

Day 350

Paul's Letter to the Philippians

Philippians 1.1 – 4.23

Paul's letter to the Philippians is one of the most personal of Paul's letters to a church, and one of the least controversial. Apart from one appeal to two women at the end of the epistle, there is no major issue Paul has to take up with them.

Philippi was a city somewhat inland from the sea, facing across to Asia on the other side of the Aegean. It was named for the father of Alexander the Great, but became a Roman colony around thirty years before Christ's birth.

The story of the Philippian church's foundation is found in Acts 16. Here the first believer on the European continent was Lydia, and here Paul and Silas ended up in jail for silencing the demon in the slave girl.

The letter is assumed to have been written from Rome, hence Paul's mentioning the household of Caesar in the last chapter. Some argument has been put forward for it having been written earlier from Ephesus, but most commentators agree a date of around 61-62ad when Paul was under house arrest awaiting his appeal to Caesar to be heard.

A recurring theme in the letter is joy, as well as love for the body. Paul also refers to the support he has received financially from the Philippians, which has been a lifeline to him.

Phil. 1.1-2 Paul opens by greeting those who are uniquely God's, the holy, set-apart ones in Philippi. Paul does not mention this time his office as an emissary of Jesus (Greek ἀπόστολος *apóstolos*) but does greet particularly the overseers (Greek ἐπίσκοποι *epískopi*, from which the English derives *bishop*.) and the servants (Greek διάκονοι *dhiákonoi*, from which English derives *deacon*.) It is worth noting here that in Philippi, not a large city, there is a *plurality* of overseers, not one. The later ecclesiastical practice of one bishop over a city or region was a later development, not reflected in the New Testament practice. In Acts 20, Paul refers to the Elders of Ephesus also as overseers, indicating the plurality of this office in one church. He invokes on the church the customary grace and peace of God.

Phil. 1.3-11 Paul is fulsome and warm in his blessings to the Philippians. They provoke joy in him, and compassion. He acknowledges that they are participators (Greek συγκοινωνοί *synkinoní*, co-fellowshippers) in the grace he experiences, a reference to their practical support, perhaps. And his prayer is for their increase in fruitfulness, that Jesus may be made more famous through them.

Phil. 1.12-14 Far from being cramped by his confinement in prison, Paul says word has spread throughout Caesar's court about why he is there and more than that, other believers have been emboldened to speak out because of his example.

Phil. 1.15-18 There are those in Rome who are preaching Jesus' word out of contention with Paul, hoping to make his situation worse, and there are those who are preaching Jesus who love Paul and want to see him freed. What excites Paul is that, whatever the motive, Jesus is being

proclaimed! This should give food for thought for those who seek to compete with others in preaching the good news – competition is never necessary!

Phil.1.19 – 26 Paul is sure of rescue through the prayer of the Philippians one way or another. If he lives, he will continue to live Christ to all. If he should die, this would be even better, for he would be with his Lord face to face. His life has been in danger so many times, he has a longing for the resurrection and being with the Lord, which is so much better. However, Paul realises how helpful it would be to them for him not to go to the Lord just yet, and so he looks to come to them again to increase their joy and confidence in the Lord.

Phil.1 27 – 2.2 But whether he comes or not, he wants them to strong in the Lord and maintain their position in the face of adversity, for they may be called on to suffer as Paul has, which is all part of the journey of faith. Paul urges them not to bend in fear before their enemies, but to give them the sign that their hatred will in the end be overcome by Christ's love, a love which will also hold them together, if they will keep close and open, working in an irenic spirit with each other, which Paul longs for them to do.

Phil.2.3-11 Paul here pens one of the most beautiful and awesome summaries of Christ's life, death, resurrection and glory. He does this to spur the readers to humility and self-giving love, so essential to a community under attack from hostile outsiders. He commends Jesus to them, who while He is God does not grasp for equality with God, but *empties himself* (Greek ἐαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν *eautón ekénosen*) and takes the form of a slave (perhaps Paul had in mind the washing of his disciples' feet?) , humbling himself even to the place of death on a cross. For this reason, because of His self-emptying, the Father has raised Him up, and given Him the name above all; at the name of Jesus, all will concede finally that He is *Kýrios*, Lord. (Jesus is Lord was the formula of faith common to believers – see Roms. 10.9) This will bring greater fame and honour to God the Father.

Phil.2.12-13 In imitation of Jesus, and even when Paul is not around to encourage them, they should be living as those rescued by Christ, in awe of what God has done for them, the One who is also working now in them to bring His purpose to fulfilment.

Phil.2.14-18 Paul's greatest joy would come from knowing that, even if he is called to lay down his life, it would be on an altar of their love and service of Christ, shining like lamps in the dark world, living harmless and blameless in the world. Then they would have cause to be joyful with him, even if it comes to the supreme sacrifice.

Phil.2.19-24 Paul is going to send to them his beloved Timothy, to whom he has no one equal, who will put Jesus Christ's glory first in his life. Paul hopes to have some news of them, but still wants to come himself if the opportunity arises.

Phil.2.25-30 Paul is also sending them back Epaphroditos, or Epaphras, a Philippian who has brought aid to Paul, but who seems to have suffered illness and been near death. This brother's love for his fellow believers was such that he was concerned at how much pain they would be in with worry over his illness! The Lord has healed him, however, sparing Paul even more grief, and now he can come to them as he desires.

Phil.3.1 Otherwise, Paul says, rejoice in the Lord ! He is not tired of telling them this again and again, and he can't go wrong with this counsel.

Phil.3.2-4a Just as with Jesus, the people for whom Paul reserves his most caustic words are the religious who mask God's grace behind the pious externalism of tradition. In this case, it is the Judaisers, those who acknowledge the Messiah but impose the law of Moses, particularly the rite of circumcision as necessary to salvation who earn Paul's anger. He calls them dogs (Greek κύων *kýon*) which is one of the basest words a Jew can use of another person, and evil, those who want to cut the flesh but not change the heart. Paul uses a word here which means 'cut up' or 'butchering' (Greek κατατομή *katatomée*) in place of the normal word for circumcision, which is related, and means 'to cut around' (Greek περιτομή *peritomée*), to indicate that all the Judaisers are interested in is the external operation of the rite, but not the inner change of the heart which is needed. The true worship, however, is in the Spirit of God, putting full trust in Jesus Christ with no reliance on any outward mark or sign, even though Paul himself would have the advantage of having been circumcised to rely on.

Phil.4b – 6 Paul of all people is well-placed to boast about his outward conformity to the law, being a true Jew, and a Pharisee to boot, one who took his loyalty as far as to hound and harm the church of Jesus Christ at first, thinking himself faultless under the *Torah* rule.

Phil.3.7-11 Yet all this externalism has been a waste of time in terms of a real relationship with Jesus Christ, for whom he has turned his back on that way of living. In fact, he treats all that former life as dog-food (Greek σκύβαλον *skýbhalon*, three Greek words run together, *eis* meaning to, *kýon* meaning dog, and *bhállō* meaning 'I throw'), as swill and refuse – for dogs in ancient times were scavengers, living on waste dumps. He sees it this way to put it in perspective against the inestimable value of knowing Christ, living in God's *right-wise-ness*, rather than reliant on his own. Paul wants only to go the way of Jesus, the way of the cross, for he knows it will lead to the joy of resurrection with Him.

Phil.3.12-16 Paul acknowledges that he is still a work in progress, stretching forward to complete what Jesus has already purposed for him. He doesn't see himself as having reached the goal yet, but his sights are set on its achievement, the joy of heaven and the completion of his call. This kind of evaluation is a mark of maturity, and he invites others who might see it differently to join him in this assessment of what really matters.

Phil.3.17- 4.1 Paul commends the example he gave them, by calling them to be 'fellow imitators' (Greek συμμιμηταί *symmimētaí*) with those who keep to the way of life he has demonstrated to them. All around them are those living Christless, pointless lives, provoking sadness in Paul. They worship consumption, and what they think is splendid is in fact tawdry, they are tethered and earthbound. By contrast, the society which believers belong to is not of this world, but its principle is heavenly, rooted in the unseen realm. Until His coming, Jesus is working in His body to transform it into His own likeness, crowning that process with the moment of final resurrection to eternal life. Paul commends this attitude to his brothers, for it will keep them anchored into the Lord.

