

Acts 2: Introduction

Subject: The aging eyewitnesses sought to prepare a second generation of Christians to meet Christ.

Main Idea: The God of hope will fill us with joy and peace, as we trust in Jesus (Romans 15:13).

Principles:

1. *Jesus Christ is the central figure of the Bible and the One the Old Testament anticipates.*
2. *No one who hopes in Jesus will ever be disappointed.*

Introduction

The *Acts 1* study ended with Paul headed to Jerusalem, with the Holy Spirit's warning that he faced prison and hardships (Acts 20:22-23). Jesus had warned all of His disciples to expect to be mistreated (John 15:20-21). Some of Paul's last written words before heading to Jerusalem were: "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Romans 15:13). Paul wasn't focused on his troubles, even though they would abound. He trusted God and overflowed with hope.

The most well documented first century persecutions of Christians occurred during the reigns of the Roman emperors Nero (AD 54-68) and Domitian (AD 81-96). In 64 AD, a great fire destroyed Rome. Many believe that the tyrannical Nero started the fire in order to clear land for his palace complex. However, he blamed the Christians and many believers suffered as a result. According to tradition, Nero also put both Peter and Paul to death. Nearer the end of the first century, Emperor Domitian targeted the Jews and Christians of Asia Minor. It was probably during this time that the Apostle John was banished to Patmos. There, he received and recorded the Revelation. It begins with letters to the suffering churches in Asia Minor.

All of these things happened at a time when the eyewitnesses to Jesus' life, death, and resurrection were aging. They were faced with preparing a generation of Christians who had never seen Jesus to give up their lives for Him. The aging generation and the younger both needed the "God of hope." They needed to be "filled with all joy and peace" as they trusted in Him. Trusting Jesus is the most basic tenant of the Christian faith, but when it comes to daily living, many of us struggle to do so. If first century believers were to reach others with the gospel, they also needed to "overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit," for that hope is what makes our lives and witness attractive. It is not surprising then that the last books of the New Testament address these very subjects. They warn believers to expect an increase in false teachings and persecution. They encourage us to "finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given [us]" (Acts 20:24). They help us remain focused on eternity, on our hope, reminding us that God is in control. They urge us to be ready to meet Christ face to face. No matter what today holds, the God of hope will fill us with joy and peace, as we trust in Him. He was the hope of those who lived in the first century, He is our hope today, and He was the hope of those who lived in Old Testament times.

Since the Acts 2 study focuses on the Christian's hope, let's trace that hope from its inception and see how it carries through the entire story of the Bible.

I. Anticipating Christ's First Advent

A. Primeval History – Genesis 1-11

i. Creation and the Fall

1. The first two Biblical events are creation and the fall. God created the world in an ideal state, and Adam and Eve, the first human beings, lived in close fellowship with God. They lived in a beautiful environment, were at peace with the animal kingdom, and had meaningful work and plenty of food. They lived free of all restrictions but one. God told them they must not eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil or they would die.
2. Although the Bible does not specifically tell us about the origin of evil, by the third chapter of the Bible, we are made aware of its existence. Satan, the enemy of God, came to Eve in the form of a serpent and deceived her into eating the forbidden fruit. She gave some to Adam and he also ate it. With this first act of disobedience, sin and death, spiritual and physical, entered the world. Sin creates a great chasm between mankind and God that we cannot bridge. However, at the time of the Fall, God promised that one day, the offspring of the woman would crush Satan (Genesis 3:15). The implication was that things would be set right again. From that time forward, God's people anticipated the birth of this Deliverer, or "Messiah," and hoped that He would make life what it once was. This "righteous one" was their hope.

ii. Flood and Babel:

1. Adam and Eve's firstborn son Cain killed his God-fearing brother Abel. Clearly, Cain was not the promised Deliverer, and Abel died without saving the world. Cain's descendants became increasingly wicked. God gave Adam and Eve another godly son named Seth. Among Seth's descendants were a remnant of people who loved God, but they all died. Eventually, only one righteous man (Noah) remained on the planet. The rest were so evil that God decided to send a flood to wipe the earth clean and start over. Every living creature on the planet died in the flood, except Noah, his three sons and their wives, and a male and female from each animal species.
2. After the flood, God told Noah's sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth, and their wives to repopulate and spread over the earth. However, some determined to live in rebellion against God and build localized empires, rather than dispersing throughout the earth. Up to that time, the whole world had had a common language, but when Ham's descendants started building a tower to reach heaven, God intervened and confused human speech, so that the people no longer understood one another. As a result, they scattered.

