

PAUL'S SECOND ROMAN IMPRISONMENT:  
THE LETTER OF II TIMOTHY

The death of James, the brother of Jesus, takes place in Jerusalem, Easter of 66, shortly before the outbreak of the Jewish War.<sup>95</sup> Because of his public confession of Jesus, James is hurled from the top of the temple by fanatical Jews, stoned, and finally clubbed to death.

Paul returns to Rome in the spring of 66 and is soon arrested. When he writes II Timothy in the summer of 66, he has been in prison in Rome for some time, no longer able to preach, and bound with chains like a criminal, his whereabouts hard to ascertain. Where Timothy is at this time is not known. Only Onesiphorus and Luke ministered to Paul's needs during this final imprisonment. Onesiphorus showed great devotion and courage in searching for Paul until he found him. However, by the time of the writing of this letter he has died. Luke has remained with Paul the entire time. Tychicus is not with Paul since Paul has sent him to Ephesus. Many others have deserted him or are, like Timothy, tempted to do so.<sup>96</sup> These desertions are possibly due to lack of courage lest they become involved in Paul's fate or, like Demas, a result of love for the world.

Paul knows now that he will never preach again and that he will soon be executed.<sup>97</sup> However, he is not depressed but writes his letter with a feeling that uplifts him and is intended to hearten Timothy. Paul has finished his course. The journey to Spain that he had planned before his first Roman imprisonment, and for which the Lord had brought about his acquittal and freedom, has been accomplished. There now remains only for him to receive the victor's crown. He asks Timothy to come to him quickly, bringing Mark with him. When Timothy passes through Troas, he is to pick up Paul's cloak and scrolls that were left there in the care of Carpus at the time of Paul's departure not long ago. On Paul's last stop at Troas, he had been opposed by Alexander the metalworker, who was hostile to the apostolic doctrine. This hostility had compelled Paul to leave Troas hastily without his cloak and scrolls. Timothy is warned to beware of Alexander, who had done Paul much harm.

It is on account of the near approach of his martyrdom that Paul exhorts Timothy so earnestly to be unremitting in his efforts to preach the gospel. Exercising all the powers that he has, Timothy is to fill Paul's place, bearing in mind his own calling. He is to be sure that both in his own time and afterwards there shall be other men faithful to the doctrine he had received from Paul to take his place when he is gone.

Paul is beheaded toward the end of 66 or the beginning of 67 on the Via Ostiensis. Mark's Gospel is published in 67. The war in Galilee begins in 67 when Rome responds to the Jewish revolt. Because of Jesus' warning recorded in Luke 21:20-21, the Christians in Jerusalem flee to Pella in 67 as the Romans advance on Jerusalem. There is a civil war in Jerusalem during the winter of 67-68. The Emperor Nero dies on June 9th, 68. The settlement of the apostle John and other disciples in the province of Asia also occurs in 68. Following the death of Nero in 68, three emperors follow in rapid succession, and then Vespasian comes to power in July of 69. In April of the year 70, the siege of Jerusalem by the

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95 The revolt against Rome that leads eventually to the destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70.

96 Cf. II Tim. 1:8 (Zahn II:3-4).

97 II Tim. 4:6.

Roman general Titus begins. In August that year Jerusalem is captured and the temple destroyed. Afterward, the church in Jerusalem is reassembled under the leadership of Simeon, a cousin of James.

### THE LETTER OF JUDE

Somewhere around the year 75, Jude writes his epistle. He is one of the younger brothers of Jesus and thus also a brother of James, former leader of the Jerusalem church. Jude, accompanied by his wife, labored as a preacher of the gospel within the Jewish Christian world. He now writes to those Christians with whom he had come into contact on his journeys as an evangelist. They are the same readers addressed by Peter in his first epistle that has come down to us (our II Peter), written ten to fifteen years earlier. Jude is constrained to warn his readers of false teachers who are now among them. These false teachers are godless men, murmuring against the established order of the church and its chosen leaders. They blaspheme angels and endeavor to lead the members of the church astray into immorality; they scoff at the promise of the coming of the Lord. Jude writes that these men are the very false teachers whom Peter predicted would make an entrance into their midst.