Phil.4.2-3 Paul appeals to two sisters in Christ, Euodia (Greek Ευοδία *Evodhía*, whose name means *good journeying*) and Syntyche (Greek Συντύχη *Syntýchee*, whose name means *serendipity* or *happenstance*) to agree with each other in the Lord. (The Greek means 'that they have the same mind.')

It seems that this enmity or conflict is disturbing the church. Paul addresses here one Sýzygos, (Greek Σύζυγος) which is either a proper name, or a term meaning 'fellow worker, yokefellow'. It seems more likely to be a proper name, since Paul

then goes on to refer to Clement by name as one who should be helping these women to resolve their issues with each other.

Phil.4.4-7 Paul again repeats his call of 3.1 to rejoice (Greek Χαίρετε *Cháirete!*, today a common modern Greek greeting.) To this joy, they can add gentleness, and calm, as they let God know their every need in speaking together with Him. As they pursue this joy and gentleness, they will know the peace of God, which defies human ability to comprehend it, since it can bring serenity in the midst of the storm, guarding their inner being, Jesus being in the boat with them.

Phil.4.8-9 They are also exhorted to meditate on and contemplate positive and Godly things, those things which feed rather than corrode the mind, and to action all that Paul has instructed them in on a daily basis in their lives.

Phil.4.10-13 Paul expresses his joy once more at their material support for him, although he is not depending on them, but on the Lord, knowing how to be as content with little as with much, full or hungry. He can endure anything when God is the source of His life.

Phil.4.14-20 Paul lets them know that they were the only Macedonian assembly to support his service. When the church of the provincial capital, Thessalonica was being supplied with Paul's service, it was Philippian Christians who saw to Paul's needs. And now Ephaphroditus has come to Rome, Paul has supplies to last him; their love is a fragrant sacrifice, and God will not leave them without provision either, but will meet all their needs (not necessarily their wants!) from His inexhaustible supply of wealth. He gives glory to God for this love and blessing which he is experiencing.

Phil.4.21-23 Paul asks for greetings to be passed on from him, indicating that he remembers them. Those in Rome, especially the believers who are part of Caesar's household send remembrance and blessing to them – indicating that the gospel was bearing fruit on the very doorstep of the Emperor!

Paul end with his customary invocation of grace.

Day 351

Paul's First Letter to Timothy.

1 Timothy 1.1 – 6.21

It seems that Paul may have been granted permission to travel after a couple of years under house arrest. After all, according to Festus who sent him to Rome, there was no case to answer. From his letter to Timothy, the emissary of Jesus seems to have travelled to Crete, leaving Titus there, and back to Ephesus with Timothy who becomes engaged with the oversight of the church there. Paul crosses back to Macedonia, by way of Miletus and Troas, and it is from there he supposed to have written this letter to Timothy, who is experiencing upheaval in the church because of conflict among the believers.

Paul gives his close friend and mentee instruction on prayer, church oversight, practical help for the needy in the congregations and the guarding of the church against mercenary false

teachers. It is a warm and personal letter, that of a father in faith to a younger man carrying great responsibility. The time is probably around 63 to 64ad.

1 Tim.1.1-2 Even though he is writing to Timothy, whom he knows so well, Paul opens with his designation as an emissary of Jesus (Greek ἀπόστολος *apóstolos*, one sent out, an emissary) by royal command of God and Christ Himself, perhaps to give full authority to Timothy in support of his role in bringing clear direction to the Ephesian church where he has been left to bring oversight.

Paul addresses Timothy as his real faith-son, since they have known one another since the early days of Acts 16 when Paul met him and his family in Lystra, en route to bringing the good news to Europe, on which journey Timothy accompanied Paul through some of the most challenging days of his ministry. A strong bond has developed, which enables Paul to be very straight and unguarded with the young man, the elder calling down upon the younger the grace, mercy and peace of God in Christ.

1 Tim.1.3-7 Paul reveals that when he left Timothy in Ephesus, he was on his way to Macedonia, to face up the problem of wrong teaching coming into the community of believers. It is possible that these teachers are Gnostics, carrying the same poisoned seed as the Colossians had to contend with, since lists of words and secret signs were hallmarks of this sect. All these kind of teachings do is fuel arguments, whereas love and faith are the signs of Godly conduct.

1 Tim. 1.8-11 It seems there is also an element of legalism coming in, trying to get people to live by regulations. Whilst Paul is not dismissing the place of the law, it is no use for producing godliness, being simply a gauge of mankind's brokenness, unable to make anyone better by its application.

1 Tim. 1. 12-17 The key is not trying to keep a set of rules – Paul once thought he was right in doing that, but it turned out that he was just as corrupt as anyone else, needing the rescue promised by the covenanted God in His *chesed*-grace. God reached out to him in favour, and turned this prince of sinners into a trophy of God's power to deliver and transform. For this, Paul lets out an exclamation of praise to this wonderful God.

1 Tim.1.18-20 Paul, in bringing Timothy these instructions, recalls the words spoken to Timothy by the Lord through prophetic words, so that he may be victorious at the end. This is in contrast to those like Hymenaeus and Alexander who have backtracked from Jesus, and whom Paul has released to satan's deception to eventually see how much against God they are behaving. This should not be interpreted as some incantation Paul is making to curse these wayward men, rather he is acknowledging whose influence they are now working under, so that no one is under any misapprehension.

1 Tim. 2.1 – 8 Paul brings directions on prayer for those in authority, to seek God's blessing on society so that life may be lived out in order and peace. The Jewish settlement which the Romans came to under Caesar included prayer for Caesar, rather than burning incense to the emperor, which was idolatrous, and therefore Paul is asking Christians to follow this example for the good of all. God is pleased with this action, and it aids the free proclamation of the good news of Jesus, to fulfil God's heart to see all people rescued.

The manner of prayer Paul favours is with hands lifted, which is a traditional stance of Jewish intercessors.

1 Tim. 2.9 – 10 With women now no longer separated from men in the meetings of Christ's people, there is a new order of togetherness which prevails in the body of Christ. Women are therefore not to behave as man-fodder, distracting men from focussing on God by dressing alluringly in the meetings. Instead, the women are to commend themselves in the assembly by their inner beauty and attractiveness, as befits their new status in Jesus Christ as his heiresses.

1 Tim. 2.11-15 This Scripture is one of the most contentious for modern readers in an era of women's equal treatment. It must be noted that Paul cannot mean for a woman to be totally silent in the church, for he makes provision for them as they pray and prophesy in 1 Corinthians 11. What is to be borne in mind also in this injunction of Paul's is that women were generally not educated at this time, and while they would be as anointed to bring Holy Spirit words as any man, the cultural ethos was one of women having the status of children. Therefore, Paul's injunction for a woman to learn (Greek *μανθάνω* *mantháno*, to study, learn, be discipled) is a counter-cultural, even revolutionary step, and certainly not one favoured by Pharisaical Judaism. Her study should be conducted with humility, not in a self-serving or showy way which would bring her into disrepute with society around, hence it is to be with quiet self-control .

However, Paul is not in favour at this stage for a woman to establish doctrine nor to lord it over men in the assembly – but for that matter, in line with Jesus, men should not be lording it over women either! Paul recalls the Adam and Eve story, not to make woman look bad and man look good, but to emphasise what happens when either sex acts independent of the other, when they have actually been made to complement each other and work together. It was not that Eve usurped her husband, but that she failed to work with him which led to her sin. But just as with Eve, God is negating woman's brokenness, giving grace to the faithful to continue their Godly calling of bringing new life into the world.

1 Tim.3.1-7 Paul now gives instructions about the qualifications for leadership in the church. He commends those who aspire to oversight of God's people, but not just anyone can qualify. In a community where there are people at all stages in a journey of faith, the task of guarding and guiding it in God's name is given to those who show a level of responsibility and maturity which will ensure the integrity of the whole body for Christ's glory.