B. Patriarchal Period – Genesis 12-50 (2250/2000-1805/1700 BC)

- i. Abraham: The world clearly needed deliverance. Abel and Seth were godly men, but they died without delivering mankind from the penalty of sin or restoring the world to what it had once been. Noah was also a godly man, but neither he nor any of his sons was the promised Deliverer. Sometime around 2000 BC, God began working to accomplish His plan of salvation through one of Noah's descendant, a man named Abraham. God promised to bless Abraham, to give him the land of Canaan, and to make him the father of many nations. Most importantly, Abraham would be the forefather of the promised Deliverer. Abraham believed God and God credited his faith to him as righteousness.
- ii. Isaac, Jacob, Joseph: Abraham's son Isaac fathered twins. Jacob, the younger twin, was later renamed "Israel." He fathered twelve sons and they became the twelve tribes of Israel. However, while the family was still relatively small in numbers, ten of Jacob's sons sold their brother Joseph into slavery in Egypt. Joseph suffered terribly but eventually rose to a position of great power in Egypt. Later, when a severe famine hit Canaan, he mercifully rescued his brothers and their families. The book of Genesis ends with the twelve tribes of Israel going to live in Egypt. Although Joseph was a "type" of the Deliverer (or Messiah) – he suffered and also rescued his family – he died and was buried without doing anything to solve the problem of sin and worldwide decay. In fact, according to Jacob's deathbed prophecy, the Promised One would not descend through Joseph but through his older brother, Judah. God was working through this entire Hebrew family to bring His Messiah into the world and to enable the world to know Him.

C. The Exodus and Wanderings – Exodus-Deuteronomy (1446-1406 BC)

- i. The Passover and the Exodus: During the 400 years in which Israel's family lived in Egypt, they grew so large that the Egyptians felt threatened and enslaved them. God chose a Hebrew named Moses to deliver the Israelites from Egyptian bondage and sent plagues to teach the polytheistic Egyptians to fear Him. The tenth plague involved the death of the firstborn of every Egyptian household. However, the Lord told Moses to have the Israelites slay an unblemished lamb and put its blood on their doorposts. On the night of death, when He saw the blood, He would pass over their homes and their sons would live. This event was memorialized as "the Passover." It is picture of what God requires to free human beings from the death penalty of sin. God's Messiah would one day become our Passover Lamb to pay our death penalty. That very night, the Israelites left Egypt and headed toward Canaan, the land God had promised their forefather Abraham.

ii. The Wanderings

1. God entered a covenant with the fledgling nation of Israel and gave them laws to teach them who He was, what He was like, and how to please Him. They were to be a nation of priests who lived holy lives and represented God to the rest of the world. God symbolically dwelt in the Israelites' portable worship center, the Tabernacle. The only way they could approach Him was through a priest and by the shedding of blood for their transgressions. These were pictures of the work of the Messiah.
2. Despite the many miracles Israel witnessed, when the people reached the borders of Canaan, they refused to believe God would overthrow the powerful residents of the land. In consequence, the Israelites wandered for forty years until all but two men died (Joshua and Caleb), even Moses died. Like Joseph, Moses was also a kind of deliverer. He was a mighty prophet and wrote the first books of the Bible, but Moses was not the promised Messiah. God buried Moses outside Canaan.

