

CHOOSING YOUR
FAITH
NEW TESTAMENT

HOLY
BIBLE



New Living
Translation®

SECOND EDITION

Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.
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ALPHABETICAL LISTING OF BIBLE BOOKS

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LIFE'S DEEPER QUESTIONS

WHY do we look at the beauty of a sunset or marvel at the wonder of childbirth and sense that there must be something undergirding all of this at a deeper level?

What makes us aware in our lying-awake moments that there must be more to life than the flurry of activities that keeps our heads spinning but our souls shrinking day after day, year after year?

Why do we long for a truly calm and centered life, one that is more in tune with the transcendent and less caught up in the tumultuous here and now?

How do we perceive that life is not as it was intended to be, and that we need some kind of outside help to really get things right?

You may be new to the Bible and curious about whether it addresses these kinds of serious issues. Or perhaps you've read it in the past and are returning for a refresher. Either way, I trust you'll find that these Scriptures resonate with your deepest questions and most heartfelt longings. It's where faith meets real life.

To help you on this journey of discovery, the *Choosing Your Faith New Testament* features these components:

First, there's the text of the New Testament, which tells the amazing story of Jesus, the long-predicted Messiah who came to earth for "all people" (see Luke 2:10). It also describes the beginnings of the church, which consisted of Jewish and Gentile people alike (see Romans 1:16).

All of this is presented in the New Living Translation, renowned for its balance of clarity and accuracy.

Second, I've added articles adjacent to key passages throughout these pages. These are designed to further illuminate the text, underscore some of the evidence supporting its teachings and claims, and explore its relevance for our lives today. I hope these notes will help you understand and apply the truths of Scripture.

You'll also find other helpful aids, including book introductions for all the books of the New Testament. These provide a helpful historical context for the content you're about to read. You will also find two reading plans that will guide you through the central passages of the New Testament in a relatively short span of time—one chapter per day. A concluding article at the very back discusses the implications of the Bible's main message.

You may wonder why this is called the *Choosing Your Faith New Testament*. It's because all people select their own beliefs about God and spirituality, and then they rely upon them for their life and future. So it's important to consider how and what we think about these vital topics in order to be sure we're making a wise choice.

Let me explain, using the three words: **Choosing Your Faith**.

Choosing: This is often overlooked, but the criteria you use to select your beliefs can greatly impact what faith you'll end up embracing. Here are six primary "faith paths" people use for choosing*:

Some arrive at their viewpoints through the Relativistic faith path, assuming that whatever they believe somehow magically becomes true for them. (This is a tempting approach, but one that doesn't work in any other area of life, so why trust it in the spiritual realm?) Others take the Traditional path, passively accepting the tenets passed down from their parents. (These could be true, but you need to test traditions to see if they're based in reality.) A similar approach is the Authoritarian path, which submits to the ideas of an influential teacher or organization. (These could also be correct, but the credentials of those authorities need to be carefully weighed.)

*For information on the six faith paths, as well as compelling reasons to consider the claims of the Bible, see the book *Choosing Your Faith . . . In a World of Spiritual Options* (details at the back).

There's the Intuitive faith path, which relies on spiritual instinct. (When tutored by truth this can become "discernment," but without that training it can lead you down blind alleys.) Then there's the Mystical path, where people's beliefs are based on what they think God has communicated to them in direct ways. (He can do so, but 1 Thessalonians 5:21 warns us to "test everything that is said. Hold on to what is good.")

Finally, there's the Evidential faith path, which uses logic and real-world facts to scrutinize truth claims. I believe wisdom leads us to apply this test to all of the other paths, and I think the verse just quoted supports that (including weighing other teachings against what the Bible says, since it passes the logical and factual tests itself).

Your: We each need to make sure we've carefully thought about these matters, considered our options, and selected a faith that makes sense and that we can truly own—not merely inherit from others.

Faith: We live by faith every day. We trust that our food will be good for us, the roads will be safe, and the person next to us won't harm us. We constantly rely on these kinds of beliefs without complete evidence or proof that they're right—and generally this trust pays off. Without this kind of "faith," we wouldn't be able to do anything.

Similarly, we live with the hope that our ideas about God merit our trust, and we rely upon these for this life and the next. This is true even if we're atheists or agnostics—in which case we live by faith that there is no God, or if there is, that we need not concern ourselves with him. We can't prove we're right; we just trust that we are based on what we suppose to be sufficient reasons.

But most of us haven't thought deeply about these things or checked out the evidence for or against our beliefs—at least not to the level they deserve. So let me encourage you to read this New Testament carefully, considering and weighing what you read. I believe you'll find answers and insights that will satisfy your soul. But more than just gaining spiritual information, I hope you'll get to know the Jesus revealed in these pages. I'm convinced that ultimately you can't do better than choosing to put your faith in him.

MARK MITTELBERG, author of *Choosing Your Faith*

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CHOOSING YOUR FAITH NEW TESTAMENT READING PLANS

The Bible has influenced countless lives over the centuries—and that continues today. But it obviously can't have an impact on us unless we carefully read and consider what is written in its pages. One of the best ways to do that is with a reading plan.