### THE WRITINGS OF LUKE

Also in or around the year 75, Luke writes his Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles. Luke is a native of Antioch, a Gentile by birth, a physician by profession,<sup>98</sup> and became a member of the Antiochian church by the year 40 at the latest, before Emperor Claudius came to the throne in January of 41. Both of his historical accounts are written for the benefit of Theophilus, a man of high position, not a member of the Christian Church, but a Gentile interested in Christianity. These works were designed to give Theophilus his first real knowledge, fundamental insight, and conviction regarding the trustworthiness of the message that he had heard. Theophilus was favorably inclined to the Christian faith, but all his doubts had not yet been overcome. In that Luke dedicates his second work to him as well as his gospel, it is evident that the gospel had met with a kindly reception and that possibly Theophilus had ceased to be the man of distinction and had become a brother.

Luke knew nothing of the existence of a gospel written by Matthew, one of the twelve disciples of Jesus. However, he was aware of the existence of the gospel of Mark and the gospels of other writers,<sup>99</sup> who, like himself and Mark, did not belong to the company of those who had been eye-witnesses and ministers of the word from the beginning. He uses these in preparing his own gospel account for Theophilus, but he uses his own first-hand knowledge for his second work, the Acts of the Apostles, since he had been a frequent companion of

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98 Col. 4:14.

99 Schleiermacher was the first to propose the existence of a collection of Jesus' sayings. At some point near the end of the nineteenth century this source became known as "Q." Q may have been a single document or, more likely, a group of documents. In modern NT studies it is often suggested that both Matthew and Luke used Q. Luke also used material not used by either Mark or Matthew called "L"--a source or sources that may have been written or oral.

Paul on his missionary journeys.<sup>100</sup>

Luke intends to give a logically connected, historical account in which events that precede prepare for and explain events that follow. Apparently, this design was in contrast to the disconnected narratives to which Theophilus heretofore had been accustomed. His intent is to set out the history of Christianity from its beginning to the point that it had reached in his own time. Luke's purpose evidently was to do this in three separate works, but he completes only the first two, taking his reader up to the time of Paul's release from his first imprisonment. The continuation of his narrative from that point on was either never written, never completed, or no longer extant.<sup>101</sup>

### THE LETTER TO THE HEBREWS

The Epistle to the Hebrews was written around the year 80,<sup>102</sup> its author unknown.<sup>103</sup> It was written to a small group of Christians in Rome, Jewish by birth, who had been Christians for a long time. They were a part of the whole church at Rome but attached to one of the several household congregations in the city. Prior to conversion, they had no connection with the Jewish sacrificial system of worship.

The author had not been a personal disciple of Jesus but owed his Christian faith to the preaching of such disciples.<sup>104</sup> The same was true of his readers. Those disciples of Jesus

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100 As evidenced by the "we" passages; see footnote 16.

101 See footnote 68.

102 Although Zahn's view of the authorship of Hebrews accords well with modern scholars (see the following footnote), the same cannot be said for his conclusion regarding the date. Central to the debate is the destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70. Although Zahn addresses this issue at length, many contemporary evangelical scholars argue that the letter's references to the sacrificial system require a date prior to the destruction of the Temple. However, no date between about 60 and 100 can be decisively ruled out. See D. A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo, and Leon Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament* [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992], pp. 398-400. Many of Zahn's interpretations of Hebrews summarized in this paper are based on his date of A.D. 80 and his identification of the readers to whom the letter is addressed.

103 The authorship of Hebrews has been debated throughout the history of the church. The earliest extant text of Hebrews is in  $\rho^{46}$ , one of the earliest papyrus manuscripts (c. A.D. 200). In this manuscript, Hebrews is placed in the Pauline corpus, just after Romans. This likely reflects the belief of the Eastern church, beginning with Clement of Alexandria (c. A.D. 150-215) and Origen (185-253), that Paul wrote this letter. Both, however, recognized the difficulties with this view. In the Western church, Pauline authorship was resisted until the latter half of the fourth century. Neither Ireneus nor Hippolytus of Rome believed that Paul wrote Hebrews. However, Jerome and Augustine eventually shifted opinion in the West. When Aquinas wrote, Pauline authorship was generally accepted. The issue was not seriously revisited until the Reformation. Calvin proposed either Luke or Clement of Rome. Luther proposed Apollos. The Council of Trent, the Roman Catholic Church's response to the Protestant Reformation, reaffirmed Pauline authorship, although few Roman Catholic scholars today take this view. Since then, other suggestions include Barnabas, Priscilla, Silas, Timothy, and Epaphras. Carson: "It is far better to admit our ignorance. We do not know who wrote it; almost certainly the first readers did. In all likelihood the author was a Hellenistic Jew who had become a Christian, a second-generation believer (Heb. 2:3). He was steeped in the LXX [the Greek translation of the OT]...and, judging by his excellent vocabulary and Greek style, had enjoyed a good education" (D. A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo, and Leon Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament* [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992], p. 397).

