

Church of God Sunday School

THE BIBLE — THE EPISTLES OF PAUL

DAILY READINGS:

- Monday:** Everyone has sinned (Romans 3:10-18, 23).
- Tuesday:** We deserve death because of our sins (Romans 6:23).
- Wednesday:** Jesus paid the price for our sins (Romans 5:6-9).
- Thursday:** Salvation is for all (Romans 10:9-13).
- Friday:** Salvation brings a relationship with Jesus (Romans 8:1, 38-39).
- Saturday:** We read of Paul's last words (2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18).

MEMORY VERSE: *"For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come . . . shall be able to separate us from the love of God . . ."*

—Romans 8:38-39

Letters Sent to Encourage and Instruct

Following the four Gospels and the Book of Acts, there are 21 books in the New Testament called the "Epistles." (An *epistle* is a formal letter written to a person or group of people.) The first 13 are commonly attributed to Paul and are sometimes referred to as the

"Pauline Epistles." These letters were written to encourage, warn, and give instruction concerning questions about the Christian faith. Some letters were written and sent to churches (groups of believers) that Paul had helped establish. Other letters were sent to churches Paul had been unable to visit, and some letters were sent to individuals.

If you count the number of churches Paul wrote letters to, you will find the answer is *seven*. These letters, at times called the "Church Epistles," were also named "Paul's Letters to Seven Churches." Although a letter was addressed to a specific church congregation, these letters were shared with Christians in other cities as well (Colossians 4:16). It is believed that after Paul's death, this practice continued, and reading Paul's letters became part of the worship service.

Arrangement and Style of the Epistles

The Epistles are not arranged in chronological order as might be expected. The longer Epistles are first, with the shorter Epistles last. These letters can also be classified according to when, where, and to whom they were written. The "Early Letters" (1 & 2 Thessalonians) are said to have been written during Paul's second missionary journey. The "Great Epistles" (Galatians, 1 & 2 Corinthians, and Romans) are said to have been written during Paul's third missionary journey. The "Prison Epistles" (Philippians, Colossians, Ephesians, and Philemon) are commonly dated during Paul's first imprisonment in Rome. The "Pastoral Epistles" (1 & 2 Timothy and Titus) were written to young pastors.

A common Greek greeting was "grace," and the usual Jewish greeting was "peace" (shalom). Why do you think Paul often combined these two words in his greeting (Galatians 1:3)?



SOMETHING TO CONSIDER:

The Apostle John also wrote letters to seven churches in Revelation. Seven is a Bible symbol of perfection or completion.

from, and greetings. Next, the letter contained a *prayer of thanksgiving*. The *body* of the letter explained the main reason for writing (answering questions, warning against false teachers, and giving instruction concerning the Christian life). The letter would end with greetings from other Christians and with a *benediction* (blessing and words of encouragement).

Effects of the Pauline Epistles

In most cases, Paul wrote each Epistle to a specific congregation or person. Yet, those letters blessed, encouraged, instructed, and convicted so many more. There are many examples of men and women whose lives were greatly changed because of Paul's writings. Martin Luther (a Catholic monk at the time) received God-given understanding concerning Romans 1:17, and the Protestant Reformation began. Two hundred years later, John Wesley was greatly affected by Paul's letter to the Romans, and soon a great spiritual awakening took place, called the great "Wesleyan Revival." Some Bible commentators have said that every great revival in the Christian Church began with the Epistles of Paul. What if Paul had not written these letters? Look at how his obedience to Jesus continues to help people even today!



The Thirteen Epistles Written by Paul

ROMANS: this Epistle is considered the most understandable summary of the Gospel. The "Romans Road to Salvation" is a collection of verses from this book often used in explaining how one can be saved. (See Daily Readings.) Paul greatly desired to visit the Christians in Rome (the greatest city in the world at that time), but he felt the importance of visiting Jerusalem (1:10-13) at that time. Paul sent this letter in place of a visit. Later, Paul would be imprisoned in Rome.

