

Trek Bible Summaries, Year 1

Matthew

Theme: Christ the King

Author: Matthew

Key Verses: Matthew 16:15-16

Date: About A.D. 50

Matthew presents Jesus Christ as the King of Israel. His Gospel begins with a genealogy of Jesus through His legal father, Joseph, which goes all the way back to Abraham. This demonstrates His right to the throne of Israel through David. Matthew also shows how Christ fulfilled many Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah, including:

- His virgin birth
- His birth in Bethlehem
- His travel to Egypt
- His miracles
- His arrival in Jerusalem on a donkey

Matthew quotes from the Hebrew Scriptures repeatedly. The book was written to assure Jews who had believed in Jesus Christ that their faith was not in vain. He really is the Messiah, and someday He will return to set up the promised kingdom.

John

Theme: Christ the Son of God

Author: John

Key Verses: John 20:30-31

Date: A.D. 85-90

The apostle John gives a straightforward reason for writing his Gospel: *But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name (John 20:31)*. While the other three Gospels cover many of the same events (each with its own thematic emphasis), John describes different events to present Jesus as the Messiah, the Word made flesh, and the Son of God. Believe is the key word.

Seven key miracles are recorded:

- Turning water into wine (John 2:1-11)
- Healing the official's son (4:43-54)
- Healing the lame man by the pool of Bethesda (5:1-9)
- Feeding 5,000 people (6:1-13)
- Walking on water (6:16-20)
- Healing the blind man (9:1-7)
- Raising Lazarus from the dead (11:1-44)

John, in Chapters 13-16, gives us the Lord's teaching of His disciples about His death and the coming of the Holy Spirit. The book closes with an account of Jesus Christ's prayer in the garden, arrest, trial, death, resurrection, and last instructions to His disciples.

Romans

Theme: The Righteousness of God

Author: Paul

Key Verse: Romans 5:8

Date: A.D. 58

Romans was written during the apostle Paul's third visit to Corinth. It contains the most detailed explanation of the newly-revealed gospel of Christ. Although he had not yet visited the church in Rome, the apostle had heard of the believers' great faith in Christ, and he anticipated visiting them soon. Paul's major concern was to establish them firmly in the truth of his gospel. (Paul refers to it as his gospel because he was appointed by God to be the minister of this new message.) He explains it in a logical, step-by-step method.

- Humanity is sinful and separated from God. We are His enemies and deserve death.
- We are powerless and incapable of solving this problem, and we cannot obtain salvation by observing the law.
- God stepped in and offered His solution — His Son, Jesus Christ.
- We access this solution by faith — by simply believing that Christ's death is sufficient to pay for our sinfulness.
- When we do this, we are no longer slaves to sin. Christ is in us and nothing can separate us from Him.
- We still carry around our sin-corrupted bodies for now, and we still sin.
- But it's not about us anymore. *There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death (Romans 8:1-2)*.
- But what about the Jews? God made them many promises in the Old Testament. Those promises will still be fulfilled. In Chapter 11, Paul makes the following points: 1) A small number of Jews were still being saved as members of the Body of Christ; 2) Israel's rejection of Christ was not a surprise to God; 3) The Gentiles should realize that Israel's current situation is part of God's plan; 4) Israel has been cut off from the olive tree (Christ) but they will be grafted back in (Romans 11:23-24); 5) All of God's promises will be fulfilled in the future and Israel will resume its place as God's chosen people.

In the final five chapters of Romans, Paul explains how we should live in the light of all he's just explained.

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Ephesians

Theme: Christian Standing

Author: Paul

Key Verses: Ephesians 2:8-9

Date: A.D. 61

Paul visited Ephesus during his second and third missionary journeys. He wrote this letter to the believers there, but he also wanted it to be passed around to other churches in the area. This is the first of four Prison Epistles, which he wrote while imprisoned in Rome. The other Prison Epistles are Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. Ephesians contains the deepest truths about the Church and the believer's wonderful position in Christ. The first three chapters show the believer's standing in Christ. This standing is unalterable, whether the believer is strong or weak. Paul explains that believers are:

- Blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ (Ephesians 1:3).
- Adopted as God's sons (1:5).
- Forgiven of all sins (1:7).
- Sealed by the Holy Spirit (1:13).
- Alive in Christ by grace (2:5).
- Members of the Body of Christ (3:6).
- Able to approach God with freedom and confidence (3:12).

