith naturally bears fruit. 1 Peter encourages believers scattered and suffering for their faith, reminding them of their living hope in Christ's resurrection and calling them to follow Christ's own example through suffering (1 Peter 2:21-24). 2 Peter and Jude both warn the church to guard sound teaching against false teachers, trusting God's patient timing (2 Peter 3:9) and 'contending earnestly for the faith' (Jude 1:3).

Fill in the Blank

1. 'Be doers of the word, and not _____ only.' (James 1:22)
2. 'Faith by itself, if it does not have _____, is dead.' (James 2:17)
3. 'By whose _____ you were healed.' (1 Peter 2:24)
4. Jude calls believers to _____ earnestly for the faith. (Jude 1:3)

Talk About It

- James says faith without works is dead. How would someone know YOUR faith is alive, just by watching your actions this week?
- 1 Peter 2:21 says Christ left us an example to follow in suffering. What's a hard situation where you could follow His example of trusting God instead of retaliating?
- Jude calls believers to 'contend earnestly for the faith.' What does that look like for a middle schooler today?

MEMORY VERSE

“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.”
— 1 Peter 2:24 (NKJV)

SESSION 12

Family Letters from John

1, 2, & 3 John

“In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him... and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”

— 1 John 4:9-10 (NKJV)

Big Idea

John writes warm, personal letters assuring believers they can know for certain they have eternal life, teaching that true faith is shown by walking in the light, obeying God, and loving one another.

Session Objectives

- Understand the false teaching (an early form of Gnosticism) that John is addressing in 1 John.
- Explain John's tests of genuine faith: believing rightly about Christ, obeying God, and loving other believers.
- Understand the assurance of salvation offered in 1 John 5:13.
- See 2 and 3 John as short, personal notes applying truth and love to real relationships.

SESSION 12 — TEACHING OUTLINE (45 MINUTES)

Opening Hook (5 min)

Ask: “How can you know for SURE you’re really saved, not just hoping you are?” That’s exactly why the apostle John, now an old man, writes 1 John. Read 1 John 5:13: ‘These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.’

Point 1: Walking in the Light (10 min)

Explain false teachers (an early form of what became Gnosticism) were claiming special spiritual knowledge while denying that Jesus truly came in the flesh, and claiming to have no sin. Read 1 John 1:5-7: ‘God is light and in Him is no darkness at all... if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.’ Read the memory verse, 1 John 1:9: ‘If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us.’ Emphasize: John isn’t teaching sinless perfection, but honest confession and ongoing fellowship with God.

Point 2: Three Tests of Real Faith (15 min)

Walk through John’s three repeated ‘tests’ that show someone truly knows God: (1) THE BELIEF TEST — read 1 John 4:2-3 and 1 John 2:22-23: true believers confess Jesus Christ has come in the flesh and is the Son of God; anyone who denies this denies both the Father and the Son. (2) THE OBEDIENCE TEST — read 1 John 2:3-6: ‘Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments.’ Obedience isn’t how we earn salvation; it’s evidence we truly know the One who saved us. (3) THE LOVE TEST — read 1 John 4:7-8 and the key verse, 1 John 4:9-10: God showed His love by sending His Son as ‘the propitiation for our sins’ (explain: the sacrifice that satisfies God’s righteous judgment against sin). Read 1 John 4:19-21: ‘We love Him because He first loved us... he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?’

Point 3: Two Short, Personal Notes (10 min)

Introduce 2 John, a short letter warning ‘the elect lady’ (likely a local church) to watch out for false teachers who deny Christ came in the flesh, while still walking in truth and love (2 John 1:4-6). Introduce 3 John, John’s warmest, most personal letter, praising Gaius for his hospitality to traveling teachers (3 John 1:5-8) and confronting Diotrephes, a church leader who loved ‘to have the preeminence’ and was mistreating others (3 John 1:9-10) — a real, honest picture of church conflict and John’s call to do ‘good’ rather than evil (3 John 1:11).

Closing (5 min)

Read 1 John 5:11-13 again as a class. Ask: can you say with confidence that you have eternal life through Jesus? Close in prayer, asking God to help the group believe rightly, obey genuinely, and love one another as evidence of real faith.