1 CORINTHIANS: the city at Corinth was well known for its wickedness. To "Corinthianize" was to be morally corrupt. A few years before writing the first Corinthian letter, Paul had labored in this city. It is thought that Stephanas and two friends (16:17-18) brought a letter to Paul with questions from the church at Corinth, and Paul wrote this letter to address those questions and other serious problems that had arisen.

2 CORINTHIANS: several months after writing the first letter to the saints in Corinth, Titus brought Paul good news concerning this church. However, he also said that false teachers were making terrible accusations against Paul. Paul wrote this Epistle (described by some as the "stern letter") to answer these attacks and also to encourage and challenge. Some call this the saddest of all the Epistles in the New Testament.

GALATIANS: Paul had visited the saints in Galatia at least twice (4:13). Upon hearing false men were teaching to be a Christian one must keep the old Jewish laws, Paul wrote the truth in this letter: ". . . be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage" (5:1). Many commentators call this Epistle the "Magna Carta of Christian Liberty," because we have "liberty" in Christ Jesus (2:4). (*Magna Carta* is "any basic law that guarantees liberty.")

EPHESIANS: because this Epistle lacks the personal greetings the other letters include, it is believed that this was a "circular Epistle" (a letter intended for multiple congregations). In this letter Paul told of the love of God in the form of prayers (Chapters 1-3) and also gave instructions concerning how a Christian should live (Chapters 4-6). Tradition tells us the Apostle John labored in Ephesus during the latter years of his life.

PHILIPPIANS: the church at Philippi was begun during Paul's second missionary journey, approximately ten years before this letter was written. This congregation had been very caring of Paul during his imprisonment, and Paul included his thanks for this when writing to them. This very personal letter written by Paul is often suggested reading material during times of discouragement.

COLOSSIANS: while in prison, Paul was visited by Epaphras who brought news from the church in Colosse. This letter was written to bring understanding concerning problems and doctrinal questions, such as angel worship and obeying Jewish laws. Paul spoke of his desire to visit the saints in Colosse when writing to Philemon (Philemon 22), whose home was the gathering place of the "church" in Colosse (Philemon 1-2).

1 THESSALONIANS: Paul had worked with Silvanus (Silas) and Timotheus (Timothy) to begin a church in the city of Thessalonica in Macedonia. After being forced to flee the city by the Jews (Acts 17:10), Paul was concerned

about the saints. Later, Paul wanted to return and visit, but knew he could not. As Paul traveled on to Berea, Athens, and Corinth, he sent Timothy back to Thessalonica. After hearing Timothy's report (3:6-9), Paul wrote this Epistle to clear up confusion over Christ's Second Coming (4:13-18) and also to deal with the false accusations that had been made against him (2:1-12).

2 THESSALONIANS: a few months after sending his first Epistle to Thessalonica, Paul heard that some of the saints were "troubled" (2:2), misunderstanding what he had written concerning the Second Coming. People had quit working, waiting for Jesus to come back. Paul told them that certain things would happen before Jesus came again (2:3) and that they needed to return to work (3:6-12). Paul gave them instructions on how to live while waiting for Christ's return.

1 TIMOTHY: Paul was like a spiritual father to Timothy, who had traveled with Paul and helped him during his first imprisonment. Some time later, Paul placed Timothy in charge of the church at Ephesus and then traveled on to Macedonia. Paul wrote this Epistle, giving Timothy instructions regarding doctrine and church government and also to warn against false teachers. We read in Philippians 2:19-22 that Paul thought very highly of this young man. You can read more about Timothy in Acts 16:1-3; 18:5; 19:22; and 20:4.

2 TIMOTHY: this Epistle, written shortly before Paul's death, is believed to be the last of Paul's Epistles. (If he wrote other letters, they were not preserved.) During this imprisonment, Paul was not kept in a rented house (as before) but is believed to have been kept in a dungeon. Paul encouraged Timothy to "be strong" (2:1), warned him of "perilous times" (3:1), and rejoiced in knowing that, although his end was near, he had "fought a good fight . . . finished my course . . . kept the faith" (4:7).