Because of this wonderful truth, the last three chapters instruct the believer on how he should live the Christian life. Paul encourages the readers to ... *walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called (Ephesians 4:1)*. He then goes into detail about what this looks like. Chapter 6 describes the believer's conflict with the forces of darkness.

Philippians

Theme: Christian Joy

Author: Paul

Key Verses: Philippians 2:2

Date: A.D. 61

Paul visited Philippi on his second missionary journey. When he wrote this letter to the Philippians, he was under house arrest in Rome. One of his reasons for writing was to thank the believers for sending him a gift. He also wanted to encourage believers who were being persecuted. Paul wrote about his imprisonment and how he was still able to spread the gospel. Paul stated that he did not know whether he would live on for a while and continue his ministry or die and be with the Lord. Whatever was to occur, he wasn't worried. His rejoicing wasn't an act — He only wanted Christ to be glorified. He told the Philippians to follow his example, to lay aside their worries, rejoice, pray and be content with God's provision in all circumstances. Paul also urged his readers to be humble and show interest in other's needs, not just their own. By doing so, they would follow the example of Christ, who humbled Himself and came to earth as a servant to die for our sins. Paul was a man of status and achievement before he was saved, but he made it clear that his past life was worth nothing compared to knowing Christ. His goal was to know Christ more.

Colossians

Theme: The Preeminence of Christ

Author: Paul

Key Verses: Colossians 1:17-18

Date: Around A.D. 61

Colossae was a small city not far from Ephesus. As far as we know, Paul never visited — the church was likely founded by those, like Epaphras, who heard the apostle speak in the larger city. During his first imprisonment in Rome, Paul received word that the church members were being attacked by those with ... *plausible arguments (Colossians 2:4)*. Some Colossian believers had been attracted to angel worship, while others had fallen back into legalism. Paul urges them to stay focused on Jesus Christ. *Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. For in Him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in Him, who is the head of all rule and authority (Colossians 2:6-10)*.

As he did in Ephesians, Paul encourages the Christians to live in a manner that reflects who they are in Christ. *If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth (Colossians 3:1-2)*.

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Hebrews

Theme: Christ's Sufficiency

Author: Unknown (though many believe it was the apostle Paul)

Key Verses: Hebrews 4:14-16

Date: A.D. 64

Hebrews is addressed to the Jewish believers of the first century. They had been brought up in the Jewish religion, based on the Old Testament, with its rituals and sacrifices and prophecies about the coming Messiah who would restore the nation to its land. Many of them believed in God as revealed in the Old Testament — some of them even believed that Jesus Christ was the promised Messiah. They did what they were told to do. They had faith in God and obeyed His commands.

Now Paul was saying that Israel had been set aside for a time and that a new body of believers known as the Church was being assembled. The promised kingdom hadn't arrived and the believers in Jerusalem were in pretty bad shape. The Jews needed to understand how things had changed and to be encouraged to remain faithful to Christ. The Holy Spirit inspired the writer to explain the new circumstances. He systematically demonstrates the superiority of Christ over the old Jewish system. Here are just a few of the comparisons (there are many others):

- Superior messenger — Under the law, God spoke through the prophets. Now He has spoken through His Son (Hebrews 1:1-20).
- Superior priesthood — Under the law, priests had to offer sacrifices because they were men with sin natures just like everyone else. Now Jesus is our eternal priest (7:24-25).
- Superior altar — Under the law, the priests offered sacrifices in the Holy of Holies. Now we have an altar in Christ's sacrifice apart from the Jewish tabernacle (13:10, 12).
- Superior blood — Under the law, the blood of goats and bulls was shed over and over to cover sins temporarily. Now the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us forever (9:14).