Discussion Questions

- John says confession, not pretending to be sinless, is the path to ongoing fellowship with God (1 John 1:9). Is it hard for you to admit when you’re wrong? Why?
- Of John’s three tests — right belief, obedience, and love — which one is hardest for you personally right now?
- 1 John 4:19 says ‘we love because He first loved us.’ How does knowing God loved you FIRST change the way you try to love others?

SESSION 12 — TEACHER BACKGROUND NOTES

Historical & Cultural Context

AUTHOR & DATE: The apostle John, writing from Ephesus in his old age (c. AD 85-95), around the same period as his Gospel, addressing churches in the region of Asia Minor that he had long overseen.

HISTORICAL/CULTURAL CONTEXT: The false teaching John combats reflects an early form of what would develop into Gnosticism, a movement (fully developed in the 2nd century) that held matter/the physical world was evil and only spirit was good — leading some teachers to deny that the divine Christ could have truly taken on physical human flesh (a heresy called Docetism, from a Greek word meaning 'to seem,' since they claimed Jesus only 'seemed' to have a physical body), and leading others to claim that since only the spiritual mattered, what one did in the physical body (including sin) was irrelevant to one's spiritual standing. This explains John's emphatic, almost eyewitness-courtroom opening in 1 John 1:1-3 (that which we have heard, seen with our eyes, looked upon, and our hands have handled) insisting on Jesus' real physical presence, and his strong warning in 1 John 1:8, 10 against claiming to be without sin. Hospitality in the ancient Greco-Roman and Jewish world was a significant social and religious duty, especially important for supporting traveling teachers and missionaries who depended on local believers for lodging and provision as they moved between towns without the modern option of hotels — explaining why 3 John praises Gaius for his hospitality (3 John 1:5-8) and why Diotrephes' refusal to welcome traveling brothers, and his intimidation of those who did, was such a serious offense (3 John 1:9-10). 'The elect lady' addressed in 2 John is understood by many scholars as a figurative reference to a local church and her 'children' as its members, a natural metaphor in a culture where household and family language was often used to describe community relationships and the church itself.

Timeline

Written c. AD 85-95 from Ephesus, around the same time as John's Gospel

SESSION 12 STUDENT HANDOUT

Family Letters from John

1, 2, & 3 John

"In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him... and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins."

— 1 John 4:9-10 (NKJV)

What We Learned Today

The apostle John, likely very old when he wrote these letters, addresses false teaching that denied Jesus truly came in human flesh and that claimed believers could be sinless. 1 John gives believers confidence that they can KNOW they have eternal life (1 John 5:13) through three repeated tests of genuine faith: right belief about Jesus Christ, obedience to God's commands, and love for other believers — all rooted in God's own love, shown when He sent His Son to be the sacrifice for our sins (1 John 4:9-10). 2 John warns a local church to guard truth while walking in love; 3 John, John's most personal letter, commends hospitality and confronts a prideful church leader, showing how truth and love work out in real relationships.

Fill in the Blank

1. 'If we _____ our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us.' (1 John 1:9)
2. 'By this we know that we know Him, if we keep His _____.' (1 John 2:3)
3. 'We love Him because He first _____ us.' (1 John 4:19)
4. John wrote 1 John so that believers may _____ they have eternal life. (1 John 5:13)

Talk About It

- John says confession, not pretending to be sinless, is the path to ongoing fellowship with God (1 John 1:9). Is it hard for you to admit when you're wrong? Why?
- Of John's three tests — right belief, obedience, and love — which one is hardest for you personally right now?
- 1 John 4:19 says 'we love because He first loved us.' How does knowing God loved you FIRST change the way you try to love others?

MEMORY VERSE

"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."
— 1 John 1:9 (NKJV)

SESSION 13

The King Returns

Revelation

“I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End,’ says the Lord, ‘who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.’”

— Revelation 1:8 (NKJV)

Big Idea

Revelation unveils the risen, glorified Jesus Christ as the sovereign King who will judge evil, defeat Satan forever, and make all things new — giving hope and courage to a church living between the cross and the coming Kingdom.