TITUS: Titus was another young man who had traveled and labored with Paul. This letter, written to Titus while he was in Crete, is believed to have been written after Paul sent his first letter to Timothy. This Epistle has instructions similar to 1 Timothy, dealing with qualifications of an elder, sound doctrine, and warning against false teachings.

PHILEMON: Onesimus (*o-NES-i-mus*), a slave of Philemon (*fi-LEE-muhn*), robbed his master and ran away from Colosse to Rome. After coming in contact with Paul, this slave heard the Gospel and was saved. For a time it is thought Onesimus helped Paul, but Paul knew Onesimus needed to make things right with Philemon. This letter from Paul to Philemon was written on behalf of Onesimus. Paul offered to repay the money himself and asked that Onesimus be received as a "brother beloved" (verse 16). Because of its length, Philemon has been called the first "postcard epistle."



1. What is an epistle? _____

2. How are the Pauline Epistles arranged in the Bible? _____

3. Name the four main parts of these letters: _____

4. What impact did Paul's writings have on Martin Luther and John Wesley? _____

5. How many churches did Paul write to? _____ How many pastors? _____

6. Why did Paul write to Philemon? _____

Who Was Paul?

Fill in the Blanks

Paul was a _____ citizen
from a wealthy family.
(Acts 22:25–28)

Paul was a _____ .
(Acts 26:5)

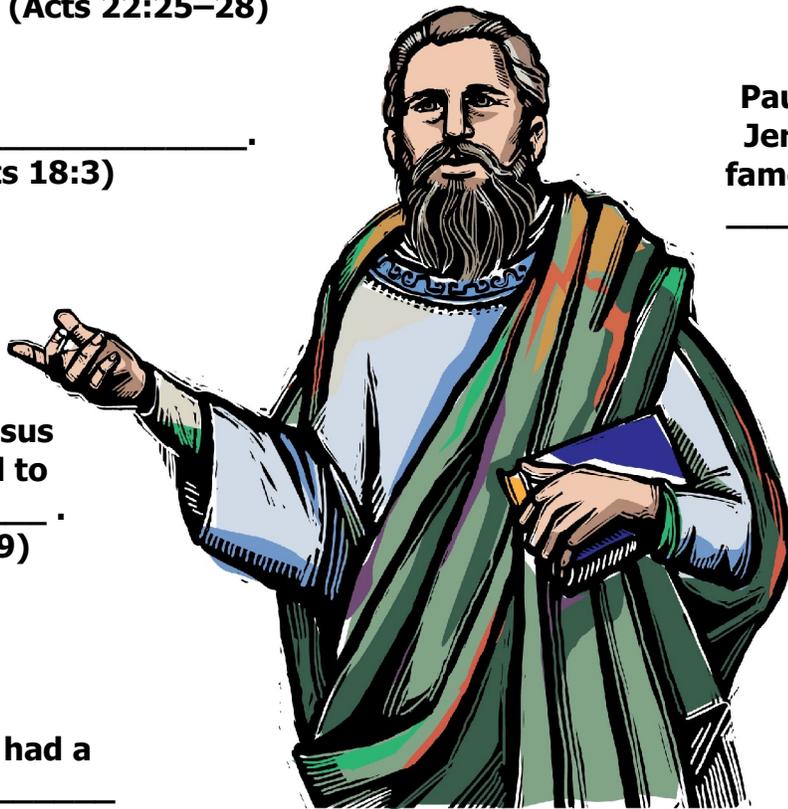
Paul was a _____ .
(Acts 18:3)

Paul was educated in
Jerusalem under the
famous Jewish teacher

(Acts 22:3)

Saul met Jesus
on the road to

(Acts 9:1-9)



Paul approved
the stoning of

(Acts 7:58-59)

Paul had a

and a nephew.
(Acts 23:16)

Paul was from the Roman city of
_____, located in what is
today southern Turkey.
(Acts 21:39)

Paul was an apostle to the

(Ephesians 3:8)

Paul was also called

(Acts 13:9)

Paul wrote the most books
of the New _____.