The overseer or supervisor (Greek *ἐπίσκοπος* *epískopos*) , if married, must be faithful and not polygamous, self-controlled, well-balanced, gentle and able to instruct others. He is to be thought well of by all, including non-believers. His family, if he has one, will be a good indicator of his character, since if someone cannot maintain the integrity of his own household, it does not bode well for his leadership of the church. New Christians are not to be taken on, to give time for them to grow in Christ and avoid power going to their heads.

1 Tim. 3.8-13 Paul goes on to give similar instruction concerning the servants of the church – presumably this is a role which involved the support and practical maintenance of the body, rather like trustees, a role much as the seven men in Acts 6 were called on to do. (Greek has here the word *διάκονος* *dhiákonos*, whence the English term 'deacon'.) They are respectable, self-controlled, not charlatans. They need to be strong in faith, clear in conscience. All this will be discovered by a time of probation, which will lead to their placement, if they satisfy the requirements. The wives of such men are also to act in a way which will not disqualify their husbands from fulfilling their work in the body. In common with the overseer, any church

servant must be polygamous, and if he has a family, must be seen to have order in his household, since this brings honour to the name of Christ.

1 Tim. 3.14-16 Paul is hoping to come to Timothy in Ephesus, but perhaps Paul is aware of growing tensions which may prevent him. People need to know how to behave in this community which Paul says is the 'pillar and foundation of truth', a mighty calling for God's people to live up to. For we are bearers of profound mysteries, of the incarnation, life, suffering, resurrection and ascension of Christ.

1 Tim. 4.1-5 Paul now turns to those who are stirring up dissension in the body, as they have been warned by the Holy Spirit will happen. The gnostic tendencies seem to be inferred here, with prohibitions on marriage and foods, both things which God has given to be enjoyed with thankfulness.

1 Tim. 4.6-10 Paul encourages Timothy to pass on these words; if he does so, he will be serving Jesus well. He wants him to shun the pursuit of Christless silliness, not giving it airspace. Rather, Timothy needs to be working out in God, just like an athlete trains his body, for He is only true Hope.

1 Tim. 4.11-16 Paul urges Timothy to be clear in his direction, and not to listen to anyone who puts him down for being younger than them, or inexperienced. By his model, he can give a clear lead; reading Scripture aloud in the gatherings, and perhaps in the market place, instructing people in Christ's ways – in this way he will be giving full expression to the gifts which the Holy Spirit gave him when the church's oversight laid hands on him and spoke over him from God. – The words God speaks to us are of value, and need to be revisited often.

1 Tim. 5.1-2 Paul turns to practical behaviour in the church. People are to be honoured and respected all round; older people as parents, younger as brothers and sisters, with no ambiguity or indecency.

1 Tim. 5.3 – 8 From Acts 6, it can be seen that the issue of the widows of believers received special attention in the Christian community. Paul encourages their care, but if they have children and grandchildren, it is their responsibility to take first share of the maintenance of their forebears, so that the ones who really have no other access to help can be aided by the church. Widows who are just set on living it up are behaving in an unseemly manner.

1 Tim. 5.9-10 Paul is anxious that only elderly widows should be added to the 'list of widows' for support, and only if she is actively part of the believing community.

1 Tim. 5. 11-15 Paul would rather that the younger widows remarry than enrol themselves as dependent on the church. The energy they still have would be better put to being partnered with a man in fruitful marriage than idly trailing from place to place, catching up on the gossip of the day while living from the community's gifts. It seems that some of the widows have already become embroiled in a lifestyle of sin, pulling them away from the Lord.

1 Tim. 5.16 Paul particularly puts on the married women the responsibility of helping and caring for widows in their family, so that only those who have nowhere else to turn need the church's aid. It is possible that Paul had in mind particular local situations which Timothy needed to address in Ephesus.

1 Tim. 5.17-22 While Paul is on the subject of church finance and provision, he instructs that the oversight, the leaders of the church should be well remunerated, particularly those who give their time to instruction and formation of the assembly through teaching and preaching. Paul makes it clear that those who labour to build up the community should live from the community. Furthermore, Paul is concerned that leaders should not be open to scurrilous accusations, therefore there must be corroboration of any complaint brought against a leader, and they must also be publicly corrected, since they have such an exemplary influence on the community. People should not be made leaders out of favouritism, nor with undue haste.

1 Tim. 5.23 With drinking water of poor quality in ancient times, it seems that Timothy is suffering frequent bouts of illness with a weak stomach. The only safe thing to drink would be that which had been fermented, therefore Paul, in a personal aside, encourages Timothy to drink wine so as to spare himself so much trouble. Presumably, Timothy had given up alcohol for one reason or another. Paul is suggesting a practical step to help, demonstrating the fatherly care of the writer.

1 Tim. 5.24 ,25 Good and evil, says Paul, have a way of revealing themselves – Timothy should be observant and use his senses to see what is going on around him.

1 Tim. 6.1-2 Slaves who are believers have a new inner freedom which gives them hope for the future. But Paul encourages them not to use their freedom in Christ as a reason to dishonour their owners, even if, or especially if they are believers. Rather, out of their freely given service, they now are to give service in love to their owners, something which Paul is insistent on, not wishing to bring discord and dishonour to Christ's name.

1 Tim.6.3 – 5 Paul inveighs against anyone who diverges in their teaching (Greek ἑτεροδιδασκαλεῖ *eterodhidhaskalée*, = teaches differently) from the instruction of Jesus Christ. Such a one is contentious, stirring up debate and controversy so that by his clever sowing of dissension he can earn some profit (monetarily) from religious disagreement.

1 Tim. 6.6 – 10 Rather, says Paul, contrasting with those trying to profit from dissatisfaction and strife in the previous verses, piety, spirituality (Greek εὐσέβεια *evséveia*, = good reverence) combined with contentment (Greek αὐτάρκεια *avtákreia*, from a word meaning self-sufficiency or satisfaction with what one has) is real profit (Greek πορισμός *porismós* = a means to an end, a way of obtaining something.) Trying to get rich quick is a sure way to discontentment, and at the end of life, we cannot take it with us. The pursuit of riches, Paul says, has drawn some away from following Jesus and desire for money is a root which grows up into all kinds of evil.

1 Tim. 6.11-16 Timothy, along with all men of God, is urged to escape this trap, and go after Godly targets such as straight dealing, trust, love, stickability and gentleness. As a soldier of Christ, he should grab hold of the promise of eternal life, staying true to the confession he made before the assembly, just as Jesus did before Pilate.

1 Tim. 6.17 – 19 Continuing on the theme of the rich, Paul gives instruction that those who have wealth (which indicates that there are believers in Ephesus who have means at their disposal,) should not make that a mark of status or wrap themselves for security in material things, rather they are to hope in God, their wealth being marked rather in acts of love than in amounts of money, sharing what they have with others. This investment will yield a full return in the age to come.

1 Tim. 6.20-21 In a short closing salutation, Paul reminds Timothy to protect what has been given to him to take care of (Greek παρακαταθήκη *parakatathéke*, that which has been placed alongside him, as a charge to guard.) He is to shun godless and vacuous chatter (Greek κενοφωνία *kenophonía* = empty sound), and especially the teachings connected to the so-called ‘gnósis’ (Greek γνῶσις = knowledge, especially the secret knowledge of the ‘Gnostics’) which is leading some away from faith in Jesus.

Paul seals the letter with grace to his son in the Lord.

Day 352

Paul’s Letter to Titus

Titus 1.1 – 3.15

Titus appears to have known Paul a long time, having gone with him from Antioch when he came up to Jerusalem to deliver the offering and for the council of Jerusalem. (Gal 2.1-3). He was evidently a Gentile, but unlike Timothy, Paul did not insist on Titus’s circumcision.

Paul is en route to Nikopolis, on the west coast of modern Greece, on the shores of the Ambracian Gulf, an inlet of the Ionian Sea, when he writes this letter to Titus in Crete, giving him practical instructions similar to those given to Timothy. It seems likely that the letter was written at a similar time as the letter to Timothy.

Titus 1.1-4 As with the letter to Timothy, Paul gives his title as emissary of Jesus (Greek ἀπόστολος *apóstolos*) to build up the people of God in their knowledge of truth and their hope of eternal life.

The letter is addressed to Titus, who, like Timothy, is seen as a son in faith, and is greeted with the grace and peace of God and Christ.