The simplest plan for reading the entire New Testament is to read three chapters a day (plus the articles adjacent to key passages) starting with the first book, Matthew, and going straight through to the end. At that rate you'll finish in just under 90 days.

To get the big picture of the New Testament by reading just one chapter a day, you will find a 90-day plan offered below. This reading plan includes the Gospel of John (one of the four biographies of Jesus), Acts (a history of the exciting early days of the church), and several important letters from the apostles Paul and Peter.

After that, you'll find a shorter 30-day plan for reading three key New Testament books at the rate of one chapter a day. This also includes the Gospel of John and one letter each from the apostles Paul and Peter.

A great way to end any of these reading plans is to read the concluding article "Choosing Your Faith" at the back of this New Testament. It will guide you in responding to what you have read.

90-DAY READING PLAN (one chapter per day)

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30-DAY READING PLAN

(one chapter per day)

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MATTHEW

T

HE BIRTH of Jesus of Nazareth

ushered in the long-awaited age of a new kingdom on earth—the Kingdom of Heaven. Matthew’s Gospel records the advent of this new Kingdom through the teachings and actions of Jesus, the Messiah. Since the Kingdom of Heaven is a major theme throughout this Gospel, Matthew was careful to show how Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament passages that speak of the Messiah, the ruler of the Kingdom. He recounted Jesus’ family history to show his royal lineage. After describing the virgin birth of Jesus, Matthew detailed Jesus’ messianic baptism, his temptation in the wilderness, and the early days of his ministry. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught his disciples how life in the Kingdom should be lived. Jesus also performed many miracles and taught the people various parables, or stories, that further illustrated what the Kingdom of Heaven is like. Matthew was careful to point out that the Gentiles, as well as the Jews, would be included in the Kingdom of Heaven. Matthew’s Gospel concludes with Jesus’ death and resurrection and his command to spread his message to every nation.

Author Matthew (Levi), one of Jesus’ twelve disciples

Date Written Probably between A.D. 60 and 65, perhaps from the city of Antioch

Purpose To present Jesus as the Messiah, who has brought the Kingdom of Heaven to earth

Themes Jesus the Messiah, the Kingdom of Heaven, Gentiles’ inclusion in the Kingdom of Heaven

Outline 1:1–4:25 . . . The early life and ministry of Jesus
5:1–7:29 . . . The Sermon on the Mount
8:1–18:35 . . . General teaching, parables, and discourses
19:1–23:39 . . . Journey to Jerusalem and final warnings
24:1–25:46 . . . Prophecies of things to come
26:1–28:20 . . . Jesus’ death and resurrection

Matthew

The Ancestors of Jesus the Messiah

1 This is a record of the ancestors of Jesus the Messiah, a descendant of David* and of Abraham:

- ² Abraham was the father of Isaac.
Isaac was the father of Jacob.
Jacob was the father of Judah and his brothers.
- ³ Judah was the father of Perez and Zerah (whose mother was Tamar).
Perez was the father of Hezron.
Hezron was the father of Ram.*
- ⁴ Ram was the father of Amminadab.
Amminadab was the father of Nahshon.
Nahshon was the father of Salmon.
- ⁵ Salmon was the father of Boaz (whose mother was Rahab).
Boaz was the father of Obed (whose mother was Ruth).
Obed was the father of Jesse.
- ⁶ Jesse was the father of King David.
David was the father of Solomon (whose mother was Bathsheba, the widow of Uriah).
- ⁷ Solomon was the father of Rehoboam.
Rehoboam was the father of Abijah.
Abijah was the father of Asa.*
- ⁸ Asa was the father of Jehoshaphat.
Jehoshaphat was the father of Jehoram.*
Jehoram was the father* of Uzziah.
- ⁹ Uzziah was the father of Jotham.
Jotham was the father of Ahaz.
Ahaz was the father of Hezekiah.
- ¹⁰ Hezekiah was the father of Manasseh.
Manasseh was the father of Amon.*
Amon was the father of Josiah.
- ¹¹ Josiah was the father of Jehoiachin* and his brothers (born at the time of the exile to Babylon).
- ¹² After the Babylonian exile:
Jehoiachin was the father of Shealtiel.
Shealtiel was the father of Zerubbabel.
- ¹³ Zerubbabel was the father of Abiud.
Abiud was the father of Eliakim.

Eliakim was the father of Azor.

- ¹⁴ Azor was the father of Zadok.
Zadok was the father of Akim.
Akim was the father of Eliud.
- ¹⁵ Eliud was the father of Eleazar.
Eleazar was the father of Matthan.
Matthan was the father of Jacob.
- ¹⁶ Jacob was the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary.
Mary gave birth to Jesus, who is called the Messiah.

¹⁷All those listed above include fourteen generations from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the Babylonian exile, and fourteen from the Babylonian exile to the Messiah.

The Birth of Jesus the Messiah

¹⁸This is how Jesus the Messiah was born. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But before the marriage took place, while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹Joseph, her fiancé, was a good man and did not want to disgrace her publicly, so he decided to break the engagement* quietly.

²⁰As he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. "Joseph, son of David," the angel said, "do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. ²¹And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus,* for he will save his people from their sins."