D. Conquest and Settlement – Joshua-Ruth (1406-1050 BC)

- i. The Conquest: God brought the children of the Israelites who left Egypt into the Promised Land under the leadership of Moses' assistant, Joshua. God commanded Joshua and the Israelites to put all of the Canaanites to death because of their extreme wickedness. However, the Israelites allowed some of them to live and those remaining Canaanites were a stumbling block to Israel's faith.
- ii. The Period of the Judges
 1. After Joshua's death, the Israelites intermarried with the Canaanites and began worshipping their gods. As a result, the tribes of Israel lived in disunity for over 300 years. They were often overrun and dominated by foreigners. When they cried out to God, He sent a Judge to lead them to military victory. Some of these Judges were God-fearing but many lived in ways that reflected the decadent spiritual climate. Israel was anything but a kingdom of priests.
 2. The last Judge in Israel was Samuel. Samuel united the people and encouraged them to get rid of their idols and serve God wholeheartedly. However, as Samuel aged, the Israelites did not consider his sons suitable replacements, and they asked Samuel to appoint a king, just as the other nations, to unify and protect them. Samuel was displeased that the people were refusing to live under God's kingship. Nevertheless, God told him to appoint Saul to be Israel's king. Samuel was a godly leader but he was not the long-awaited Promised One.

E. The United Kingdom (Israel's Golden Age) – 1 Samuel-1Kings 11 (1050-930 BC)

- i. Saul: Saul was man's king. By human standards, he was impressive. By God's standard, he fell far short. Although he helped unite the tribes of Israel, he failed to recognize that his authority was God-given and he disobeyed God's direct orders. During Saul's reign, God instructed Samuel to anoint another man king, a young shepherd from the line of Judah named David. During Saul's reign, David rose to favor with the people by killing the Philistine giant Goliath and leading Israel to many military victories. Saul was jealous and tried to kill David, but God protected him. David waited many years before his appointment to kingship was realized. During those years, he suffered at Saul's hand, but God used this period to better prepare David to lead Israel.
- ii. David: God had promised that the Deliverer would come through Abraham. Later, He specified the tribe of Judah. After David became king, God promised that the Promised One would be David's descendant. He promised to establish David's throne forever through Him. He finally routed the last of the Canaanites from the land and expanded Israel's borders to include all the land God promised Abraham. In addition to being a great military leader, David was musically gifted. He composed many of the Psalms, which became Israel's hymnal. Although David was a man after God's heart, he was imperfect as a father and a husband. Like Joseph and Moses, he was a type of the coming Christ, but he too was not the hope of the world.
- iii. Solomon: David left his son Solomon to rule a well-secured and organized land. The days of David and Solomon were Israel's Golden Age. David left plans and provisions for Solomon to build a Temple as God's earthly dwelling. Solomon built the glorious Temple and asked God to make him wise and God greatly honored him for that request. People from foreign lands came for an audience with Solomon and to see his vast treasures. However, Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived (next to Jesus), foolishly ignored God's laws regarding marriage; in his later years, his many foreign wives led him into idolatry. When he died, he left the kingdom to his son Rehoboam. The kingdom was never the same. A man named Jeroboam convinced the northern tribes to rebel against Rehoboam. Rehoboam retained rulership of Judah in the south, but the northern tribes seceded and formed their own government under Jeroboam's rule. The kingdom of Israel was never again united. It remained a divided kingdom for the next two hundred years.

F. Divided Kingdom and Exile – 1 Kings 12-2 Chronicles (930-538 BC)

- i. Prior to the Fall of Samaria: Jeroboam's was the first of several dynasties to rule the northern kingdom of Israel. He set a precedent of encouraging idolatry and the others followed. The most evil king Israel had was Ahab. His wife Jezebel promoted Baal worship throughout the land. God sent prophets like Elijah and Elisha to speak directly to the kings and call the people to repentance. He also spoke through Obadiah, Joel, and Jonah, but Israel did not listen.
- ii. Fall of Samaria (722 BC): Many years earlier, Moses had foretold that they would go into captivity if they refused to live in obedience to God's laws. The prophets Isaiah, Amos, Hosea, and Micah warned Israel's last kings of impending disaster. Eventually, God did what He said He would; in 722 BC, He sent the mighty northern Assyrians to overrun Israel and its capital Samaria. The Assyrians carried the Israelites into captivity and sent foreigners to work the land in their place. The few remaining Israelites intermarried with these people. Over time, they became known as Samaritans. The majority of the Israelites were dispersed among the nations and never returned.
- iii. Prior to the Fall of Jerusalem: The southern kingdom of Judah was ruled by David's descendants, as God promised, and Jerusalem remained the capital. Judah had many bad kings and some of them flirted with the kings of Israel. Jehoshaphat of Judah made an unholy alliance with Israel and his son Jehoram married the daughter of wicked Ahab and Jezebel. Hezekiah and Josiah were especially godly kings of Judah and were effective in slowing moral decline. As a result, the kingdom of Judah remained intact for 136 years after Israel was dismantled. But Judah also worshipped idols. God sent the prophets Nahum, Zephaniah, Habakkuk to warn them, but when they looked to Egypt instead of God for protection from the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar, God gave them over to the Babylonians.
- iv. Fall of Jerusalem (586 BC): The Babylonians dismantled the society in Jerusalem in several waves. Daniel, a young Judean nobleman, was one of the first to be carried off. Later, Ezekiel the priest was later carried to Babylon in another wave. Eventually, in 586 BC, the Babylonians completely crushed Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple. The prophet Jeremiah witnessed the fall of Jerusalem and was a strong voice during these years. He encouraged the few remaining Judeans to settle down under God's hand of discipline and promised that God would release His people from exile in 70 years. Would the promised Deliverer ever come?