Session Objectives

- Understand Revelation as a book meant to reveal (not hide) Jesus Christ's glory and give hope to a persecuted church.
- See Jesus' glorified appearance in Revelation 1 and His messages to the seven churches.
- Understand the big picture: God's total victory over evil and Satan's final defeat.
- Land on the hope of the New Heaven and New Earth as the goal of the whole Bible's story.

SESSION 13 — TEACHING OUTLINE (45 MINUTES)

Opening Hook (5 min)

Ask: “If you flip to the very last page of a book before you finish it, and see that everything turns out okay in the end — does that change how you feel reading the hard parts in the middle?” That’s exactly what Revelation does for us. It’s the last book of the Bible, and it shows us how the story ends: Jesus wins.

Point 1: A Revelation of Jesus Christ (10 min)

Read Revelation 1:1 — note the title is ‘The Revelation of Jesus Christ,’ not ‘revelations’ (plural) or a puzzle to fear, but an unveiling, a pulling back the curtain to reveal Christ’s glory. Read Revelation 1:12-16 (the vision of the glorified Jesus — hair white as wool, eyes like flame, feet like bronze, voice like rushing waters, a sword from His mouth, face shining like the sun) and John’s response in 1:17 (he ‘fell at His feet as dead’). Read the key verse, Revelation 1:8: Jesus is ‘the Alpha and the Omega’ — the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet — meaning He is the beginning and end of all things, sovereign over all history.

Point 2: Letters to Seven Real Churches (10 min)

Explain Revelation 2-3 contains Jesus’ personal messages to seven real churches in Asia Minor — some faithful, some struggling. Briefly mention Ephesus (had left their first love, 2:4), Smyrna (suffering but told ‘be faithful until death,’ 2:10), and Laodicea (lukewarm, neither hot nor cold, 3:15-16). Read Revelation 3:20: ‘Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in.’ Point out: Jesus still speaks directly and personally to real churches and real believers today, commending and correcting in love.

Point 3: The Throne Room and the Lamb (8 min)

Briefly describe Revelation 4-5: John is taken up to see God’s throne room in heaven, worship happening around God’s throne (4:8, 11), and then a search for who is worthy to open a sealed scroll. No one is found worthy — until Revelation 5:5-6 reveals ‘the Lion of the tribe of Judah’ who appears as ‘a Lamb as though it had been slain.’ Explain: the Lion (power, kingship) and the Lamb (sacrifice) are the SAME Jesus — He conquered by dying. Read the song of Revelation 5:9-10, 12: ‘Worthy is the Lamb who was slain.’

Point 4: Victory and a New Creation (12 min)

Explain (without getting lost in every symbolic detail) that the middle chapters of Revelation depict escalating judgment on a rebellious world and Satan’s opposition to God and His people, but the outcome is never in doubt. Read Revelation 19:11-16 (Jesus returns as the conquering King on a white horse, ‘KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS’) and Revelation 20:10 (Satan is thrown into the lake of fire, defeated forever). Then land on the glorious conclusion: read Revelation 21:1-4, the memory verse passage — a new heaven and new earth, and God Himself dwelling with His people, wiping away every tear, with ‘no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying... for the former things have passed away.’ Close with Revelation 22:20: ‘Surely I am coming quickly.’ Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

Closing & Course Wrap-Up (5 min)

Zoom out: over 13 sessions we’ve traveled from Matthew’s promised King to Revelation’s returning King — the whole New Testament is one unified story pointing to Jesus Christ, Savior of the world (echo Luke 24:27, session 1’s Bible layout diagram). Close in prayer, thanking Jesus that the story ends not in defeat, but in His total victory and the restoration of all things, and asking Him to help each person live with hope until He returns.

Discussion Questions

- Knowing that Jesus wins in the end — how should that change the way you face hard things this week?
- Jesus says to Laodicea, ‘I stand at the door and knock’ (Rev. 3:20). Is there an area of your life where you’ve kept the door partly closed to Him?
- Looking back over all 13 sessions, what’s one truth about Jesus that has stuck with you most?

