

## LESSON ONE

# THE PAULINE EPISTLES

### A. THE EPISTLES:

In the New Testament there are twenty-one epistles, of which the Apostle Paul wrote fourteen.

There is a definite harmony in the New Testament and the epistles should be studied after the student has a thorough knowledge of the book of Acts. The writers of the epistles, with the exception of Jude, were all leading characters in the book of Acts. The message found in the historical book of Acts is mainly addressed to the unbelievers, while the epistles were written to believers. The purpose of the book of Acts is to evangelize; the purpose of the epistles is to instruct and to edify.

The book of Acts answers the question, "What must I do to be saved?" The epistles answers the question, "What must I do to live for Christ after I am saved?"

Just as there is harmony between the book of Acts and the epistles, there is also harmony among the epistles themselves. The writers never contradicted one another although each writer had his own distinctive theme:

Paul's theme	- FAITH;
Peter's theme	- HOPE;
John's theme	- LOVE;
James' theme	- ACTION;
Jude's theme	- VIGILANCE.

The word, "epistle" came from the Greek word, "epistole" and the Latin word, "epistola." In Modern English they are simply called, "Letters." This word is used in the same way we would use the word, "letter" in ordinary correspondence.

Although a few of the epistles were addressed to individuals, most of the epistles were written and designed to be read publicly to the churches.

Some of the epistles were written to meet specific needs of particular churches and individuals. Nevertheless they were so inspired and were of such spiritual importance that they were of great interest and profit to everyone. There were soon quoted as being part of the Scriptures, and soon found their place in the New Testament canon as being inspired writings.

### B. APOSTLE PAUL:

We may readily understand the importance of the ministry of the Apostle Paul when we remember that he was the central character in the last sixteen chapters of the book of Acts, and that he was the author of fourteen epistles which make up part of the New Testament. We may learn a great deal about this great man of God by not only studying the historical sketch given in the Acts, but also by studying his own writings. Each of his epistles tells us something about the author.

He was born, Saul, the son of an important Jewish family with Roman citizenship. His birthplace was Tarsus, the chief city of Cilicia, and the seat of a well-known school of learning. He was of the tribe of Benjamin.

As a youth he was sent to Jerusalem to continue his education. Here Gamaliel, one of the most distinguished rabbis of that day, taught him. He soon became a member of the Pharisee party, and also became an arch persecutor of the church. Considering the prominent place he took at the death of Stephen and in the persecution of the Christians, it would seem that he was a member of the Council of the Sanhedrin.

About the year 35 AD Saul was converted when Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus where he was travelling in order to arrest the Christians. After spending some three years in the Arabian Desert he eventually made his way back to Tarsus where he remained until Barnabas brought him to Antioch to be a teacher to the young church there. Here he received his missionary call and was sent forth by the church.

It was during his second missionary journey, in the late 50 or early 51 AD, that he wrote his first letters. These were his letters to the church at Thessalonica.

### **C. PAUL'S LETTERS:**

Paul was a great evangelist. This great soul winner who traveled from town to town declaring the Apostolic truth without fear or favor stirred the entire Mediterranean world.

In the beginning of his ministry he would make "return trips" to the newly established churches. In this manner he would confirm them in the truth and correct such errors that might have risen. However, this became more and more difficult as the number of churches grew, and his ministry was extended farther and farther afield. It was then that he began to write letters of advice, encouragement, instruction and correction to the elders and saints of the churches he had established.

Apparently Paul had some difficulty with his eyesight, and therefore dictated most of his letters to a copyist. Then he would add the salutation in his own "large hand." However, when he wrote the Galatians, Paul departed from his usual custom and wrote the entire letter with his own hand (Galatians 6:11). Paul wrote three of his letters to pastors of churches, one to a Christian friend, and the others to churches. The letter to the Galatians was a circular letter to be circulated to the churches of Galatia.

### **D. THE CHRONOLOGY OF PAUL'S LETTERS:**

We shall study Paul's letters as they are recorded in the Bible. However, it will help us a great deal if we would remember the chronological order of these letters. There were written as follows:

1. About 50-53 AD written during Paul's second missionary journey: I and II Thessalonians.
2. About 54-58 AD written during the third missionary journey: Galatians, I Corinthians, II Corinthians and Romans.
3. About 61-63 AD written during Paul's first imprisonment at Rome: Colossians; Ephesians; Philemon; Philippians and Hebrews.
4. About 64-67 AD written after the release from the first and during Paul's second imprisonment at Rome: I Timothy, Titus and II Timothy.

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### SELF HELP TEST

- A. What were Paul's first two epistles?
- B. Which was Paul's final epistle?
- C. Which epistle did Paul write with his own handwriting?
- D. Which epistles were written to pastors?
- E. Write a brief history of Paul's life up to the time of his missionary call.
  
- F. State the theme of the following writers:
  - 1. Peter -
  - 2. James -
  - 3. Jude -
  - 4. Paul -