

## Perseverers Class

### Introduction to NT: Part 3 – NT as a Whole

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1. **Introduction:** The NT is focused on Jesus Christ with the overall objective of drawing people to salvation through Christ. The NT culminates in Christ's endless reign over the people of God in eternity. Every page of the NT relates to Christ. Even in the OT He is the primary subject, but not with the same exclusiveness or in the same way as in the NT. In the OT He is the Christ of prophecy. In the NT He is the Christ of history. In the OT He is the great hope, in the NT the great reality. He is anticipated in the OT. He is present in the NT. He is latent in the OT but manifest in the NT.
2. **NT As A Whole:** Scripture is God's Self-revelation in written form given through human authors by supernatural inspiration. God providentially guards His revelation, controlling it from beginning to final form. The 27 books of the NT include memoirs and letters forming a literary archway into saving truth, the true knowledge of Christ and His work on behalf of sinners. Neither the NT books nor the contents of any book follow a rigid chronological order. The aim of the NT is presenting Christ and His salvation. The 27 books divide into 4 groups.
  - A. **The Gospels and Acts:** The 1<sup>st</sup> group of books is Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and the Acts of the Apostles. These 5 are the historical books of the NT. They are foundational to all that follows. Each is in the form of a memoir or historical account written from personal knowledge or knowledge from other eyewitness sources.
  - B. **Letters to the Christian Churches:** Next comes a group of 9 letters inspired by the Holy Spirit and written to Christian assemblies by the Apostle Paul. They give instruction on Christian doctrine and practical application. The 9 letters are Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians.
  - C. **Pastoral Letters to Individuals:** Next is a group of 4 letters also written by Paul but addressed not to churches but to individuals. The first 3 are written to 2 of Paul's sons in the faith who have become pastors. There are 2 to Timothy followed by 1 to Titus. The 4<sup>th</sup> is to Philemon, a Christian at Colosse, who was the leader of a church in his home.
  - D. **Letters to Hebrew Christian:** Finally there are 9 letters to Hebrew Christians written using terms and references familiar to them. The 1<sup>st</sup>, called "Hebrews," was written to Hebrew Christians in general. The next, "James," was written to the 12 tribes in the Dispersion. Then there are 2 letters by the Apostle Peter. The 1<sup>st</sup> is addressed to elect exiles of the dispersion, and the 2<sup>nd</sup> to those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with his. These are followed by the Apostle John's 3 letters. The 1<sup>st</sup> has no addressee, but his short 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> letters are addressed to Jewish individuals. Next comes the letter from Jude, brother of James, which is addressed to those who are called. The last letter is an unconventional letter we call "Revelation." Although this epistle was written to Christians

by John, it was dictated to him by the risen Christ. Its form is Apocalyptic. The fact that it is a message in letter form is seen in the 1<sup>st</sup> verse. ***“The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place”*** (Rev. 1:1). All 9 letters (as revealed by statements and references in each letter) though Christian, were written from a Jewish standpoint, to Jewish Christians, and display a Jewish “atmosphere.”

3. **Progression in the NT:** The Gospels and Acts taken together lay a solid foundation of historical fact. The letters to Christian Churches and Hebrew Christians move on to instruction in doctrine and practice. The Pastoral letters form a bridge between the other 2 sets of letters. A high point of gospel truth occurs in 1 Tim. 3:16, Paul says, ***“Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up into glory.”***
4. **Interrelationship of the Letters to Churches and Those to Hebrew Christian:** Each set begins with a doctrinal treatise. Romans begins Letters to Christian Churches. Hebrews begins Letters to Hebrew Christians. Both sets end with an unveiling of Christ’s return, the first with the 2 Thessalonian letters, the 2<sup>nd</sup> with Revelation.

Romans 1:16 declares the gospel to be the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. Perfect obedience to the Law was the only way to righteousness known to the Jews. Paul says Jesus changed that. Rm. 3:21-22a: ***“But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it – the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.”*** “Hebrews” shows the new way to salvation to be better in every way than that of complete obedience to the Law.

The Thessalonian letters show Christ’s 2<sup>nd</sup> coming emphasizing its relation to the church. Revelation shows Christ’s 2<sup>nd</sup> coming emphasizing its relationship to Israel and the nations.

5. **The NT’s Orderly Unfolding in Understanding Doctrine and Practice:** Salvation in the NT is clearly described as a process designed by God. Each step is necessary before the next step. Likewise Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all deal with Christ yet are distinctly different. They are not parts of one consecutive narrative. Many of the basic stories in the 1<sup>st</sup> 3 Gospels are the same, yet minor and major differences abound. Matthew begins with a genealogy of Jesus beginning with Abraham. He ends his Gospel with the Great Commission. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Gospel, Mark, begins, not where Matthew leaves off, but with the ministry of John the Baptist. He ends with the ascension. Luke begins with the birth of John the Baptist. He ends with the disciples back in Jerusalem after the ascension continually in the temple blessing God. Each Gospel writer’s style is different.