SESSION 13 — TEACHER BACKGROUND NOTES

Historical & Cultural Context

AUTHOR & DATE: The apostle John, exiled to the small island of Patmos in the Aegean Sea 'for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ' (Rev. 1:9), likely during increasing pressure on Christians under Emperor Domitian around AD 95.

HISTORICAL/CULTURAL CONTEXT: Patmos was a small, rocky island used by Rome as a place of exile for political and religious troublemakers, which tells us John's exile was a form of punishment for his Christian witness. By the later first century, emperor worship (the imperial cult) had grown significantly, especially in the province of Asia where the seven churches were located; refusing to participate in required acts of civic worship toward the emperor (viewed as a matter of political loyalty, not just religion, in the Roman mind) marked Christians as suspicious, disloyal, and increasingly subject to social exclusion, economic pressure, and at times violent persecution — the backdrop for Revelation's letters to real, struggling churches and its climactic vision of Christ's ultimate victory over worldly power. Revelation belongs to a genre called 'apocalyptic literature,' which was familiar to Jewish and early Christian readers (portions of Daniel and Ezekiel share this style) and uses vivid, often symbolic imagery — numbers, colors, creatures, and cosmic events — to communicate spiritual truth and encourage persecuted readers, rather than functioning as a literal newspaper-style forecast; understanding this genre helps readers avoid over-literalizing every image while still trusting the book's clear, repeated core message of Christ's certain victory. The seven churches (Rev. 2-3) were real, existing congregations in the Roman province of Asia connected by a circular postal/trade route, and each church's message often reflects details specific to its city (for example, Laodicea was known for wealth, a famous eye-salve industry, and lukewarm water piped in from a distance, illuminating the 'lukewarm' rebuke of Rev. 3:15-16, and for being self-sufficient enough to decline Roman disaster relief after an earthquake, matching its self-satisfied claim to 'need nothing' in Rev. 3:17). The imagery of the Lamb who was slain yet stands (Rev. 5:6) draws on Passover lamb symbolism from the Exodus and Isaiah's suffering servant (Isaiah 53), tying Revelation's climax back to the very beginning threads of the Old Testament and the whole biblical storyline this 13-session survey has traced.

Timeline

Written c. AD 95, during the reign of Emperor Domitian, while John was exiled on the island of Patmos (Rev. 1:9)

SESSION 13 STUDENT HANDOUT

The King Returns

Revelation

“I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End,’ says the Lord, ‘who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.’”

— Revelation 1:8 (NKJV)

What We Learned Today

Revelation, written by the apostle John while exiled on the island of Patmos, is not primarily a puzzle to decode but an 'unveiling' of the glorified, victorious Jesus Christ (Rev. 1:1). John sees Christ in overwhelming glory (Rev. 1:12-16) and records His personal messages to seven churches (Rev. 2-3). In heaven's throne room, only Jesus — the Lion of Judah who is also the slain Lamb — is found worthy to open God's scroll (Rev. 5). Despite escalating judgment and conflict with evil throughout the book, the ending is certain: Jesus returns as King of Kings, Satan is defeated forever, and God makes all things new, dwelling forever with His people in a world with no more death, sorrow, or crying (Rev. 21:1-4). The New Testament's story, which began with a promised King in Matthew, ends with that same King reigning forever.

Fill in the Blank

1. 'I am the _____ and the Omega... says the Lord.' (Revelation 1:8)
2. 'Behold, I stand at the door and _____.' (Revelation 3:20)
3. Jesus is both the Lion of Judah and the _____ who was slain. (Revelation 5:5-6)
4. In the new creation, there will be no more death, nor sorrow, nor _____. (Rev. 21:4)

Talk About It

- Knowing that Jesus wins in the end — how should that change the way you face hard things this week?
- Jesus says to Laodicea, 'I stand at the door and knock' (Rev. 3:20). Is there an area of your life where you've kept the door partly closed to Him?
- Looking back over all 13 sessions, what's one truth about Jesus that has stuck with you most?

MEMORY VERSE

“God Himself will be with them and be their God... and there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying... for the former things have passed away.”

— Revelation 21:3-4 (NKJV)