²²All of this occurred to fulfill the Lord's message through his prophet:

- ²³ "Look! The virgin will conceive a child!
She will give birth to a son,
and they will call him Immanuel,*
which means 'God is with us.'"

²⁴When Joseph woke up, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded and took Mary as his wife. ²⁵But he did not have sexual relations with her until her son was born. And Joseph named him Jesus.

1:1 Greek *Jesus the Messiah, son of David*. 1:3 Greek *Aram*, a variant spelling of Ram; also in 1:4. See 1 Chr 2:9-10. 1:7 Greek *Asaph*, a variant spelling of Asa; also in 1:8. See 1 Chr 3:10. 1:8a Greek *Joram*, a variant spelling of Jehoram; also in 1:8b. See 1 Kgs 22:50 and note at 1 Chr 3:11. 1:8b Or *ancestor*; also in 1:11. 1:10 Greek *Amas*, a variant spelling of Amon; also in 1:10b. See 1 Chr 3:14. 1:11 Greek *Jeconiah*, a variant spelling of Jehoiachin; also in 1:12. See 2 Kgs 24:6 and note at 1 Chr 3:16. 1:19 Greek to *divorce her*. 1:21 *Jesus* means "The LORD saves." 1:23 Isa 7:14; 8:8, 10 (Greek version).

Ancient Prophecies Fulfilled!

CONGRATULATIONS— you’ve gotten through the first seventeen verses of the New Testament.

You’ll be glad to know it gets easier to read from here on out!

They say a good communicator seizes the audience’s attention with the first few sentences. So why would Matthew start his biography of Jesus with such a long list of names?

He had a good reason. Matthew was primarily speaking to readers who knew that the long-awaited Messiah (“the Christ” or “anointed one”) had been predicted to be a descendant of Abraham (Genesis 12:2-3), out of the tribe of Judah (Genesis 49:10), and through the bloodline of King David (2 Samuel 7:12-16). And Matthew wanted them (and us) to know that Jesus had fulfilled those ancient prophecies.

In fact, these are only the first of several major prophecies Matthew alludes to in his opening chapters to show that Jesus uniquely fit the “finger-print” of the Messiah whom the Israelites expected would come one day to deliver them.

Matthew’s second example comes toward the end of the first chapter, starting in verse 18, relating to Jesus being born of a virgin. This was another sign of the coming Messiah—predicted way back in Isaiah 7:14, more than seven centuries earlier!

A third major prophecy, mentioned in Matthew 2:4-6, foretold that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. This was predicted in Micah 5:2, which was also written more than seven hundred years before Jesus’ birth—and again fulfilled in Jesus.

Here we are, barely out of the starting gate, and we’re already seeing several lines of evidence that point to the supernatural nature of both the Bible and its central character: Jesus. No wonder so many people believe he was the predicted Messiah and Son of God—or, as Isaiah foretold and Matthew confirmed, “Immanuel, which means ‘God is with us’” (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:23).

Neither Jesus nor his parents could have intentionally fulfilled these first three predictions—and there were many more to come. By some counts there were several hundred prophecies about the Messiah, including about fifty major ones, all of which Jesus uniquely fulfilled or is in the process of fulfilling.*

There are many spiritual options available to people trying to choose their faith, but no other religious leader has the credentials of Jesus Christ—and no other book has signs of the supernatural comparable to those found in the Bible.

*To read more about the prophecies concerning Jesus, see chapter 10 in the book *Choosing Your Faith*.

Visitors from the East

2 Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the reign of King Herod. About that time some wise men* from eastern lands arrived in Jerusalem, asking, ²“Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star as it rose,* and we have come to worship him.”

³King Herod was deeply disturbed when he heard this, as was everyone in Jerusalem. ⁴He called a meeting of the leading priests and teachers of religious law and asked, “Where is the Messiah supposed to be born?”

⁵“In Bethlehem in Judea,” they said, “for this is what the prophet wrote:

⁶And you, O Bethlehem in the land of Judah, are not least among the ruling cities* of Judah, for a ruler will come from you who will be the shepherd for my people Israel.*”

⁷Then Herod called for a private meeting with the wise men, and he learned from them the time when the star first appeared. ⁸Then he told them, “Go to Bethlehem and search carefully for the child. And when you find him, come back and tell me so that I can go and worship him, too!”

⁹After this interview the wise men went their way. And the star they had seen in the east guided them to Bethlehem. It went ahead of them and stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰When they saw the star, they were filled with joy! ¹¹They entered the house and saw the child with his mother, Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasure chests and gave him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

¹²When it was time to leave, they returned to their own country by another route, for God had warned them in a dream not to return to Herod.

The Escape to Egypt

¹³After the wise men were gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. “Get up! Flee to Egypt with the child and his mother,” the angel said. “Stay there until I tell you to return, because Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.”