- v. Exile: God disciplined His people but He did not abandon them. He spoke to them through the example and visions of Daniel and the prophetic words of Ezekiel. During these years, the term “Judean” was shortened to “Jew.”

G. Resettlement – Ezra, Nehemiah (538-430 BC)

- i. Rebuilding: When the 70 years ended, the Persian king Cyrus issued an edict permitting the Jews to return to their homeland. He even made provisions for a new temple to be built in Jerusalem. Many had become comfortable in the foreign lands and never returned. Ezra, Nehemiah, Zerubbabel and Jeshua were leaders in resettling Jerusalem and the surrounding land. The Samaritans opposed the resettlement but God enabled them to rebuild the temple and the walls around Jerusalem and sent the prophets Haggai and Zechariah with spiritual encouragement.
- ii. Esther: Anti-Semitism was not only a problem in Samaria and Judea but also a problem abroad. Approximately 60 years after the Jewish exiles returned, during the reign of Xerxes, an evil man named Haman almost succeeded in wiping the Jewish people off the face of the earth. God proved His faithfulness by strategically and covertly appointing a young Jewish woman named Esther as Queen of Persia. God used her and her uncle Mordecai to unveil and override Haman’s plans.
- iii. Foreign Domination and Spiritual Apathy
 1. The prophets had foretold a glorious restoration of Jerusalem. Some of these prophecies were fulfilled in the resettlement, but the Jews continued to live under foreign domination. Many became pessimistic and cynical. God sent the prophet Malachi to confront their apathy for true worship. Malachi’s was the last prophetic voice the Jews heard for 400 years.
 2. During those years, the Greeks overthrew the Medo-Persian Empire. After the death of Alexander the Great, Palestine was fought over by two of his generals and their descendants for over a hundred years. Then, just as the Greek Empire was declining, the Roman Republic rose. By 63 BC, Jerusalem and Judea were subjects of Rome. The few Jews who still hoped for a Messiah envisioned Him as the kind of deliverer they most wanted, a political king rather than a spiritual deliverer. This was the world into which Jesus was born.