Titus 1.5 – 9 Paul gives Titus instruction on the appointment of leaders (Greek πρεσβύτεροι *presbhýteri*, literally, ‘older ones’) for the church, in fulfilment of the purpose Paul left him in Crete, to complete the work started there, throughout the island.

The guidelines are very similar to those given in 1 Timothy 3, of good character and repute. Paul also calls this role ‘overseer’ or ‘supervisor’ in v.7 (Greek ἐπίσκοπος *epískopos*) so that in his mind we see the two words are coterminous. Particularly, the leader is to guard against infiltration by false teachers by knowing the true word of Christ.

Titus 1.10- 2.1 Paul is aware of a number of sources of threat to the sound expression of the good news of Jesus, in particular the Judaisers with their legalistic demands. There are also seemingly native Cretans involved in misleading the church, for Paul quotes a sage of the island who mentions the unreliable nature of its inhabitants! Paul instructs Titus not to pussyfoot around with error, but to tell them in no uncertain terms. They are not to let their purity be sullied by the corruption of error. Titus is in a position to bring the right teaching.

Titus 2.2 Paul wants mature older men in the assembly who can earn the respect of all through their love and faithfulness.

Titus 2.3-5 The older women are to be examples of the new womanhood in Christ for the younger ones, industrious, kind and responsive to their spouses.

Titus 2.6-8 The young men are to be restrained in their behaviour; Titus himself is to be an example for them of integrity and wisdom.

Titus 2.9-10 Slaves are to bend to the requirements of their masters, so that they can be reflectors of the life of Christ even in their bonded work.

Titus 2.11-15 God's *chesed*-grace, His self-sacrificial love-bond with His people demonstrates to the believer how to say no to crooked dealings, choosing to live straight for God, until He comes again in Jesus Christ. Titus is to teach these things and to brook no insult to his word.

Titus 3.1-2 Paul reminds the Lord's people to be biddable before authorities, and to not speak ill of others, but to live in humility.

Titus 3.3-8 He reminds Titus that there is no grounds for thinking oneself above others, for they themselves have been wayward and broken ; it is only God's goodness and grace that have rescued them and made them heirs of the Lord and His life. This is why people need to humbly conduct themselves and continue to do what is good.

Titus 3.9-11 Contentious arguments and disputes win no friends, and bear no fruit. Divisiveness is toxic and to be rooted out of the body. Those who just want to cause trouble are to be distanced as their own worst enemies.

Titus 3.12-14 Paul closes the letter to Titus with personal instructions concerning his plans. Paul will send Artemas or Tychicus (bearer of the Colossian letter) to Crete, and then Titus is to join Paul at Nikopolis. In the meanwhile, Paul requests Titus' help for a scholar of the law (Greek νομικός *nomikós*) named Zenas, and for Apollos, who is still on the teaching circuit, by all accounts. Paul wants the Cretans to be fruitful, not frivolous.

Titus 3.15 As with first Timothy, the ending is brief. Paul sends general greetings from all who are with him, and asks for his greetings to be sent on. He invokes grace upon Titus in closing.

Day 353

Paul's Second Letter to Timothy

2 Timothy 1.1 – 4.22

It seems that Paul was taken back to prison sometime after writing the letter to Titus and Timothy. He may also have had his hearing before Caesar, and seems to have escaped being thrown to the lions, although Nero Caesar is building in hatred of the Christians, and Paul's physical future is not yet sure.

He writes this second letter to Timothy to ask him to come and be with him at a time when Paul feels without support and isolated. A visit from his son in the Lord would be so welcome.

2 Tim. 1.1-2 Paul gives his customary salutation at the beginning of the letter, using his ministry title of Jesus-emissary (*apóstolos*) in greeting his son, Timothy, invoking grace and peace.

2 Tim.1.3-7 Paul reminds Timothy that he is praying for Paul ongoing, remembering not only his own faithfulness but also Timothy's mother, Eunice's and his grandmother, Lois's. He sees Timothy's heart for the Lord as coming to him through the women who have cared for him and taught him. However it is Timothy's faith, given through the Spirit of God when hands were laid on him, which needs to be energised to keep him on track.

2 Tim. 1. 8-12 Perhaps Timothy has been feeling unsure about whether he should share Paul's situation with people – it might seem like failure? But Paul encourages him to make known the Lord's goodness and Paul's imprisonment. Paul is not suffering for wrongdoing, but because of the good news of the life changing power of Jesus Christ. Paul is dependent on Jesus' ability to come through for him whatever happens.

2 Tim. 1.13-14 Paul asks Timothy to be faithful to the content of the instruction he has received from Paul, with the Holy Spirit's help, because it is an investment to yield a return.

2 Tim.1.15 It is distressing to think that Paul, in his hour of need, has been left by his friends from Asia Minor.

2 Tim.1.16-18 But Paul is not left comfortless, having been supported by Onesiphoros and his family, who previously helped when he was in Ephesus, and who have not been afraid to come and see him and be known as supporters of the good news, at a time when it would be dangerous.

2 Tim.2.1-7 Paul encourages Timothy to be strong in the Lord and to pass on all that he has received to others, who may then transmit the message on faithfully to others. Timothy is to be single-minded, not distracted by other things. Paul uses three metaphors, of the soldier, the athlete and the farmer, all of whom have to be focussed in their work.

2 Tim.2.8-13 Paul reminds his son in the Lord of the kernel of the good news, Jesus Christ, the risen one, the branch of David, for which he is held in prison. Paul sees himself as going through this suffering for the sake of the believers, who have heard this news for which he is now chained. In a poetic saying, Paul balances the suffering with the promise of life in Christ, and the denial of Jesus with the consequence of rejection. However, even if we let him down, He still remains faithful to us.

2 Tim.2.14-19 Paul warns Timothy away from contention and disputation, while handling the truth wisely, and not following the example of Hymenaeus and Philetus who are teaching that the general resurrection has already happened, a teaching which seems to have elements of gnostic mysticism within it. However, they are no threat to those who are anchored in Christ and who leave argument alone.

2 Tim.2.20 -26 Continuing the theme of avoiding strife in the church, Paul gives a metaphor of the church as a large house in which there are items of different quality – precious metals, clay

and wood. Paul seems to be suggesting that those indulging in needless argument are the wood and clay, while those dealing with the base drives of human sinfulness will produce something of great value. Going after peace and love and righteousness will produce those qualities. Furthermore, the one who represents the Lord in His service needs to be exemplary in keeping away from contention and quarrelling, but in gentleness should demonstrate the kind of life to people which will lead them out of the enemy's clutches.

2 Tim.3.1-5 Paul is aware of the growing tide of evil; being in Rome he would have seen the hedonistic, violent lifestyles of the imperial city. The last days are still in train now, and all the things Paul warns of, not only are signs of man's depravity in his age, but in all of the ages until Jesus returns. The direct rule of God runs alongside the dark tyranny of Satan, who corrupts the heart of man and leads him to destruction. Paul also adds to the list of evils that of being outwardly religious but having no real experience of God's present power in one's life.

2 Tim. 3.6 – 9 The outwardly religious have a habit of forming for themselves coterie of followers, particularly women, (in Paul's time often uneducated) whose emotional responses pull them into straying from truth. Paul refers to two opponents of Moses, Jannes and Jambres, who are not mentioned anywhere in the Old Testament, but by tradition were either magicians in the court of Pharaoh or the sons of Balaam, the prophet of Pe'or. Paul is saying that these (probably gnostic) teachers are to be rejected and in any case are being found out for their immoral ways.

2 Tim. 3.10 -17 Paul commends his story, on the other hand, to Timothy, in contrast to these false interlopers. Timothy, who is from Lystra originally, saw Paul on some of his early mission in Galatia and what he went through for the sake of Jesus. Persecution is part and parcel of the witness to the good news of Jesus. Nevertheless, Timothy is to stay rooted in the Scriptures, which point the way to rescue and transformation, and are breathed by God (Greek θεόπνευστος *theópnevstos*); they are full of useful tools for correcting, instructing and directing people into God.

2 Tim. 4.1-5 Paul gives Timothy a solemn charge, therefore, before God's presence-face, to declare the counsel of God, both when he feels like it and when he doesn't. And even when people don't want to hear him, when they turn away through hardness of heart, the young man is not to give up, but to press through, bearing with the difficulties and being good news to all around him.