¹⁴That night Joseph left for Egypt with the child and Mary, his mother, ¹⁵and they stayed there until Herod’s death. This fulfilled what the Lord had spoken through the prophet: “I called my Son out of Egypt.”*

¹⁶Herod was furious when he realized that the wise men had outwitted him. He sent soldiers to kill all the boys in and around Bethlehem who were two years old and under, based on the wise men’s report of the star’s first ap-

pearance. ¹⁷Herod’s brutal action fulfilled what God had spoken through the prophet Jeremiah:

¹⁸“A cry was heard in Ramah— weeping and great mourning. Rachel weeps for her children, refusing to be comforted, for they are dead.”*

The Return to Nazareth

¹⁹When Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt. ²⁰“Get up!” the angel said. “Take the child and his mother back to the land of Israel, because those who were trying to kill the child are dead.”

²¹So Joseph got up and returned to the land of Israel with Jesus and his mother. ²²But when he learned that the new ruler of Judea was Herod’s son Archelaus, he was afraid to go there. Then, after being warned in a dream, he left for the region of Galilee. ²³So the family went and lived in a town called Nazareth. This fulfilled what the prophets had said: “He will be called a Nazarene.”

John the Baptist Prepares the Way

3 In those days John the Baptist came to the Judean wilderness and began preaching. His message was, ²“Repent of your sins and turn to God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near.*” ³The prophet Isaiah was speaking about John when he said,

“He is a voice shouting in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way for the LORD’s coming! Clear the road for him!’”*

⁴John’s clothes were woven from coarse camel hair, and he wore a leather belt around his waist. For food he ate locusts and wild honey. ⁵People from Jerusalem and from all of Judea and all over the Jordan Valley went out to see and hear John. ⁶And when they confessed their sins, he baptized them in the Jordan River.

⁷But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming to watch him baptize,* he denounced them. “You brood of snakes!” he exclaimed. “Who warned you to flee God’s coming wrath? ⁸Prove by the way you live that you have repented of your sins and turned to God. ⁹Don’t just say to each other, ‘We’re safe, for we are descendants of Abraham.’ That means nothing, for I tell you, God can create children of Abraham from these very stones. ¹⁰Even now the ax of God’s judgment is poised, ready to sever the roots of the trees. Yes, every tree that does not produce good fruit will be chopped down and thrown into the fire.

¹¹“I baptize with* water those who repent of their sins and turn to God. But someone is com-

2:1 Or *royal astrologers*; Greek reads *magi*; also in 2:7, 16. 2:2 Or *star in the east*. 2:6a Greek *the rulers*. 2:6b Mic 5:2; 2 Sam 5:2. 2:15 Hos 11:1. 2:18 Jer 31:15. 3:2 Or *has come, or is coming soon*. 3:3 Isa 40:3 (Greek version). 3:7 Or *coming to be baptized*. 3:11a Or *in*.

ing soon who is greater than I am—so much greater that I'm not worthy even to be his slave and carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.* ¹²He is ready to separate the chaff from the wheat with his winnowing fork. Then he will clean up the threshing area, gathering the wheat into his barn but burning the chaff with never-ending fire."

The Baptism of Jesus

¹³Then Jesus went from Galilee to the Jordan River to be baptized by John. ¹⁴But John tried to talk him out of it. "I am the one who needs to be baptized by you," he said, "so why are you coming to me?"

¹⁵But Jesus said, "It should be done, for we must carry out all that God requires.*" So John agreed to baptize him.

¹⁶After his baptism, as Jesus came up out of the water, the heavens were opened* and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and settling on him. ¹⁷And a voice from heaven said, "This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy."

The Temptation of Jesus

4 Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted there by the devil. ²For forty days and forty nights he fasted and became very hungry.

³During that time the devil* came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become loaves of bread."

⁴But Jesus told him, "No! The Scriptures say,

'People do not live by bread alone,
but by every word that comes from the
mouth of God.*'"

⁵Then the devil took him to the holy city, Jerusalem, to the highest point of the Temple, ⁶and said, "If you are the Son of God, jump off! For the Scriptures say,

'He will order his angels to protect you.
And they will hold you up with their hands
so you won't even hurt your foot on a
stone.*'"

⁷Jesus responded, "The Scriptures also say, 'You must not test the LORD your God.*'"

⁸Next the devil took him to the peak of a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. ⁹"I will give it all to you," he said, "if you will kneel down and worship me."

¹⁰"Get out of here, Satan," Jesus told him. "For the Scriptures say,

'You must worship the LORD your God
and serve only him.*'"

¹¹Then the devil went away, and angels came and took care of Jesus.

The Ministry of Jesus Begins

¹²When Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he left Judea and returned to Galilee. ¹³He went first to Nazareth, then left there and moved to Capernaum, beside the Sea of Galilee, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali. ¹⁴This fulfilled what God said through the prophet Isaiah:

¹⁵ "In the land of Zebulun and of Naphtali,
beside the sea, beyond the Jordan River,
in Galilee where so many Gentiles live,

¹⁶ the people who sat in darkness
have seen a great light.

And for those who lived in the land where
death casts its shadow,
a light has shined.*"

¹⁷From then on Jesus began to preach, "Repent of your sins and turn to God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near.*"

The First Disciples

¹⁸One day as Jesus was walking along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers—Simon, also called Peter, and Andrew—throwing a net into the water, for they fished for a living. ¹⁹Jesus called out to them, "Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!" ²⁰And they left their nets at once and followed him.