104 Heb. 2:3. This is one of the arguments against Pauline authorship; cf. Gal. 1:11-12.

who had brought the gospel to them had held official positions in the church of which they were members. However, at the time of this writing they are no longer living among them. They either had moved on or more probably had died as martyrs. In the past, the author of this letter had lived and taught among these readers, and he hopes in the near future to return to them, accompanied by Timothy, who had been recently released from imprisonment.

The recognition of the preaching and life of the apostles and disciples of Jesus leads the author to speak of the earlier life of these Christians. The foundation of Christian knowledge was rightly laid among them, and they need only to hold fast the confidence of their first faith. However, at present they are in a state of discontent and in serious danger of falling away into unbelief.

In the past they had distinguished themselves in their charity toward the saints by their prominent part in the great collection for the church in Jerusalem. They had nobly withstood the persecution of their faith during the days of Nero. When they themselves escaped with their lives, they had not been ashamed to fellowship with those who had fared worse but visited and comforted them in prison. They had gladly endured the forcible confiscation of their possessions. But now these Christians had grown so dull that they seem to be in need of instruction in the most elementary principles of Christianity. It is not that they represented a second generation of a Christian church. Although the apostles who had brought them the gospel had died, as well as other Christians from their circle, in the main this is the same generation that had heard the gospel from the lips of the disciples of Jesus.

The author of Hebrews uses a typological and allegorical treatment of Old Testament history when applying it to present events. The warning that the Psalmist once spoke to his own generation by recalling the forty years of wandering in the wilderness, the author of this letter now speaks anew to the Hebrews of his time. The Psalmist in writing to his contemporaries speaks of "your fathers"--the generation that hardened itself against God in the wilderness.<sup>105</sup> Similarly, the writer of Hebrews in allegorical fashion applies "your fathers"<sup>106</sup> to that evil generation of Jewish people, the contemporaries of Christ, who had hardened themselves against the Son of God. For forty years (30-70 A.D.) they had witnessed God's redeeming work, first in the person of Jesus, and then in the preaching of the apostles. Yet they failed to acknowledge God's way. Those people, like the evil generation in the wilderness, have no part in the rest promised to the people of God. And just as at the time of the wandering in the wilderness, so now in this present time, a separation has taken place between the majority of the Jewish people hardened by their unbelief and the minority who has believed.

The author also writes about worship with its turning from dead works to faith in Christ. He is not dealing with the question of how the Christian confession was to be combined with temple worship or how life generally under the law is to be judged. These readers had not participated in temple worship prior to their conversion. Nowhere in this letter does he speak of a temple or the system of worship existing in his time in Jerusalem. Rather, he describes the tabernacle and the worship associated with it in the Pentateuch. He does not treat the conscientious observance of the law and its sacrificial system as dead works. However, these forms of legal piety become dead works and lack spiritual power if performed without

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<sup>105</sup> Ps. 95:8-11.