2 Tim.4.6-8 Paul is very aware of limited time left to him, as though his life was being poured out like a wine or water-offering on an altar. He realises his departure (Greek ἀνάλυσις *análysis*, =dissolving, breaking up, loosing up) is coming soon, but he is approaching the finish line with confidence, and can say that he knows the winner's laurel, the athlete's trophy is ready for him at the end of the race.

2 Tim.4.9-13 Paul is anxious for Timothy to come, since so many are leaving him, presumably because they feel their own safety threatened in the rising tide of hostility to the believers. Among these are Demas, Crescens and even Titus, to whom Paul has written the letter. Luke the faithful narrator is still with Paul, Tychicus has left for Ephesus. Paul asks Timothy to bring Mark with him, a sign of the restoration of relationship with the young man whom Paul didn't want to journey with in former times. It is Mark who, when he comes to Rome, will most likely scribe down Peter's witness to Jesus in the gospel which will bear his name, to preserve the

story for coming generations. There is a very personal touch here, as Paul asks for his coat which he left at Troas, and his papers, in particular his valuable parchments.

2 Tim.4.14-15 Paul warns Timothy to be on guard against Alexander Chalkevs (Alexander the Coppersmith or Metalworker) who has done disservice to Paul, what though is not known.

2 Tim.4.16 – 18 Paul refers to his first trial, presumably his appeal to Caesar; this would infer that he is awaiting a further hearing. At his first appearance, he managed to escape being sent to the Coliseum, and given to the lions, which was providential, given that if he is appearing before Caesar, it is Nero, the cruel despot who would hear the case. Paul is content to commit himself into the care of the Saviour who can see him through every danger.

2 Tim. 4.19-22 Paul greets his dear friends, the Roman Jewish couple Aquila and Priscilla, with whom he once made tents, and the servant-hearted Onesiphoros. Paul mentions Erastus staying in Corinth, and Trophimus sick in Miletus – all people he could perhaps have done with in this troubled time. He therefore urges Timothy to come before winter sets in, when travel would be impossible, as Paul knows only too well.

Paul sends greetings from some of the believers with him, and closes with his customary impartation of grace.

It may well be that Paul dies shortly after this letter; we do not know if Timothy did see him again. Tradition has Paul beheaded in Rome at the command of Nero Caesar in 64AD.

Day 354

The Letter of James and Jude

James 1.1 – 5.20, Jude 1-25

The letter of James is believed to have been written by James, the brother of Jesus, leader of the church in Jerusalem referred to in Acts 15. It is very different in style to Paul's letters, and has a very different emphasis. It is intensely practical in all, and is a counterpoint to Paul's emphasis on the grace of God. James puts the emphasis on faith in action, and the fruit of a life lived for Jesus.

The character of James is an interesting one, from the little we know. He was not called as one of the twelve. In fact, in John 7.5 we find that his brothers were not among the believers at first. However, by Acts 1.14, we find them with Jesus' mother in the upper room, and so they would have been around at the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2.

There seems then to have been something of a dynastic development in the emergence of James as leader of Jerusalem, with his blood-relationship to Jesus. It also seems that he would have tended originally to the Judaising tendency of Jesus' followers, since Peter is prepared to act hypocritically according to Paul in Galatians 2 when 'men from James' arrive in Antioch,

seemingly expecting apartheid between Jews and Gentiles. However, in Acts 15, the matter is settled, and James's voice is heard bringing the summarising of the first church council at Jerusalem which does not lay on Gentiles the keeping of the Mosaic law.

The name 'James' is an English corruption of the Hebrew name Jacob (Heb יַעֲקֹב *Ya'aqov*, Greek Ἰάκωβος *Iákobhos*.) Over time, the Latin version, Iacobus, nasalised into *Iacombus* and thence to *Iacomus* (cf Italian Giacomo.) Eventually in Spanish and English the word elides and shortens to James/Jaime, and thereby James emerges. But the original character would have been plain Jacob to his brother Jesus and to the church; James is simply the anglicised version.

Traditionally, James was martyred in AD62, therefore this letter is dated somewhere between 50 and 62Ad.

Jas 1.1 James describes himself in his opening address as a slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ (Greek Θεοῦ καὶ Κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ δοῦλος *Theoú kai Kyríou Ieesou Christou dhoulos*.) He is writing his letter to the *diaspora*, the Jewish believers scattered through the nations, but by extension, to all disciples of the Jewish *Mashiach*, his brother Jesus.

Jas.1.2-4 James is leading in Jerusalem a suffering church; from the early days, with the deaths of Stephen and James, and then with the persecution under Saul of Tarsus, the followers of Jesus have had a rough ride, and many would have laid down their lives.

James therefore highlights this opposition from the outset as an opportunity to grow, a reason to rejoice, because the hardships are the Holy Spirit's tools to produce the character of Christ in His people; when the believer persists, it produces staying-power (Greek ὑπομονή *ypomonée*, literally, a 'staying under', an undergoing.) The picture might be suggested by this of the diver, holding his breath to swim through a difficult place to safety or treasure. For James, this brings us to being mature (Greek τέλειος *téleios*, full-grown, finished) and to being whole (Greek ὁλόκληρος *olókleeros*, whole portion, fully rounded.)

Jas.1.5-8 The great quest of the Hebrew sages is *wisdom*, (Hebrew חֵכֶמָה *Chokhmáh*, Greek σοφία *sofía*) the life-skill not only to know all there is to know, but to be able to actively live out its precepts. James points the believer to the Lord as the provider of this precious gift, which in times of trial and challenge is indispensable, to avoid dithering and false steps.

Jas.1.9-11 The values of the world in terms of what is classed as success are turned upside down in the realm of God's rule; the low in social status are to be confident of their worth in God's eyes, while the rich should brag only about the fact that the material things they have are totally transient, and of no eternal consequence, conferring no status with God; they are ephemeral as a daisy or a dandelion.

Jas.1.12-15 By contrast, real happiness, true fulfilment says James, (perhaps having in mind the Hebrew word *asher*, = happy or successful) is found in staying true to the call of God through testing times, which lead to true riches in the age to come, the crowning glory of life unbounded by time or space limitations.

However, the assumption that such testing is deliberately set up by God to produce character is wrong. Testing and temptation are the same word in Greek (Greek πειρασμός *peirasmós*)

and the testing that comes to stretch us is the result of our bent to sin, not a result of God's action. In this context, James is talking about temptation, and its capacity to trip up the believer when they allow it to fester and bloom, like bacteria.

Jas.1.16-18 Rather, God the Father is the source not of evil but of good; He is not subject to change, staying true to His promise to bring us to new birth and produce in us as believers the first evidence of the new age.

Jas.1.19-21 James now previews a subject which will form a major part of his letter shortly, that of the power of speech. He reminds his readers that it is better to listen than to speak, and certainly speaking in anger should be a rare occurrence because it can do nothing to contribute to the just way of life God desires. It may be a gauge of the inner turmoil, but it does nothing to bring about peace. Because of this, the believer is to root out all conduct which is less than God's best, shunning the expression of evil, living rather in humble accord with God's indwelling, saving word.

Jas.1.22-25 James, as Jesus his brother did, warns against not practising what one learns of God's ways. Hearing something and not acting on it is like seeing you have a dirty face in the mirror, and then going away without washing it. However, when the gauges and measures of the law show up the dirt and brokenness of our lives, they equip us with the freedom to do something about it, the freedom to change.

Jas.1.26-27 Back on the power of the tongue, someone who says they are pious and godly and yet shoots their mouth off, using their speech for harm and abuse is just lying to himself and others. What God sees as piety and godliness is doing right for the marginalised, particularly for the destitute and staying away from the toxic fumes of the world's lifestyle.

Jas.2.1-7 Intensely practical, James urges believers in Jesus against favouritism, that is, just relating to people we think are nice and socially acceptable. James gives examples of the treatment of different individuals in the gathering of God's people (called by James here, 'your synagogue', Greek συναγωγή *synagoghée*), one who is richly dressed and the other one scruffy. If the rich are shown friendship, but the poor are ignored, this is discrimination. James reminds the believers of the emphasis Jesus puts on the poor, and therefore they are not to be insulted or patronised. After all, it is the rich of the world who are persecuting the church!