²¹A little farther up the shore he saw two other brothers, James and John, sitting in a boat with their father, Zebedee, repairing their nets. And he called them to come, too. ²²They immediately followed him, leaving the boat and their father behind.

Crowds Follow Jesus

²³Jesus traveled throughout the region of Galilee, teaching in the synagogues and announcing the Good News about the Kingdom. And he healed every kind of disease and illness. ²⁴News about him spread as far as Syria, and people soon began bringing to him all who were sick. And whatever their sickness or disease, or if they were demon possessed or epileptic or paralyzed—he healed them all. ²⁵Large crowds followed him wherever he went—people from Galilee, the Ten Towns,* Jerusalem, from all over Judea, and from east of the Jordan River.

The Sermon on the Mount

5 One day as he saw the crowds gathering, Jesus went up on the mountainside and sat down. His disciples gathered around him, ²and he began to teach them.

3:11b Or in the Holy Spirit and in fire. 3:15 Or for we must fulfill all righteousness. 3:16 Some manuscripts read opened to him.
4:3 Greek the tempter. 4:4 Deut 8:3. 4:6 Ps 91:11-12. 4:7 Deut 6:16. 4:10 Deut 6:13. 4:15-16 Isa 9:1-2 (Greek version).
4:17 Or has come, or is coming soon. 4:25 Greek Decapolis.

The Performance Plan?

ONE OF OUR NATURAL INCLINATIONS in choosing our faith is to instinctively put our trust in our own efforts to do good, help others, and perhaps fulfill a list of spiritual obligations. It's the *Performance Plan*, and most religions are built on some variation of it.

The main idea behind this plan is that we improve our odds of making the grade, pleasing God, and getting into heaven through consistent efforts at moral living and self-improvement. After all, we reason, everybody knows that “God helps those who help themselves.” But what a surprise to discover that this famous “verse” is not really a verse at all—and nowhere to be found in the Bible.

More than that, Jesus makes it clear in Matthew 7:21-23 that trying to earn our way into God's favor by doing good deeds or participating in religious activities is ultimately a losing proposition. It's not that he's against our doing positive things—far from it. But he sternly warns us that unless our spiritual performance is *perfect*, we will fall short of his standard (see Matthew 5:48). The obvious truth is that none of us lives up to that standard because we all “break God's laws” (7:23; also see Romans 3:23).

Jesus is not being harsh or unkind; he's simply giving us an honest wake-up call. If we put our faith in the *Performance Plan*, we're destined to experience the greatest disappointment imaginable at a very real future event—the Day of Judgment. He doesn't want that fate for any of us!

As Jesus shows us here and throughout the Gospels, the real criteria for receiving God's forgiveness and entrance into heaven is not spiritual performance—which always comes up short—but enrollment in God's *Grace Plan*.^{*} This plan, as indicated in 7:23, is built on a foundation of knowing Jesus personally, which is the first step in following him and doing “the will of my Father in heaven” (7:21).

In effect, Jesus is saying: As you choose where to place your faith, you'd be wise to trust and follow me. I would add only this: In light of Jesus' amazing credentials as the unique Son of God, I think it makes sense to listen to his advice.

^{*}For more information on the *Grace Plan*, see Ephesians 2:8-10, and the notes near that passage.

ROMANS

LIKE a skilled lawyer presenting his case, Paul established a solid framework for understanding the broad scope of the gospel message in his letter to the Romans. Of all the epistles of Paul, this is the longest, most elaborate, and most systematic in design, reading more like a theological treatise than a personal letter. After a lofty introduction, Paul opened his discourse by discussing humanity's relationship to God. Once he established the basic concept that all human beings are violators of God's holy law, Paul offered a solution: the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Those who believe in Jesus Christ receive forgiveness for sin and gain new life in the Holy Spirit. Paul also examined Israel's place in God's grand scheme of history and discussed the future roles of Israel and Gentile nations in the Kingdom of God. Returning to his earlier train of thought, Paul discussed some practical applications of redemption through Jesus Christ. He concluded his letter with heartfelt salutations to several believers in Rome. Paul's epistle to the Roman believers provides the Christian church with a systematic presentation of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Author Paul the apostle

Date Written Around A.D. 58, from the city of Corinth

Purpose To present a systematic explanation of the gospel of Jesus Christ to the church at Rome

Themes Sin, atonement, living according to the Holy Spirit, the place of Jews and Gentiles in God's plan

Outline 1:1-17 Introduction
1:18-5:21 . . . Humanity's sin and Christ's salvation
6:1-8:39 . . . Victory over sin by the power of Christ
9:1-11:36 . . . God's plan for the Jews
12:1-15:13 . . Principles of Christian living
15:14-16:27 . . Concluding remarks

Romans

Greetings from Paul

1 This letter is from Paul, a slave of Christ Jesus, chosen by God to be an apostle and sent out to preach his Good News. ²God promised this Good News long ago through his prophets in the holy Scriptures. ³The Good News is about his Son. In his earthly life he was born into King David's family line, ⁴and he was shown to be* the Son of God when he was raised from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit.* He is Jesus Christ our Lord. ⁵Through Christ, God has given us the privilege* and authority as apostles to tell Gentiles everywhere what God has done for them, so that they will believe and obey him, bringing glory to his name.