The writer shows how this new message was part of God's eternal plan. It was hidden in the Old Testament, but now that it has been revealed, we can look back at the events of the Old Testament and see how they point to Christ. Hebrews 13:20-21 reveals the purpose of the new covenant: *so that ... the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ ...*

The book also includes many warnings to the Jews not to shrink back, through unbelief or slothfulness, into their former beliefs and practices. Rather, through faith and confidence in the perfect sacrifice of Christ, they were admonished to go forward into maturity and usefulness.

James

Theme: Living Your Faith

Author: James

Key Verse: James 1:22

Date: A.D. 42

Like Hebrews, the book of James was written to Jews. James, the half brother of Jesus Christ, was one of the leaders of the Jewish assembly in Jerusalem. He was writing to Jews who lived in other countries, many of them forced to leave because of persecution. The book has a very Jewish feel, with references to Abraham, the synagogue and the law. James and his audience believed in the risen Christ, of course, but there is no mention of what the cross means.

James was most likely the first New Testament book, written long before the apostle Paul wrote any of his letters explaining the gospel that was entrusted to him for the Gentiles. When we read James, we need to remember that it was written to the Jews (just as we do when we read the requirements of the law in the Old Testament). But there is a great deal of practical application in the book for the Jews and for us. For example:

- Find comfort in spiritual, not physical, things (James 1:9-11).
- Don't favor the rich over the poor (2:1-4).
- Control your mouth and you'll have a better chance of controlling your body (3:6).
- Avoid the world and its temptations (4:4).
- Remember that every day could be your last (4:13-17).

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1 Peter

Theme: Suffering and Glory

Author: Peter

Key Verse: 1 Peter 2:24

Date: A.D. 60

Peter sent his first letter to believing Jews who were suffering persecution for their faith. He begins with an explanation of why they experienced hard times. *In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:6-7).* The rest of the letter tells the believers how they should respond in the face of their suffering.

- Without fear, and with a clear conscience, be ready to explain why you believe what you believe (1 Peter 3:13-16).
- If you suffer for your testimony of Christ, don't be ashamed but praise God for the privilege (4:12-16).
- Stand firm against Satan's attacks, assured that they restore you to strength (5:6-10).

2 Peter

Theme: The Faithfulness of Christ

Author: Peter

Key Verse: 2 Peter 3:9

Date: A.D. 66

Not long after Peter wrote his first letter, he wrote a second one to the same audience with a different purpose. False teachers were corrupting the truth and influencing the believers. *These are waterless springs and mists driven by a storm. For them the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved. For, speaking loud boasts of folly, they entice by sensual passions of the flesh those who are barely escaping from those who live in error. They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption. For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved (2 Peter 2:17-19).*

Peter encouraged his readers to:

- Grow in their faith (2 Peter 1:5-8).
- Pay attention to God's Word (1:16-21).
- Be ready for the Lord's return (3:9-10).
- Be on guard against false doctrine (3:17-18).

Revelation

Theme: Eternal Triumph

Author: John

Key Verse: Revelation 1:1

Date: Around A.D. 95

Through an angel, the Lord revealed to John a picture of events that would mark the end of the world as we know it and the manifestation of the kingdom of God. These events, while prophecies in their own right, give further details about other prophecies that appear throughout Scripture. As the end approaches, the world will become a place of unspeakable evil and misery. God will judge all sin and make things right. Satan will meet his final doom. Revelation depicts Jesus Christ in all His power and glory. It tells how He will return to conquer evil and set up His rule on the new heaven and new earth.

John opens with letters to seven churches. Each church is commended for the good it has done, counselled to clean up those things it has done wrong, and given promises for the future.

The book then describes the horrors of God's judgments on sinful man through the seven seals and the seven bowls. These are followed with a description of the Lord's second coming to earth and the final judgments of Satan and unbelievers. There are a lot of very frightening scenes in Revelation — because God is a God of justice. But He's also a God of grace and He had John write: ... *And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price (Revelation 22:17).*

In Chapters 21 and 22, we see how humans will finally realize the purpose for which we were created — to love, worship and enjoy the Lord in perfect fellowship forever.