<sup>106</sup> Heb. 3:9.

faith. It is in contrast to this kind of worship that he and his readers are to measure their service for Christ. Dead works are those that are not animated by faith and not done under the influence of the life-giving Spirit. The worship that the Christian must render to the living God throughout his life is based upon the high-priestly work of Christ performed once for all. It consists of prayer, thanksgiving, works of mercy, and a life well-pleasing to God. The Christian life is a spiritual service, the offering of a living sacrifice.<sup>107</sup>

The author's letter is designed to save the readers from deserting their Christian confession and falling into a state of unbelief. He laments their spiritual dullness and their religious and moral apathy. He exhorts them to hold fast to their hope in the certain, though delayed, fulfillment of the promise of God to his people. In their disappointment, they were on the verge of giving up their birthright as Christians for a mere temporary improvement in the conditions of their life. The writer warns that Esau had done the same thing when he sold his birthright for a bowl of stew. He also points out that his readers are in danger of treating the blood of Christ, which for the Christian must remain most sacred, as a common thing. To further encourage them, the author includes a long list of witnesses from the Old Testament, together with the perfect example of Jesus, as models of the power of faith. The essential quality of this faith is a patient waiting for God's promised blessings.

### THE WRITINGS OF JOHN

While in Ephesus sometime between the years 80 and 90, the Apostle John writes his gospel to a group of churches composed of Greek Christians living in the province of Asia. He takes for granted on their part a comprehensive knowledge of gospel history. They were certainly familiar with Mark's gospel, probably with Luke's, and perhaps even with Matthew's, although only through oral translation. These readers needed to be further strengthened in the faith they already possessed in order to become true disciples. John endeavors to do this by giving character sketches of Jesus' disciples, both those who were intimately associated with him and those more remotely so. This supply of entirely new information was calculated to render more intelligible the picture obtained from the Synoptic Gospels of the course of gospel history as a whole as well as many of its details in particular.

John concluded his Gospel with our chapter 20. Chapter 21 is a supplement added with his consent by persons closely associated with him not long after John finished his writing.<sup>108</sup>

The Apostle John was the son of Zebedee and Salome, a well-to-do family that lived in Capernaum. He was a cousin of both Jesus (Salome was Mary's sister) and John the Baptist and was also one of John's disciples. After the arrest of John the Baptist, John, together with his brother James, responded to Jesus' command and followed him.

At the time of the writing of his Gospel and letters, John was a teacher and occupied a position of leadership in a group of Christian churches that in general did not owe their

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107 Cf. Rom. 12:1.

108 This is not at all analogous to Mark 16:9-20. It is not a textual issue: there are no extant manuscripts that lack John 21. Zahn devotes an entire section (III:232-248) to the status of John 21, but the issues are related to *form* in that John 20:30-31 seems to represent a conclusion.

conversion to his preaching. They were Gentile churches in the province of Asia.

The Epistle of I John was a written address to a circle of Christian churches, all, or the majority of whom, lived at a distance from John in the province of Asia. His purpose in writing was two-fold:

- To enable his readers to become thoroughly conscious of their possession of eternal life that they had as believers on the name of the Son of God
- To combat false doctrine that threatened to influence the church

False teachers were claiming that the divine Christ or Son of God united with the man Jesus at his baptism and then separated himself again from Jesus prior to his crucifixion. John answers this heresy by testifying that the Christ, who is inseparable from Jesus, came in the flesh and that the Jesus of gospel history and the Christ whom the churches confess is indeed the Son of God. John emphasizes the redemptive power of the blood, not so much of Jesus but of the Son of God. He teaches that the essential purpose of sending the Son of God was to make propitiation for sin through the shedding of blood. Finally, he gives assurance that the man Jesus, whom he and the other disciples had perceived with their senses and with whom they had associated so intimately, was indeed the revelation of the Life that had existed with the Father from the beginning.

Both II and III John were written at the same time, most likely after I John, between the years 80 and 90 from Ephesus where John was residing.

John's third epistle is a letter of recommendation that he gave to traveling missionaries who wished to journey from their home in Ephesus to the home of Gaius.<sup>109</sup> These same missionaries had experienced kindness from Gaius before, and John requests that Gaius show them hospitality again.

Gaius was a well-to-do member of a congregation, and his personal means enabled him to practice hospitality on a considerable scale. John writes to Gaius alone about the missionaries rather than to Diotrephes, the church leader, or to the congregation as a whole. Since Diotrephes does not recognize John's authority nor that of the other disciples, John could not be sure that his request would be granted if he addressed it to the church. Being an autocratic bishop, Diotrephes possessed great power in the local church and exercised it in a direction hostile to John, since he does not adhere to the apostolic teaching. But John will not let him continue to do as he pleases. When John next visits, he will bring Diotrephes' evil conduct before the assembled congregation.

