

New Testament Survey:  
Philippians, Colossians,  
First and Second Thesalonians

Paul wrote Philippians and Colossians during his Roman imprisonment. With Ephesians and Philemon, these letters compose Paul's Prison Epistles.

## **Philippians**

For an account of the founding of the church in Philippi, see Acts 16. Philippians is a unique letter in Paul's writings because of the lack of controversy in the letter. Paul apparently had no major issues to address in the Philippian church. The Philippians had apparently sent a gift to Paul by Epaphroditus, who became ill on the trip (2:25-30).

### **Themes**

- Joy. Time and again, Paul mentions rejoicing and joy in this letter. In spite of his imprisonment, the Philippians' care for him brings joy to Paul's heart whenever he thinks of them.
- Servanthood. The letter to the Philippians contains the great doctrine of the "Kenosis," or emptying, of Christ of His divine prerogatives and the assuming of His servant status (chapter 2).
- Perseverance. Paul gives the beautiful description of the Christian life as a race in chapter 3.
- Contentment. In chapter 4, Paul speaks of a peace "which surpasses all understanding" in spite of the circumstances of life.

### **Outline**

Source: *Holman Bible Handbook* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 1992).

- I. Greetings (1:1-2)
- II. Paul's joyful concern for the church (1:3-11)
- III. Difficult circumstances (1:12-26)
- IV. Christian unity and humility (1:27-2:28)
- V. Timothy and Epaphroditus, their examples of humility (2:19-30)
- VI. Error of self-righteousness (3:1-11)
- VII. Christian maturity (3:12-4:1)
- VIII. Joy and peace (4:2-9)
- IX. Thanksgiving for generosity (4:10-20)
- X. Conclusion (4:21-23)

## **Colossians**

Paul had never been to Colossae, so we don't know who founded this church. It is possible that Epaphras, the man Paul mentions in chapter 1, learned the gospel message from Paul in his time at Ephesus and carried it back to Colossae. Regardless, Epaphras had visited Paul in Rome and brought questions with him. Epaphras would later suffer imprisonment with Paul (cf. Philemon).

The Colossian letter is a rich theological treatise on the divinity of Christ and the Christian life.

### **Themes**

- The preeminence of Christ. Paul emphatically states that Jesus Christ is responsible for all Creation, a doctrine confirmed by John in his Gospel.
- The denouncement of Jewish rituals and reliance on ritual alone in the faith. Ritual alone accomplishes nothing in the Christian life.
- The death of sin in the Christian life. All believers are freed from sin in Christ, and all believers are united in Christ.

### **Outline**

Source: *Holman Bible Handbook* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 1992).

- I. Introduction (1:1-14)
- II. Explanation of the supremacy of Christ (1:15-23)
- III. Ministry for the Church (1:24-2:5)
- IV. Warnings against false spirituality (2:6-3:4)
- V. Exhortations for ethical living (3:5-4:6)
- VI. Conclusion (4:7-18)

## First Thessalonians

Paul founded the Thessalonian church on his second missionary journey (Acts 17). After a short time there, Paul was chased out of the city by Jews who refused to believe his message about Jesus. These Jews later followed Paul to Berea. After leaving Berea, Paul went to Athens, where he delivered his message on the Aeropagus.

The letters to the Thessalonians concern both practical living in this life, and an exciting preview of the life to come. In both letters, Paul addresses the issues of eschatology, or last things, that will occur at the Second Coming of Christ. Paul wrote the first letter c. 50 and the second letter c. 51.

### Outline

Source: *Holman Bible Handbook* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 1992).

- I. Salutation (1:1)
- II. Personal problems (1:2-3:13)
  - A. Faith, hope, and love (1:2-10)
  - B. God's approved ministry (2:1-9)
  - C. Worthy of God (2:10-16)
  - D. "My glory and joy:" Paul's longing to visit the church again (2:17-3:5)
  - E. Timothy's encouraging report (3:6-13)
- III. Church problems (4:1-5:11)
  - A. Sexual morality (4:1-12)
  - B. Hope in grief: The Return of Christ (4:13-18)
  - C. The Day of the Lord (5:1-11)
- IV. Concluding exhortations (5:12-28)

## Second Thessalonians

Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians addresses issues that arose after the first letter. Apparently, some in the church at Thessalonica had decided that if Christ were returning so quickly, there was no reason to worry themselves with working for a living. There is also mention of a false letter from Paul (2:2) leading some to believe that Jesus had already returned, only they had missed His coming. Paul gives additional information regarding the return of Jesus to earth.

### Outline

Source: *Holman Bible Handbook* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 1992).

- I. Introduction (1:1-2)
- II. Encouragement for the church (1:3-12)
- III. Instructions to correct misunderstandings (2:1-12)
- IV. Injunctions to steadfastness (2:13-3:18)