⁶And you are included among those Gentiles who have been called to belong to Jesus Christ. ⁷I am writing to all of you in Rome who are loved by God and are called to be his own holy people.

May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace.

God's Good News

⁸Let me say first that I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith in him is being talked about all over the world. ⁹God knows how often I pray for you. Day and night I bring you and your needs in prayer to God, whom I serve with all my heart* by spreading the Good News about his Son.

¹⁰One of the things I always pray for is the opportunity, God willing, to come at last to see you. ¹¹For I long to visit you so I can bring you some spiritual gift that will help you grow strong in the Lord. ¹²When we get together, I want to encourage you in your faith, but I also want to be encouraged by yours.

¹³I want you to know, dear brothers and sisters,* that I planned many times to visit you, but I was prevented until now. I want to work among you and see spiritual fruit, just as I have seen among other Gentiles. ¹⁴For I have a great sense of obligation to people in both the civilized world and the rest of the world,* to the educated and uneducated alike. ¹⁵So I am eager to come to you in Rome, too, to preach the Good News.

¹⁶For I am not ashamed of this Good News

about Christ. It is the power of God at work, saving everyone who believes—the Jew first and also the Gentile.* ¹⁷This Good News tells us how God makes us right in his sight. This is accomplished from start to finish by faith. As the Scriptures say, "It is through faith that a righteous person has life."^{*}

God's Anger at Sin

¹⁸But God shows his anger from heaven against all sinful, wicked people who suppress the truth by their wickedness.* ¹⁹They know the truth about God because he has made it obvious to them. ²⁰For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse for not knowing God.

²¹Yes, they knew God, but they wouldn't worship him as God or even give him thanks. And they began to think up foolish ideas of what God was like. As a result, their minds became dark and confused. ²²Claiming to be wise, they instead became utter fools. ²³And instead of worshipping the glorious, ever-living God, they worshiped idols made to look like mere people and birds and animals and reptiles.

²⁴So God abandoned them to do whatever shameful things their hearts desired. As a result, they did vile and degrading things with each other's bodies. ²⁵They traded the truth about God for a lie. So they worshiped and served the things God created instead of the Creator himself, who is worthy of eternal praise! Amen. ²⁶That is why God abandoned them to their shameful desires. Even the women turned against the natural way to have sex and instead indulged in sex with each other. ²⁷And the men, instead of having normal sexual relations with women, burned with lust for each other. Men did shameful things with other men, and as a result of this sin, they suffered within themselves the penalty they deserved.

²⁸Since they thought it foolish to acknowledge God, he abandoned them to their foolish thinking and let them do things that should

1:4a Or *and was designated*. 1:4b Or *by the Spirit of holiness; or in the new realm of the Spirit*. 1:5 Or *the grace*. 1:9 Or *in my spirit*. 1:13 Greek *brothers*. 1:14 Greek *to Greeks and barbarians*. 1:16 Greek *also the Greek*. 1:17 Or *"The righteous will live by faith."* Hab 2:4. 1:18 Or *who, by their wickedness, prevent the truth from being known*.

AS TEMPTING AS IT IS FOR PEOPLE to try to ignore God in their lives, Romans 1:19-20 points out what most of us feel

when we look up at the starry sky on a clear night: The beauty and order in the universe screams that there is a wise and powerful Creator.

In 1802 British philosopher William Paley published his famous “argument from design,” which states that if you find a watch on the ground, you immediately surmise it is not a fluke of nature. By virtue of the complexity of its design, we assume that a watch requires a watchmaker. Whenever something shows evidence of having been made for a purpose, it points us back to a cause behind it, or an intelligent designer.

Think about it. Nobody picks up a watch on the beach and says, “Praise the cosmos! Just look at the wonderful creation the forces of nature have tossed together by chance.” But if you think the *watch* indicates a designer, just glance from your watch to your *hand*. It is far more complex, has far more moving parts, displays a much more intricate design, and would therefore, all the more, require a designer.

The realization that the beauty, order, and grandeur of the universe points us to the divine designer goes back at least as far as King David, when he said in Psalm 19:1 some three millennia ago: “The heavens proclaim the glory of God. The skies display his craftsmanship.”

Hundreds of years later, the apostle Paul picked up David’s theme when he wrote: “Ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse for not knowing God” (Romans 1:20).

This divine designer must be *incredibly intelligent, amazingly powerful, and wonderfully wise* to have somehow produced all of what we see in the universe, including its 10,000 galaxies and 70 sextillion stars (that’s 70,000,000,000,000,000,000,000—and those are just the stars we can see).^{*} Any being of that creative magnitude certainly ought to get our attention, capture our imagination, and gain our listening ear.

If he’s big enough, strong enough, and smart enough to make this universe, then ought we not at least sit up and take notice regarding whatever else he might want to say to us?