H. The Life and Death of Jesus – Matthew, Mark, Luke, John (6 BC – 27 AD)

- i. The Synoptic Gospels: “Gospel” means “good news.” The New Testament begins by announcing the arrival of the long-awaited “Christ” (the Greek translation of the Hebrew word “Messiah”), Jesus of Nazareth. The four gospels are accounts of His life, death, and resurrection. They were probably written sometime between 60 and 85 AD, or roughly 30-55 years after Jesus returned to heaven. In the beginning, it may not have seemed important to have a written record of Jesus’ life. Eyewitnesses could easily have refuted anything untrue. But as the eyewitnesses aged and heretical ideas became more prevalent, having a reliable record was critical. The first three gospels are called synoptic because they present a synopsis, or general outline, of Jesus’ earthly ministry and contain much of the same material. Yet all three have a slightly different focus.
 1. Matthew was an apostle of Jesus and a tax collector by trade. His gospel emphasizes Christ’s kingdom and was directed to a Jewish audience.
 2. Mark is the John Mark of the book of Acts (the cousin of Barnabas). He was a disciple of the apostle Peter and put down the substance of Peter’s teaching. Mark emphasized Jesus’ servanthood.
 3. Luke was a Gentile and thus targeted a Gentile (Greek) audience. As Paul’s traveling companion, he recorded the gospel Paul preached. Luke portrays Jesus as the perfect Man, tracing His ancestry all the way back to Adam.
- ii. The Gospel of John: John was the beloved apostle of Jesus and his gospel complements the others by adding commentary on the spiritual meaning of the events. He emphasized Jesus as the divine Son of God.
- iii. Jesus’ Ministry: Jesus’ earthly ministry was very public, especially in the beginning. He healed, taught, and preached to large crowds. He ate in the homes of sinners. He knew His mission. He understood that He was born to show the world who God is and to die for our sins. As the time for His crucifixion grew closer, He spent more time alone with His disciples, training them.
 1. *Claims*: Jesus made the lofty claim of fulfilling Old Testament Messianic prophecy (Luke 4:18-21). He claimed to be establishing a kingdom, not an earthly one at that time, but a spiritual one (John 18:36, Acts 1:6-7). He also claimed equality with God the Father (John 10:30) and to be God’s only provision for salvation (John 14:6). He said that God loves the world and had sent Him to die for our sins, and He claimed to grant eternal life to all who believe in Him (John 3:16). He said He was returning to heaven but promised

to come back again one day and reward His followers (Matthew 16:27).

2. *Opposition:* Jesus taught that obedience to the Old Testament laws was not a means of salvation but a means of expressing one's love for God. The Jewish religious leaders did not accept this teaching and saw Jesus as a threat to their authority. They opposed Him and eventually had Him crucified. This did not happen according to the will of man but according to the deliberate plan and foreknowledge of God (Acts 2:23). Just as Jesus predicted, on the third day He rose from the dead (Matthew 16:21). He is the ideal Savior because He was fully human and fully divine.

Summary Statement: The Gospels reveal that Jesus is the Messiah promised in the Old Testament and the uniquely qualified Savior of the world.

Principle: *Jesus Christ is the central figure of the story of the Bible and the One the Old Testament anticipates.*

Illustration: A friend of mine used to illustrate the idea of Jesus' centrality to the Bible with cookbooks. Cookbooks often have sponsors interested in marketing a particular ingredient. The title may not reveal it, but if you thumb through the recipes with an alert eye, you will notice that every single one calls for this ingredient.

In the same way, every book of the Bible features Jesus. It may be less obvious in the Old Testament books, where the name "Jesus" does not appear, but He is clearly in every book. He is key to understanding the story. He is the central figure, the Seed of the woman, the Passover Lamb, the Prophet greater than Moses, the Commander of the Lord's army, the royal Son of David, and the promised Messiah through whom God will restore all things. God gave us the Bible so we can know Jesus.

Application: One day, each and every person will meet Him face to face, whether or not they are prepared. If He is the central figure of human history and our only hope of salvation, shouldn't our lives revolve around Him? Shouldn't we trust Him? If we lack joy and peace, perhaps we should consider where – in what, in whom – we have our hope and trust. With what do you need to trust Him more fully? Is He truly your hope?

Transition: What the Old Testament foretells, the Gospels reveal, and what the Gospels reveal, the epistles explain. The historical book of Acts provides the context for these letters. Acts tells of Jesus' ascension to heaven and the history of the early church.