At the same time, however, John writes a letter to the congregation of which Diotrephes is the leader (our II John)<sup>110</sup> and does not mention the subject of hospitality for the traveling

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109 This was not the Gaius of Corinth (I Cor. 1:14; Rom. 16:23), the Gaius of Macedonia (Acts 19:29), or the Gaius of Derbe (Acts 20:4). The name *Gaius* was very common in the Roman Empire.

110 II John 1. Almost certainly the phrase "elect lady and her children" does not refer to a respected Christian matron and her family but to a specific local congregation; "your chosen sister" (v. 13) similarly refers to a sister congregation. Zahn (III:378) argues that II John was the letter to the congregation of Gaius and

missionaries. Only a few members in the church are walking in the truth, but John includes all the members in sincere love, not because of their virtues, but because of his faith in the enduring truth, which in Christians is not easily destroyed. He appeals to them to hold fast to the old command of love and to the old truth of Jesus Christ as come in the flesh. He does not want them to lose, in their folly, the whole harvest of the labor of their Christian lives. Although Diotrephes holds great power, he had not yet reached the point where he could prohibit the reading of this letter before the assembled congregation.

During this period of John's writings, the Greek translation of Matthew makes its appearance, probably around the year 85.<sup>111</sup>

Then around the year 95, John writes his Revelation. It is a revelation of God, given to Jesus Christ, and imparted to John through Jesus' angel. At some point John had been banished to the island of Patmos because of his activity as a preacher and on account of his Christian belief. The banishment occurred as the result of a legal sentence imposed by the proconsul of that district.

John's revelation consists of eight visions that divide into two parts: a single vision dealing with that which already existed at the time of the revelation and the remaining visions dealing with that which is to come to pass in the future.<sup>112</sup>

- In the **first vision**, Christ speaks to each of seven churches in Asia Minor. In these messages He points out characteristics of the churches that are both worthy of praise and in need of correction.
- John's **second vision** contains the opening of the six seals. The opening of the seventh seal brings only the parousia<sup>113</sup> itself, but instead of there being any description of this event or a statement that it has occurred, a silence of about half an hour intervenes in heaven.
- The **third vision** relates the blowing of the six trumpets. Just as in the vision of the seals, there is no description of what occurs at the seventh trumpet blast. However, the songs of praise in heaven, just as the silence at the seventh seal, imply that God and Christ have begun their world rule.
- In the **fourth vision** we have a view of the Ark of the Covenant set up in the Holy of Holies. It is the temple of God in heaven that is symbolized, and what John sees is the ark in which the eternally valid testament of God rests.
- The **fifth vision** describes the last judgments that in vain call men to repentance. They are represented by seven angels who pour out vials full of the wrath of God.

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Diotrephes mentioned in III John 9. However, this is not universally accepted among scholars.

111 See footnote 79.

112 There are many different interpretations of Revelation. Zahn's summary of its contents is based on his interpretation, which is futurist, premillennial. Premillenarians, however, will also differ on some of the details.

113 One of the Greek words in the NT for the second advent of Christ (e.g., II Thess. 2:1); it is a noun and means *coming, arrival, or presence*.

- In the **sixth vision** John hears songs of praise that glorify the fall of Babylon as the beginning of the kingly domain of God. This fall is one of the last events before the marriage of the Lamb.
- The **seventh vision** brings John to the kingly rule of Christ. Jesus Himself comes upon the scene of action in order that, after overcoming antichrist and binding Satan, He may enter upon his kingly rule of 1000 years upon earth. Not till the millenium has expired do the general judgment, the destruction of death, and the creation of a new world take place.
- In this new world there is also a new Jerusalem, and this is unveiled before the eyes of John in a last and **eighth vision**. However, this new Jerusalem is not considered a part of the new world but as the glorified center of a world not yet completed during the kingly rule of Christ. It will be transformed into a new and eternal world when the kingly rule of Christ is over.

With this the revelation closes most appropriately, for the longing of the Church is directed not to an endless eternity but to the specific coming of Jesus into union with His Church and to His royal reign, limited in time, but broadening out into eternity.

The aged Apostle John dies a natural death around the year 100.