^{*}For more details on this topic and similar arguments for God’s existence, see chapter 9 of the book *Choosing Your Faith*.

never be done. ²⁹Their lives became full of every kind of wickedness, sin, greed, hate, envy, murder, quarreling, deception, malicious behavior, and gossip. ³⁰They are backstabbers, haters of God, insolent, proud, and boastful. They invent new ways of sinning, and they disobey their parents. ³¹They refuse to understand, break their promises, are heartless, and have no mercy. ³²They know God's justice requires that those who do these things deserve to die, yet they do them anyway. Worse yet, they encourage others to do them, too.

God's Judgment of Sin

2 You may think you can condemn such people, but you are just as bad, and you have no excuse! When you say they are wicked and should be punished, you are condemning yourself, for you who judge others do these very same things. ²And we know that God, in his justice, will punish anyone who does such things. ³Since you judge others for doing these things, why do you think you can avoid God's judgment when you do the same things? ⁴Don't you see how wonderfully kind, tolerant, and patient God is with you? Does this mean nothing to you? Can't you see that his kindness is intended to turn you from your sin?

⁵But because you are stubborn and refuse to turn from your sin, you are storing up terrible punishment for yourself. For a day of anger is coming, when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. ⁶He will judge everyone according to what they have done. ⁷He will give eternal life to those who keep on doing good, seeking after the glory and honor and immortality that God offers. ⁸But he will pour out his anger and wrath on those who live for themselves, who refuse to obey the truth and instead live lives of wickedness. ⁹There will be trouble and calamity for everyone who keeps on doing what is evil—for the Jew first and also for the Gentile.* ¹⁰But there will be glory and honor and peace from God for all who do good—for the Jew first and also for the Gentile. ¹¹For God does not show favoritism.

¹²When the Gentiles sin, they will be destroyed, even though they never had God's written law. And the Jews, who do have God's law, will be judged by that law when they fail to obey it. ¹³For merely listening to the law doesn't make us right with God. It is obeying the law that makes us right in his sight. ¹⁴Even Gentiles, who do not have God's written law, show that they know his law when they instinctively obey it, even without having heard it. ¹⁵They demonstrate that God's law is written in their hearts, for their own conscience and thoughts either accuse them or tell them they are doing right. ¹⁶And this is the message I proclaim—that the

day is coming when God, through Christ Jesus, will judge everyone's secret life.

The Jews and the Law

¹⁷You who call yourselves Jews are relying on God's law, and you boast about your special relationship with him. ¹⁸You know what he wants; you know what is right because you have been taught his law. ¹⁹You are convinced that you are a guide for the blind and a light for people who are lost in darkness. ²⁰You think you can instruct the ignorant and teach children the ways of God. For you are certain that God's law gives you complete knowledge and truth.

²¹Well then, if you teach others, why don't you teach yourself? You tell others not to steal, but do you steal? ²²You say it is wrong to commit adultery, but do you commit adultery? You condemn idolatry, but do you use items stolen from pagan temples? ²³You are so proud of knowing the law, but you dishonor God by breaking it. ²⁴No wonder the Scriptures say, "The Gentiles blaspheme the name of God because of you."^{*}

²⁵The Jewish ceremony of circumcision has value only if you obey God's law. But if you don't obey God's law, you are no better off than an uncircumcised Gentile. ²⁶And if the Gentiles obey God's law, won't God declare them to be his own people? ²⁷In fact, uncircumcised Gentiles who keep God's law will condemn you Jews who are circumcised and possess God's law but don't obey it.

²⁸For you are not a true Jew just because you were born of Jewish parents or because you have gone through the ceremony of circumcision. ²⁹No, a true Jew is one whose heart is right with God. And true circumcision is not merely obeying the letter of the law; rather, it is a change of heart produced by God's Spirit. And a person with a changed heart seeks praise* from God, not from people.

God Remains Faithful

3 Then what's the advantage of being a Jew? Is there any value in the ceremony of circumcision? ²Yes, there are great benefits! First of all, the Jews were entrusted with the whole revelation of God.*

³True, some of them were unfaithful; but just because they were unfaithful, does that mean God will be unfaithful? ⁴Of course not! Even if everyone else is a liar, God is true. As the Scriptures say about him,

"You will be proved right in what you say, and you will win your case in court."^{*}

⁵"But," some might say, "our sinfulness serves a good purpose, for it helps people see how righteous God is. Isn't it unfair, then, for him to

2:9 Greek also for the Greek; also in 2:10. 2:22 Greek do you steal from temples? 2:24 Isa 52:5 (Greek version). 2:29 Or receives praise. 3:2 Greek the oracles of God. 3:4 Ps 51:4 (Greek version).

Bad News/Good News

IMAGINE THIS: YOU'RE OUT IN THE ocean on a sunny summer day, about a mile from the shore, with a group of friends

who are having fun together swimming near the boat. You, however, are standing on the deck, feeling concerned for their safety. So you throw out a rope with a life preserver tied to it and shout to them to grab onto it so you can pull them up into the boat.

How do your frolicking friends respond? "Lighten up!" they playfully call back to you. "The water's warm and the swimming is great. Why don't you just jump in and join us!"

Maybe I should reconsider my strategy, you think to yourself. Maybe they would be more interested in my offer if I first told them about the sharks that are circling them!