Matthew collects Jesus’ sayings in purposeful arrangements with little concern for chronological order. His 1<sup>st</sup> group of Jesus’ sayings is the Sermon on the Mount in chapters 5-7. His 1<sup>st</sup> group of Jesus’ doings are the miracles in chapters 8-9. The 1<sup>st</sup> miracle Matthew

reports is not the 1<sup>st</sup> one Jesus performed, but the 1<sup>st</sup> miracle reported by John is the one performed first in time at Cana of Galilee.

Similarly with the letters. Their order in the NT is not determined by the date they were written. The first 2 written were 1 and 2 Thessalonians yet they appear last in the letters to the churches. Romans was written near the last but appears first in that group. Similar disregard for chronological order prevails in the letters to Hebrew Christians. The order in which the NT books are presented is an order displaying consistent progression in revelational truth.

6. **Some Comments on the Gospels and Acts:** Matthew begins the NT. He focuses on the links between the Gospel and Hebrew Scriptures. That approach shows the NT to be fulfillment of the Old. Matthew (Levi, the son of Alphaeus) was a Jew. In His flesh, Jesus was a Jew. Matthew's narrative is adapted for Jews.

Mark (John Marcus) was half Jew and half Gentile. John is a Hebrew name, Marcus is Greek. Mark worked with Peter as Luke worked with Paul. Mark's Gospel shifts away from Matthew's focus on Christ fulfilling Jewish prophecy to Jesus' command of the present. Jesus is presented as the action-filled, wonder-Worker from God with power over both visible and invisible realms. That approach is more directed to Gentiles than to Jews.

Mark's presentation of Christ did appeal to Gentiles, but it was Luke who maximized that appeal. He presents Christ as "the Son of Man." Luke, a Gentile, wrote in Greek style. The other 3 evangelists followed Hebrew form. Luke even prefaces his Gospel with a Greek-style dedication to a Gentile convert. He brings out Jesus' humanity without regard for national distinctions. The progression from Matthew (a Jew), to Mark, (a Jew-Gentile), to Luke (a Gentile), parallels the 3 stages of evangelistic expansion cited in Acts.

Things inferred in the earlier 3 Gospels about Jesus' divine nature as the eternal Son are completed and made manifest in John's Gospel. Jesus, the Savior of the world, is Himself Jehovah, the Creator. Jesus not only teaches truth, He is "the Truth." He imparts life because "He is the Life." The 1<sup>st</sup> 3 Gospels provide realities about the physical Jesus. John provides understanding of Jesus' divine spiritual nature.

The first 3 Gospels stress outer facts, human aspects, public discourses, and the Galilean ministry. John stresses inner facts, divine aspects, private discourse, and the Judean ministry of the Lord. Matthew wrote primarily for Jews, Mark for Romans, Luke for Greeks, John for the Church. This truth is revealed in their selection of the miracle by Jesus to be presented 1<sup>st</sup>. Matthew chose healing a leper. To the Jews, leprosy was the most loathsome and dreaded disease. Luke choose casting out a demon. Demonology was of great interest to the Greeks and leprosy of little interest.

Acts was written by Luke and dedicated to the same Gentile convert as was his Gospel. Acts shows the Apostles receiving power from the Holy Spirit and using that power to

continue the mission of carrying the good news of Christ to all people. In Acts we see the external facts of our Lord's earthly life, death, and resurrection completed in His ascension. Acts shows both the initial meaning of these truths to the Jews and their fuller meaning to the developing Church.

- 7. The Letters:** The letters focus both doctrinally and practically on the meaning and significance of "following Christ." They often deal with problems that arose in the developing churches. Three words from Paul point to the meaning of the Christian life, at least from its human side. Those words are "faith," "hope," and "love." ***"So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love"*** (1 Cor. 13:13). The 3 principal writers of the NT are Paul, Peter, and John. Paul is the apostle of faith, Peter of hope, and John of love. Their writings appear in that order which seems so spiritually correct.

In the Letters to Christian Churches, the 1<sup>st</sup> 4 emphasize the "**Cross**;" the next 3 emphasize the "**Church**;" the last 2 the "**Lords' 2<sup>nd</sup> coming**." In the Letters to Hebrew Christians, the 1<sup>st</sup> 2 stress "faith" & "works." The next 2 stress "hope" & "growth." John's 3 letters emphasize "love." Jude emphasizes "contending." Finally, Revelation speaks of "overcoming" and "inheriting." Notice the unmistakable progression in spiritual level.

Divine revelation of truth and human apprehension of that truth are interwoven in the NT.