II. Anticipating Christ's Return

A. The Early Church of Acts (27– 58 AD):

- i. Pentecost and Peter's Leadership: Jesus said the Holy Spirit would come and empower His disciples to be His witnesses. The first chapters of Acts show how this happened. Despite opposition from the Jewish religious leaders, the early church grew in Jerusalem. When Jewish opposition claimed the life of the first Christian martyr, the church scattered throughout Judea and Samaria, and eventually much further.
- ii. James: As the church expanded and Peter, the leader among the apostles, was called to leave Jerusalem with greater frequency, James took over his responsibilities in Jerusalem. Some scholars date the only epistle penned by James quite late. However, it may have been among the first of the New Testament epistles. James wrote to the "twelve tribes scattered among the nations" (1:1), a possible reference to the Jewish Christians who were scattered by the onset of persecution outside Jerusalem (Acts 7-8). These believers faced trials of many kinds (1:2) and James encouraged them to choose a heavenly response, rather than an earthly one (3:13-18).
- iii. Paul's Journeys and Early Letters
 1. The earliest believers were Jewish but God's will had always been to include Gentiles in Christ's church. Jesus appeared to a persecutor of the Church named Paul and appointed him the apostle to the Gentiles. Luke outlined Paul's three missionary journeys in Acts. Aside from Jesus Himself, Paul is the single most influential man in church history. In addition to writing important documents that explain the gospel, he was also responsible for the gospel reaching Asia Minor and Europe.
 2. During and as a result of Paul's journeys, he penned several letters:
 - a. *Galatians*: Galatians affirms that salvation is by grace through faith alone and not by works.
 - b. *1 & 2 Thessalonians*: Thessalonians tells its readers to stand firm and prepare for Christ's return.
 - c. *1 & 2 Corinthians*: The Corinthians lacked spiritual maturity and needed to prioritize the best interests of others. Paul exposed their false teachers. In so doing, he revealed a great deal about his own ministry.
 - d. *Romans*: The prized letter to the Romans explains the full scope of our salvation, Israel's place in it, and the gospel's implications for daily living. Paul explained the inability of humanity to save itself. Rescuing us from our depraved, sinful condition was something only God could do. It was something He accomplished through His beloved Son Jesus.

B. Paul's Imprisonment and Trials (58 – 62 AD): At the conclusion of Paul's third journey, he brought an offering from the Gentile churches to the Jewish believers in Jerusalem. While Paul was there, he was arrested. When the Jews plotted to murder him, the Roman commander sent Paul to Caesarea, where he remained in prison for two years. Paul was tried several times in Caesarea. Although none of his enemies were ever able to prove their charges against him, Paul eventually appealed to the emperor and was transferred to Rome. He remained under house arrest in Rome for another two years (60-62 AD). During his imprisonment, he wrote four letters that are known as his "prison epistles."

i. Paul's Prison Epistles

1. *Ephesians*: Paul's letter to the Ephesians is theologically rich. Its theme is God's high purpose for the Church.
2. *Philippians*: Paul was especially close to the church in Philippi. He wrote them a "thank you" letter of sorts, in which he included a personal update and many words of encouragement. Joy is the letter's theme.
3. *Colossians*: Paul wrote the Colossians to address a heresy that in some way demoted Christ. Therefore, Christ's supremacy is the theological focus of that letter. Its outline and many of its thoughts are similar to those in Ephesians.
4. *Philemon*: Philemon was the Christian owner of a runaway slave named Onesimus. Onesimus made his way to Rome and somehow, perhaps under Paul's influence, became a committed follower of Jesus Christ. Although Onesimus was of great help to Paul, Paul felt it was only right for him to return to Philemon. Paul wrote Philemon and his household to request that they receive Onesimus without repercussions and as warmly as they would have received Paul himself.

ii. Paul's Pastoral Epistles: Although it is not recorded in Acts, Paul was apparently released from his Roman imprisonment and continued his missionary endeavors in what was probably his fourth journey. During these travels, he left Timothy and Titus in Ephesus and Crete (respectively), where they pastored churches, trained leaders, and defended the gospel from false teachers.

1. *1 Timothy*: Timothy was Paul's son in the Lord and Paul's first letter to him was a leadership manual. Among other things, it includes instructions on dealing with false teachers and instructions on worship.
2. *Titus*: Titus was another of Paul's sons in the faith. Titus had the job of resolving some problems in Crete and appointing the church with leaders. Paul's letter to him bears similarities to 1 Timothy.

3. *2 Timothy*: Paul must have been re-arrested and imprisoned in AD 67, the same year Nero beheaded him. Realizing his time on earth was short, he wrote Timothy a second letter. It is the last of Paul's letters that have been preserved and it is a very personal letter. Paul wrote that he had finished the race and kept the faith. "Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day..." (4:7-8). He warned Timothy of the dangers that lay ahead in the end times. Paul had eternity on his mind. Hope of our heavenly inheritance in Jesus is increasingly in focus in the last New Testament books.