It's true, isn't it? Life preservers become much more relevant when we realize our life is in jeopardy. People don't get life-saving radiation treatments unless they know they have cancer. Nobody gets heart surgery until they find out they have a cardiovascular problem. We don't look up and ask for help until we've hit bottom and realize we're helpless.

The apostle Paul understood this principle well. That's why he unabashedly laid out the bad news first. He spelled it out for almost the entire first three chapters of Romans, summarizing it here in 3:23: "For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard." Paul explained that, morally speaking, we're in serious trouble. We're in deep water, the sharks are circling, and we're about to go down. Once we grasp that, we'll be ready to hear about the solution to our spiritual dilemma.

But the good news is made clear in 3:22: "We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes."

The sharks are real, but so is the life preserver. And who is that lifeline available to? "Everyone who believes, no matter who we are!" Read more about it in Romans, and then grab hold of the lifeline!*

*For more details on God's solution to our predicament, see Ephesians 2:8-9 and the notes there.

punish us?" (This is merely a human point of view.) ⁶Of course not! If God were not entirely fair, how would he be qualified to judge the world? ⁷"But," someone might still argue, "how can God condemn me as a sinner if my dishonesty highlights his truthfulness and brings him more glory?" ⁸And some people even slander us by claiming that we say, "The more we sin, the better it is!" Those who say such things deserve to be condemned.

All People Are Sinners

⁹Well then, should we conclude that we Jews are better than others? No, not at all, for we have already shown that all people, whether Jews or Gentiles,* are under the power of sin. ¹⁰As the Scriptures say,

"No one is righteous—
not even one.

¹¹ No one is truly wise;
no one is seeking God.

¹² All have turned away;
all have become useless.

No one does good,
not a single one."^{**}

¹³ "Their talk is foul, like the stench from an open grave.

Their tongues are filled with lies."
"Snake venom drips from their lips."^{**}

¹⁴ "Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness."^{*}

¹⁵ "They rush to commit murder.

¹⁶ Destruction and misery always follow them.

¹⁷ They don't know where to find peace."^{**}

¹⁸ "They have no fear of God at all."^{**}

¹⁹Obviously, the law applies to those to whom it was given, for its purpose is to keep people from having excuses, and to show that the entire world is guilty before God. ²⁰For no one can ever be made right with God by doing what the law commands. The law simply shows us how sinful we are.

Christ Took Our Punishment

²¹But now God has shown us a way to be made right with him without keeping the requirements of the law, as was promised in the writings of Moses* and the prophets long ago. ²²We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are.

²³For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard. ²⁴Yet God, with undeserved kindness, declares that we are righteous. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins. ²⁵For God pre-

sented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. People are made right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood. This sacrifice shows that God was being fair when he held back and did not punish those who sinned in times past, ²⁶for he was looking ahead and including them in what he would do in this present time. God did this to demonstrate his righteousness, for he himself is fair and just, and he declares sinners to be right in his sight when they believe in Jesus.

²⁷Can we boast, then, that we have done anything to be accepted by God? No, because our acquittal is not based on obeying the law. It is based on faith. ²⁸So we are made right with God through faith and not by obeying the law.

²⁹After all, is God the God of the Jews only? Isn't he also the God of the Gentiles? Of course he is. ³⁰There is only one God, and he makes people right with himself only by faith, whether they are Jews or Gentiles.* ³¹Well then, if we emphasize faith, does this mean that we can forget about the law? Of course not! In fact, only when we have faith do we truly fulfill the law.

The Faith of Abraham

4 Abraham was, humanly speaking, the founder of our Jewish nation. What did he discover about being made right with God? ²If his good deeds had made him acceptable to God, he would have had something to boast about. But that was not God's way. ³For the Scriptures tell us, "Abraham believed God, and God counted him as righteous because of his faith."^{*}

⁴When people work, their wages are not a gift, but something they have earned. ⁵But people are counted as righteous, not because of their work, but because of their faith in God who forgives sinners. ⁶David also spoke of this when he described the happiness of those who are declared righteous without working for it:

⁷ "Oh, what joy for those
whose disobedience is forgiven,
whose sins are put out of sight.

⁸ Yes, what joy for those
whose record the LORD has cleared of
sin."^{**}

⁹Now, is this blessing only for the Jews, or is it also for uncircumcised Gentiles?* Well, we have been saying that Abraham was counted as righteous by God because of his faith. ¹⁰But how did this happen? Was he counted as righteous only after he was circumcised, or was it before he was circumcised? Clearly, God accepted Abraham before he was circumcised!

¹¹Circumcision was a sign that Abraham already had faith and that God had already

³⁻⁹ Greek or Greeks. ^{3:10-12} Pss 14:1-3; 53:1-3 (Greek version). ^{3:13} Pss 5:9 (Greek version); 140:3. ^{3:14} Ps 10:7 (Greek version). ^{3:15-17} Isa 59:7-8. ^{3:18} Ps 36:1. ^{3:21} Greek *in the law*. ^{3:30} Greek *whether they are circumcised or uncircumcised*. ^{4:3} Gen 15:6. ^{4:7-8} Ps 32:1-2 (Greek version). ^{4:9} Greek *is this blessing only for the circumcised, or is it also for the uncircumcised?*