Jas.2.8-13 James refers to what he calls the 'kingly law' of loving neighbours as oneself, and that favouritism is a violation of that precept. To break the law in one point is to break it all, he says, and to be unmerciful to others drives God's pleasure out. Perhaps in James's esteem for the law here, we see the Jewish leader coming to the fore, commending *Torah* as bringing freedom and boundaries to conduct.

Jas.2.14-17 James homes in on the claim to faith which has no visible means of demonstration. Faith which is really faith will have fruit which makes a practical difference – there will be evidence of transformation. If all we have is words, how can that make a difference to the poor and needy?

Jas.2.18-20 James challenges those who say faith needs no evidence of fruit, by being willing to show that he is full of faith, but faith which results in action. Even satan has faith, but it does not lead to Godly life! Faith which is fruitless is phoney faith.

Jas.2.21-26 James introduces the character from the Old Testament to whom all Jews pointed as their source and example, Abraham. Perhaps James has in mind Paul's teaching in his Galatian letter on Abraham's receiving the promise by faith, not by his actions. James points out that Abraham trust in God resulted in his action of laying his only son bound on the altar, ready to sacrifice him. This was the fulfilment, the complement to his faith. James presents the passive and the active as two sides of a coin of faith, adding that justification comes by faith acted out, not just claimed as a lifestyle choice.

Similarly, even Rahab the prostitute in Jericho who sheltered the Israelite spies was accepted as righteous by her action in showing kindness to them. Faith and action go together for James like body and spirit.

Jas. 3.1-5 James adds here an aside to those aspiring to instruct the body of Christ. He warns that teachers will be evaluated more intensely than others, because they have presumed to present God's ways to others. In case there is any doubt, James points out that even the best teachers make mistakes and blunders in life. The use of our mouth, in particular, lets us down.

James demonstrates how large bodies can be ruled by small parts – the horse with a bit in its mouth, the ship with a relatively small rudder – and similarly, the tongue wields a great power for good or ill in our bodies.

Jas.3.6-12 The tongue is called here 'a fire, a world of evil' (Greek πῦρ, ὁ κόσμος τῆς ἀδικίας *pyr, o kósmos tees adhikías*), reflecting how much it needs to be kept under control, if not, becoming a hellish inferno capable of ruining a life.

James says no one is able to tame the tongue, even though animals may be trained. He is shocked that the same mouth that praises God can also curse and harm others verbally – this is inconsistent and shameful. Bad speech drives out good.

Jas.3.13- 18 As the church comes face to face with this teaching from James, there needs to be action – wisdom seen in actions, a very Hebrew concept, and repentance from everything done out of contention and self-promotion. The wisdom of God is evident in peace, mercy and love, in quality pure. The aim is to see a fruitful harvest reaped from seed sown in peace and harmony.

Jas.4.1-4 What does not contribute to that harvest of justice among God's people is the ambition for acquisition, as Wordsworth wrote, '*getting and spending, we lay waste our powers*'. This drive to 'get stuff' results in conflict and fights, when all the time, God is able to supply what is needed for all.

James is blunt – being friends with the world system is hating God, and is spiritual adultery, just like Israel was in when she went after other gods.

Jas.4.5-10 God is too in love with us to share our affections with material things; He is jealous to live in us and have our full attention, pouring grace out upon us. When we stop living humbly, and start thinking we own the place, it gets dire. Jesus' brother urges the believers to disconnect from the devil and say no to him, yielding instead to God. As we approach Him, we find Him running towards us. James calls for some deep mourning over

lives lived so far from the light of His presence. As we abase ourselves, it gives God space to lift us up.

Jas.4.11-12 If we judge one another, we are making up our own law, and dishonouring the true law which is God's to apply. We should not be evaluating or analysing one another, since our evaluation will always be shoddy and selfish.

Jas.4.13-17 Human beings have a tendency to see themselves as captains of their own destiny; they plan as though they controlled the future. James says this should not be; when we make plans, they are always provisional, never concrete. Tomorrow is not ours to order, does not belong to me. All our intentions should be expressed in the light of God's purposes, which may change ours dramatically. Writing these words at a time when deep snow has paralysed the UK's transport system for days, it brings James's words home more deeply.

Jas.5.1-6 James has further words for the outcome for those who have wealth; Jesus spoke of moth and rust corrupting in Matthew 6.19.20, and James expands that thought, warning the rich to be prepared for the loss that is coming. The finery and art will not help, and in fact will count against them in the analysis of what really matters, when hoarding things means that the workers are unpaid and people starve. James is uncompromising in his denouncement of the oppression perpetrated by the greedy rich.

Jas.5.7-11 To a suffering church, James counsels perseverance – the word this time he uses is 'long-hearted' (Greek μακροθυμία *makrothymía*), ready for the same wait which the farmer has when he is waiting for the harvest. They are not to get grumpy and short with each other in the waiting, because they also don't know the moment when the Lord will appear and they might be caught complaining! The writer points to the example of the prophets of the Old Testament as those who kept going for the joy of what was to come, in particular the character of Job and the outcome of his faithfulness.

Jas.5.12 James also reminds them of Jesus' words about not taking oaths to make their promises sound more impressive. Their yes should be commitment enough, their no, witness enough.

Jas. 5.13-18 In drawing to a conclusion, James commends to his readers prayer in all things – prayer in trouble, praise in happiness, prayer with others of faith in the church for healing, confession of sin to one another leading to prayer for reconciliation – prayer, says James, is powerful and effective. He gives the example of Elijah who, though as human as we, prayed and saw the nation changed and the elements controlled.

Jas. 5.19 – 20 James commends the challenging of those who are in danger of abandoning the journey of faith, in order to bring them back to Christ, since to turn someone from sin is to see them rescued from brokenness and death.

Jude's Letter

Jude, also Judas or Judah (Hebrew יהודה *Yehudah*, Greek Ἰούδας *Ioudhas*) is assumed to be a second brother of Jesus, being the brother of James; he, like James calls himself a slave of Jesus Christ. In a time of stress for the church, the letter being written sometime between 60 and 80AD, Jude is concerned to see false teaching kept out and the true message of Christ kept pristine. The particular problem appears to be a version of Gnosticism which preaches

that what is done in the flesh, being essentially unreal, cannot affect the spiritual life, leading to immoral behaviour by those claiming to be believers.

Jude 1 -2 Jude opens his letter as James has begun his, declaring himself a slave of Jesus Christ (Greek Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ δοῦλος *Ieesou Christou dhoulos*) and a brother of James. He addresses himself to those called, loved and cared for by God, Father and Son, invoking blessings upon them.

Jude 3-4 Jude immediately sets out the purpose of his letter, to defend the purity of the gospel of Jesus against those who have turned grace into an excuse for evil conduct and who deny the Lordship of Jesus – classic gnostic tendencies.

Jude 5-7 Jude highlights the consequences of immoral behaviour with three examples; first, the judgement on the Israelites who, although they were rescued from Egypt, turned against the Lord in immorality at Pe'or. Second, angelic beings who rebelled against God, perhaps referring to those having relationships in Genesis with human women, who are now imprisoned until the day of the Lord ; and third, the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah who were destroyed for their hideous perversions.

The second of these, concerning the angels, is not dealt with elsewhere in Scripture, but highlights the teaching that demonic forces are angelic beings who have rebelled to now be held for judgement, servants of darkness instead of light.

Jude 8-13 Jude homes in on the gnostic teachings on the orders of spiritual beings (called *aeons*) which they say can be overcome by secret words and knowledge, to get to the true God, other than by the way of the cross. He points out, however, that even the archangel Michael disputing with the devil for Moses' body (a legendary story found in the book of the Assumption of Moses, an apocryphal writing of dubious provenance) does not try and take power over the demon, but looks to God to bring deliverance. These false teachers, however, are teaching strategies for naming and rebuking the spiritual forces in high places, which Jude says is killing them!

Jude is appalled that these people fellowship with them at table, but have nothing to offer – the language is very descriptive – they are clouds without rain, trees without fruit, lost stars about to go out.