C. Letter to the Hebrews: Hebrews is a very doctrinal book. Its theme is the superiority of Christ. No one knows who wrote the book of Hebrews or to whom it was even written. Some believe Paul wrote it but many other individuals have also been suggested. The abundance of Old Testament quotations and other internal evidence indicates that it was written to the second generation of believing Jews. The author warned the readers of the dangers of turning back to their Jewish traditions. Our *Acts 2* study covers this letter in two separate lessons.

D. The Books of Peter and Jude (64-68 AD): The epistles of Peter, John, and Jude are positioned immediately prior to the book of Revelation. All of these works have the end of the age in view. Like Paul, these men witnessed increased persecution and false teaching, and these were marks of the end times.

- i. 1 Peter: According to tradition, Peter spent his last years in Rome. Many believe he wrote 1 Peter shortly before the outbreak of Nero's persecutions (64 AD). He spoke of the blessedness of life in Christ and also sharing Christ's sufferings.
- ii. 2 Peter: Peter wrote his second letter just before his death in the mid-sixties to warn against the teachings of false prophets. He was concerned that ignorance of the scriptures might prevent his readers from standing firm, especially as persecution intensified.
- iii. Jude: Jude, the half-brother of Jesus, wrote to urge his readers to "contend for the faith" in light of false teaching (Jude 3-4). Nothing in the book indicates the intended audience or time of writing, but the book contains many parallels to 2 Peter. While Peter warned of a coming apostasy, Jude apparently witnessed it. He could have been written as late as AD 80.

E. John's Epistles (AD 85-95 [alternatively, AD 60-65]): In addition to writing his gospel, the apostle John also wrote three letters and the book of Revelation. According to the testimony of the church father Irenaeus, John wrote his epistles from Ephesus. He may have written them as late as AD 85-95.

- i. 1 John: John denounced an early form of Gnosticism in his first epistle. Gnosticism was one of the most dangerous heresies the church faced in the first two centuries. Gnostics taught that the spirit is entirely good and all matter is inherently evil. To be saved is to escape from the body by way of special, secretive knowledge, rather than by faith in Christ. John wrote to expose this false teaching and give believers assurance of their faith.
- ii. 2 and 3 John: John's second epistle warned against identifying with traveling missionaries who had apparently had a negative influence on some of the smaller house churches. 3 John, written perhaps a year later, suggests the situation had worsened.

F. Revelation (AD 95-96 [alternatively, AD 54-68])

- i. The Letters of Revelation: While the apostle John was in exile on the island of Patmos, the Lord came to him in a vision. In one sense, the book is an epistle written to the seven churches of Asia Minor. It is clear that these churches were facing persecution. The first three chapters contain Christ's words of warning and commendation to each of them.
- ii. The Apocalypse of Revelation: On the other hand, Revelation is also an apocalyptic book of prophecy. Apocalyptic literature is highly symbolic. The events of chapters 4-19 have been interpreted in a variety of ways. Some believe they reflect the course of church history from Christ's first advent until His return. Others think all the events described were fulfilled in the first century. A third approach discards the possibility of any historical events and views these chapters as presenting timeless truths about good and evil. The most commonly held approach today is to view chapters 4-19 as describing the future end times. Ultimately, the book shows God's sovereign control over human history. This fact would have greatly encouraged the suffering believers.

Summary Statement: As the apostles aged, they did all they could to prepare the second generation of Christians to live and possibly die for Christ. They knew that human history is racing toward its climax, when Christ will return and reign forever and ever. They wanted to prepare the generations after them to see Jesus face-to-face, whether through death or as a result of His return. They modeled fighting the good fight (1 Timothy 1:18, 6:12) and keeping their eyes on Jesus, "the author and perfecter of our faith" (Hebrews 12:2). His return was always on their minds.

Principle: *No one who hopes in Jesus will ever be disappointed* (Psalm 22:5, 25:3; Isaiah 28:16, 49:23; Romans 10:11).

Conclusion

No matter what our todays and tomorrows hold, the God of hope wants to fill us with joy and peace, *as we trust in Jesus*. One day, you and I will see Him face to face. That day could be today! Are we prepared to meet Him with confidence that our hope is fully in Him and that He is the central figure of our lives?

As we study Paul's imprisonment and trials and the later New Testament writings, may we seek to make real life changes to prepare for the day we meet Jesus.