Jude 14-16 Jude goes on to quote from another apocryphal work, the book of Enoch, which promises final judgement on the ungodly for their misdeeds.

Jude 17-21 Jude reminds them that the emissaries of Jesus warned them about false teachers who would try and deceive them, leading them into Spiritless practices which they are to avoid, instead building up themselves by the Holy Spirit in their faith, anchored in God's love in Christ until His coming.

Jude 22-23 But Jude is anxious that those being deceived should be rescued, while their deception should be rejected.

Jude 24-25 Jude commends his readers to the keeping power of God who is well able to defend His people and bring them through, for He has all power and majesty through all time, because of Jesus Christ.

Day 355

Peter's First Letter

1 Peter 1.1 – 5.14

Peter, Cephas the rock on whose revelation of the deity of Jesus Christ the church depends and from which it unfolds is not a prolific writer like Paul – at least, we do not have his writings preserved.

The two letters here are called generally ‘pastoral epistles’, letters of care and concern to a wide audience of the churches in Asia Minor. There is a theme of suffering which must be borne as a follower of Jesus Christ, but also a celebration of whom God has made his people in the salvation and rescue He has brought in Jesus Christ.

1 Pet. 1.1-2 Peter opens up his letter identifying himself as an emissary of Jesus, in the same way Paul does in his communications. He is writing to God’s chosen ones (Greek ἐκλεκτοί *eklektí*) who are strangers living alongside the ordinary residents (Greek παρεπιδήμιοι *parepidhéemi*, resident aliens, those living beside others, but not natives), whose citizenship is of another realm, but who are living in the provinces of Asia Minor, the territory which is today’s Turkey. This selection has come about through the work of the Holy Spirit, as God foreknew, to bring rescue and atonement for them.

He invokes grace and peace upon them.

1 Pet.1.3-5 The content of the letter begins with an acclamation of the rescue God has brought about through Jesus, and of the hope brought through the risen Christ, which gives access to an eternal legacy under which His people are secure until He returns.

1 Pet.1.6-7 This is a source of great joy for them , but also of great suffering, which is like a crucible of refining fire to purify the quality of their faith, to be shown when Jesus comes back.

1 Pet.1.8-9 Even though Jesus is now invisible, He is encountered through faith and by His Spirit who fills them with a joy beyond words (Greek ἀνεκκλήτος *anekkléetos* = without speaking out, unable to be expressed), meaning that now they are experiencing the rescue in measure which they will fully see when Jesus is revealed.

1 Pet.1.10-12 Peter points out that this experience is what the prophets of the Old Covenant were pointing to when they spoke of the *chesed*-grace of God coming in great measure, seeing ahead down the corridor of time *by the Spirit of Christ* (Greek Πνεῦμα Χριστοῦ *Pnévma Christóu*) at work in them. This is worth noting, that Peter sees the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament as synonymous with the Spirit of Christ, giving an insight into the theology of the apostle as he writes these words. The prophets are speaking in ministry to the people of the new age to come, the ones who would experience what they could only dream of and discern in the Spirit, things which leave the unseen angelic beings gasping in awe at their import.

1 Pet.1.13-17 Peter is urging his readers to be prepared for the coming again of Jesus Christ, no longer following the lifestyle of the world. He calls them to be holy (Greek ἅγιος *ághios*, uniquely earmarked for, reserved for) as Jesus is holy. There will be an evaluation, an analysis of the fruit of our lives by the Father, thus the life lived now should be not as a worldlying, but a one whose full destiny lies in the unseen realm to come.

1 Pet.1.18-21 The picture of ransom here (Greek λυτρόω *lytró-o*) is of the releasing of a slave from the market place. The price paid is not money, but Christ's blood, the epitome of the Old Testament flawless sacrifice. Christ, figuring in God's mind in the story from before creation as the one who would deliver it from corruption, is now revealed and the focus of faith of His people.

1 Pet.1 22-25 Peter wants to emphasise the eternal nature of this life which Christ's people have been given, which energises love for one another from the heart, and so he points to the contrast between the earthly, mortal life which is fading away and the immortal Word of life which is dwelling in Christ's people, drawing on words from Isaiah 40.6-8.

1 Pet. 2.1-3 Living in this reality, as those reborn in Him, and children of His kingdom, the aim is maturity which is free from all unloving actions and attitudes.

1 Pet.2.4-5 Perhaps Peter has in mind how Jesus always called him 'Cephas' or Kepha in Aramaic, meaning rock, when he in turn describes Jesus as the 'living stone' (Greek λίθος ζῶν *líthos zōn*), rejected but now built into the house of the Spirit in which all His people become living stones with Him, a priesthood offering no longer physical but now sacrifices in the Spirit brought in Jesus' name.

1 Pet.2.6-8 He draws on often-quoted words from Isaiah 28.16, Psalm 118.22 and Isaiah 8.14 to back up his statements about Jesus the cornerstone from the Scriptures, a stone against which many have tripped up.

1 Pet.2.9-10 Those who yield to Christ instead, however, are transformed into a people belonging to Him, a new priesthood representing Him in the earth, to advertise, to promote the greatness of this rescuing God, who once were nobodies, but now, in Him, are somebodies as far as God's plans are concerned.

1 Pet.2.11-12 Believers, who are not citizens of this present world age, which is passing away, are instructed to be examples of the age to come, giving no foundation for their accusations to the opposition targeted at them by the Nations, the *goyim* of whom they are no longer part.

1 Pet. 2. 13-17 One of the ways of being exemplary is in the attitude to rulers and authorities, not running them down, but honouring them. It is by doing right that evil is shamed and silenced.

1 Pet.2.18-25 Peter echoes Paul's instructions to slaves, who are to respect and honour their owners, even though they are now free men in Christ. If punishment is unjustly administered, they are to bear patiently and not revile and curse. In this way, they are following Christ in

His suffering, who took unjust treatment for us. Through Jesus' suffering, God has brought healing and release.

1 Pet.3.1-6 Peter encourages wives, even of unbelieving husbands to reflect Christ by showing such love, bending to their will, that they are transformed themselves to follow Christ. Women of Christ are not playthings of men, do not have to allure with outward appearance, but have a splendour and attractiveness which is inward, as the women of God of old demonstrate.

1 Pet.3.7 Peter also urges husbands to respect their wives, valuing them as tender and precious beings, who are joint heirs now in Christ, not the nonentities they were in the pagan culture's view.

1 Pet.3.8-12 The overriding principle Peter is communicating in all these examples is of an *irenic community* where compassion and humility are the ruling order, where goodness is pursued and life is lived in the full view of God's eye.

1 Pet.3.13-17 Here are words to a community of people living with the cruel whip of persecution at their back. Doing the right thing, even if it is punished or gainsaid, is still the right thing. 'Jesus is Lord' is the non-negotiable starting point for all life's actions. When attack comes, followers of Christ are to emulate His character, not firing back insult, but shaming malicious and unjust detractors by the beauty and bravery of clear, straight, gentle, faith-filled answers. Peter himself has experienced at first hand this abuse by the authorities, and bears the scars to show it.

1 Pet.3.18-22 Jesus' suffering is the pinnacle of righteousness unjustly put down by evil, and yet, God used it to bring resurrection and release, even for those whose lives on earth ended long ago, whose spirits have waited 'in prison' for the coming of one whose suffering would give Him access to the place of the dead, to include them in the company of the redeemed. Specifically, Peter refers to those who refused Noah's offer of rescue from the flood, by the ark, in which only eight were saved alive of all of humanity. The water of the flood recalls for Peter the water of baptism, in which the old, sinful life is ended, and where the resurrection of Jesus is appropriated by the believer, causing them to be a participator in the heavenly glory of Christ.

1 Pet.4.1-6 In view of Jesus' suffering, and His overcoming, Jesus' disciples are done with sin and human desires. While the Nations, the Gentiles, heap abuse on the Christians who choose not to live in the dirtpile of decadence, there is coming an evaluation by the Creator, who in Jesus has even gone to the place of the dead to prove His credentials as the righteous judge of all the earth.

1 Pet.4.7-11 Peter points his readers to the coming end of all things; it is time now, therefore to be loving, welcoming, serving and for speaking God's word with awe and care, each one taking their place in the body of the One to whom all things belong.

1 Pet.4.12-19 The church is not to be surprised at the persecution now taking place; it is their opportunity to walk the way of the cross with the Lord Jesus. Insults for being Christians become blessings when they are taken in the name of Jesus. The judgement starts with God's own family, and the trial of faith leads to the evaluation which brings eternal life.

1 Pet.5.1-4 Peter speaks a word of encouragement to the leaders of the church, the senior servants of God, especially in this time of pressure and pain. They are to help the church to bear this time, to care and encourage, to supervise, as God has called them to, not for the pay, but for the love of God's people. If they will hold on, they will hear the great Shepherd of the sheep speaking their names lovingly, bearing in His hand the unfading crown of God's 'well done.'

1 Pet.5.5 – 7 Young men are to act with humility toward those graced with life's experience – indeed, humility is the chief requirement among God's people, for only those who are low can be lifted up.

*'Lay me low, lay me low, lay me low,
Where the Lord can find me, where the Lord can own me, where the Lord can bless me'*
Old Shaker song, adapted.

1 Pet.5.8-11 Often this passage is read in a spiritual way alerting the Christian to be on the lookout for temptation. But in the context in which Peter is writing, the enemy is very literal, and is likely to knock on the door in the night to arrest the believer in Jesus to take them to prison and death. When this happens, the enemy is not to be given in to, but is to be resisted, shamed by the good example of the suffering servants of Christ, in which many across the continent are held.

Peter promises that suffering will not last for long, and God will vindicate His servants.

1 Pet.5.12-14 Peter reveals that the good brother Silas, erstwhile co-worker with Paul, is writing this letter for him. The reference to 'she who is in Babylon' is no doubt reference to the suffering church in Rome, whence Peter is believed to have sent this letter. Also with him is Mark, who is perhaps even at this time in process of writing down Peter's story to retell in the Gospel which bears Mark's name. Peter asks that they greet one another with a kiss of love, and closes with a word of peace in Christ.

Day 356

Peter's Second Letter

2 Peter 1.1 – 3.18

The Second Letter of Peter is debated widely by scholars as to its authenticity as a letter of this emissary of Christ. Doubts about its authorship were raised early on by Origen, late in the second century. The focus of questions about the letter seem to be around its heavy drawing on Jude's letter for much of its style and content, and its references to Gnosticism, which took hold in the second century. However, the teaching in the letter is orthodox, and even if the letter does not come from the pen of Peter, its purpose in writing is to encourage believers to be faithful to Jesus in the midst of persecution and doubt over the coming again of the Lord.

Taking it as an authentic letter of Peter, which a good number of scholars are content to do, it is written shortly before Peter's death, around 64-67AD, most likely in Rome. The letter speaks of the dangers of false teachers, and the need to hold to the doctrine of the second coming of Christ.

2 Pet.1.1-2 The letter opens with a simple declaration and address, from Peter, slave and emissary of Jesus the Messiah, to sharers in the faith of Christ.

2 Pet.1.3-4 Peter makes it clear at the outset that there is nothing to be added to the good news of salvation in Jesus which His emissaries have already presented. It is through knowledge (Greek γνώσις *gnósis*) of Him, and no other knowledge in addition, that we have the promises of God and through them alone are able to break out of the brokenness of the world.

2 Pet.1.5-11 Peter encourages his readers to grow in the qualities of character which lead to fruitfulness in Christ, without which a myopic view (Greek μωπιάζων *myopázon*) of life sets in. Pursuing these characteristics will ensure that welcome into the eternal realm which is promised.

2 Pet.1.12-15 Peter is not afraid of repeating things he thinks they already know, because he is not sure how much longer he has to speak of them before he is martyred, which Jesus has spoken to him of before, and therefore he wants to make sure before his death, his exit (Greek ἔξοδος *éxodhos*) that he has taken every opportunity.

2 Pet.1.16-18 This is the most compelling section in support of the authenticity of the letter, since Peter writes that he is not proposing myths and fables (Greek μύθοι *mýthi*) such as the pagans use, but is recounting his own eye-witness testimony of the transfiguration, when God audibly spoke to the glorified Jesus, commending Him to the onlookers.

2 Pet.1.19-21 This testimony is proof of the words of the ancient prophets, and should be a powerful light to them in this dark time, until the morning star (Greek φωσφόρος *phosphóros*, the light-carrier, that is, Venus, appearing above the horizon) gives sign of the dawn approaching of the new age in Christ. These prophecies are not the imaginations of people's minds, but are the utterances of Holy Spirit-breathed words revealed to the ancients.

2 Pet.2.1-3 By contrast, even in the past times there were false prophets (Greek ψευδοπροφήται *pseudoprophétai*) who misled people, as there are now false teachers (Greek ψευδοδιδάσκαλοι *pseudodidáskali*) who are bringing in divergent teachings, which dishonour God and lead others astray. The Gnostic sects saw the Creator as less than true God, and the author of evil; he must be by-passed by secret knowledge, to achieve true spiritual enlightenment, which Christ has come to bring. Such was the deception being taught by these interlopers, who will be swiftly punished for their misleading words.

2 Pet.2.4-10a Echoing here words from Jude's letter concerning fallen angels and the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah, as well as those concerning Noah and the flood from his own previous work, Peter points out that retribution will be swift for those who deceive God's people, while rescue is at hand, as it was for 'righteous Lot' for those threatened by their lies.

2 Pet.2.10b – 16 The Gnostics are teaching about the nature of heavenly beings, whom they call *aeons*, and it is this which Peter is homing in on. These are evil powers who are keeping people out of the promised heaven, and they have to be overcome with the correct passwords by the *enlightened*. But Peter says such teaching maligns the angelic hosts, coming from men who are no better than animals.

It seems also that there is evidence of the Gnostic hedonism, which says that since this world is an unreality, what is done in the flesh does not count towards the heavenly outcome. Therefore, drunkenness and sexual licentiousness are seen as permitted, because they do not affect the spiritual knowledge. Peter is vehement against these teachings, likening such teachers to the prophet Balaam, who was actually curbed in his foolishness by the talking donkey! (Num.22.21)

2 Pet.2.17-22 Echoing again the words of Jude, Peter has similar descriptions of such teachers – they are waterless springs, storm-driven mist. Although they promise freedom by their mysteries, they breed destruction. These seem to have at one time been following Christ, but now, veering wildly off his path to follow false teachings, they are in a worse place – Peter goes as far as to say it would have been better if they had not come to Christ at all, than to have come to Him and now perverted His Way.

2 Pet.3.1-2 Peter reminds his readers that both this and his previous letter are calls to keep close to Jesus, inspired by the prophets and by Jesus' words.

2 Pet.3.3-7 He answers those here who mock the idea of the return of Jesus as rubbish. To those who ask why Jesus is not appearing, Paul offers the explanation that, just as in the days of Noah when God held back the rain so that people could repent, so now, God is holding back His judgement for the sake of mankind's coming to Him, in greater numbers.

2 Pet.3.8-10 God's timing is very different to man's; God's day is like a millennium, but the Lord is not being forgetful of His promise, rather, He is being patient, because He wants all to come to know Him. However, at the most unexpected moment, the day of the Lord (Peter is using an ancient prophetic term) will come, a cataclysm which will destroy the corruption which has been, to recreate and bring to rebirth.

2 Pet.3.11-13 Therefore, in view of this, the readers should be always ready for the coming apocalypse, when the recycling of the creation will take place, to be superceded by the new heaven and earth coming together, in which righteousness will make its home. (Greek ἐν οἷς δικαιοσύνη κατοικεῖ *en ees dhikaiosýnee katikée*, literally, *in which righteousness dwells*.)

2 Pet.3.14-16 Therefore, Peter wants people to be reconciled with the Lord and at peace with Him. The writer refers now to the fact that similar things are written in the works of Paul, which he equates with Scripture in their weight, although some people have been distorting his words, presumably the Gnostics again, especially the more challenging passages.

2 Pet. 3.17-18 Peter closes his words with a final exhortation to be wary of error, but increasing in the true knowledge with the grace found in Jesus Christ.