

A Year at His Feet

New Testament



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Overview

A 52-week chronological journey through all 260 chapters of the New Testament. Beginning with John's cosmic prologue and ending with the new creation in Revelation, each week covers a coherent block of scripture with daily readings, historical context, reflection questions, and a memory verse.

What You Will Study

Section	Weeks	Theme
1. The Coming of Christ	1–4	Incarnation, birth narratives, John's prologue
2. Galilean Ministry	5–11	Sermon on the Mount, parables, miracles
3. Road to Jerusalem	12–16	Conflict, compassion, Olivet Discourse
4. Passion and Resurrection	17–20	Upper Room, trial, cross, resurrection
5. The Early Church	21–41	Acts, Paul's letters, missionary journeys
6. Letters and Revelation	42–52	General epistles, Hebrews, Revelation

Section 1. The Coming of Christ

Weeks 1–4

In four weeks you will witness the most extraordinary entrance in all of history. God becomes human. The eternal Word takes on flesh, is born in obscurity, and steps onto the stage of a world that does not yet know what has changed forever.

Section 1 moves from eternity to Galilee. It begins before time itself, with John’s prologue declaring that the one who made all things has come to dwell among us. Then we descend into the particular — angelic announcements to an elderly priest and a young woman, prophetic songs that echo centuries of hope, and a birth in Bethlehem so humble that only shepherds are invited. From there the story leaps forward through recognition at the temple, danger under Herod, and thirty hidden years to the banks of the Jordan, where the heavens open and the Father’s voice confirms what Simeon already knew: this is the beloved Son.

Tested in the wilderness where Israel once failed, Jesus emerges to begin gathering followers and performing signs that reveal who he is. A wedding feast becomes a revelation of glory. A Pharisee learns that everything must be born anew. A Samaritan woman discovers living water. Fishermen leave their nets. A paralyzed man walks. Tax collectors are called to the table. And the religious establishment begins to ask uncomfortable questions that will not stop until they reach a cross.

By the end of these four weeks, you will have met the central figure of the New Testament — not as a character in a story, but as the eternal God who entered history, survived its dangers, resisted its temptations, and began turning it upside down. Everything that follows in the remaining forty-eight weeks flows from what happens here. This is the foundation.

Week 1. The Word Became Flesh

Memory Verse: John 1:14 (ESV)

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

The Big Picture

We begin our journey through the New Testament not with a manger scene but with eternity. John’s prologue reaches back before the first verse of Genesis, declaring that “in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” This is a deliberate theological decision: before we witness the birth of a baby in Bethlehem, we must understand who this child truly is. The eternal Logos, the creative agent through whom all things were made, the light that has been shining since before the cosmos existed — this is the one who will take on human flesh. Without this cosmic frame, the Christmas story shrinks into mere sentimentality. With it, the incarnation becomes the most staggering event in the history of the universe.

From that eternal vantage point, we then descend into the gritty, particular world of first-century Palestine. Luke, the careful historian, introduces us to an aging priest named Zechariah burning incense in the temple and a young woman named Mary in the backwater town of Nazareth. Through angelic announcements, prophetic songs, and an unexpected genealogy, God is setting the stage for the fulfillment of centuries of promise. The Magnificat and the Benedictus — the great hymns of Mary and Zechariah — root this story firmly in the Old Testament narrative of God’s faithfulness to Israel, to Abraham, and to David. These are not new promises but ancient ones finally coming to fruition.

Matthew adds his own essential perspective, tracing Jesus’ lineage through the royal line of David and revealing Joseph’s quiet, obedient faithfulness in the face of an impossible situation. Then Luke brings us at last to Bethlehem, where the King of the universe is born in the most humble circumstances imaginable, announced not to the powerful but to shepherds working the night shift. Together, these five readings form a complete theological introduction to the person of Jesus Christ: eternal God, long-promised Messiah, and now an infant wrapped in swaddling cloths. This is the foundation on which the entire New Testament rests.

This Week's Readings

Day	Reading	Title
1	John 1:1-18	The Word Became Flesh
2	Luke 1:1-38	Annunciations to Zechariah and Mary
3	Luke 1:39-80	The Magnificat and Benedictus
4	Matthew 1	Genealogy and Joseph's Dream
5	Luke 2:1-20	The Birth of Jesus

Key Characters

- **The Word (Logos)** — The pre-existent second person of the Trinity, the agent of all creation, who becomes flesh in Jesus of Nazareth.
- **John the Baptist** — Introduced in John's prologue as a witness to the light; his birth story is told in Luke 1.
- **Zechariah** — An elderly priest of the division of Abijah, husband of Elizabeth, father of John the Baptist.
- **Elizabeth** — A descendant of Aaron, barren in old age, who miraculously conceives John the Baptist.
- **Mary** — A young virgin from Nazareth, betrothed to Joseph, chosen to bear the Messiah.
- **Joseph** — A righteous man of the house of David, who obeys God's command to take Mary as his wife.
- **Gabriel** — The angel who delivers God's announcements to both Zechariah and Mary.
- **The Shepherds** — The first to receive the news of Jesus' birth, representing the humble and marginalized.

Key Locations

- **Heaven / Eternity** — Where the prologue of John begins, before time and space existed.
- **The Temple in Jerusalem** — Where Zechariah receives the angelic announcement while serving at the altar of incense.
- **Nazareth** — The small Galilean town where Mary lives and receives Gabriel's visit.
- **The Hill Country of Judea** — Where Elizabeth lives and where Mary visits, prompting the Magnificat.
- **Bethlehem** — The city of David, where Jesus is born in fulfillment of Micah 5:2.

Key Themes

- **Incarnation** — The central mystery of this week: God taking on human flesh. John's prologue establishes the theological reality, and the birth narratives show it unfolding in history. The infinite becomes finite, the Creator enters creation.
- **Fulfillment of Promise** — Every passage this week connects back to Old Testament promises. The genealogy traces the Davidic line, the hymns echo Hannah's prayer and the prophets, and the birth in Bethlehem fulfills Micah's prophecy. God is faithful across centuries.
- **Reversal of Expectations** — God consistently works through the unexpected: a barren elderly couple, an unmarried young woman, a quiet carpenter, a feeding trough for a crib, shepherds as the first witnesses. The Kingdom arrives upside-down by the world's standards.
- **Light and Darkness** — John's prologue introduces the cosmic conflict between light and darkness that runs through the entire New Testament. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

Week 2. A Child Is Born

Memory Verse: Luke 2:30-32 (ESV)

For my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.

The Big Picture

This week bridges from Jesus' infancy to adulthood. We see the presentation at the temple where Simeon and Anna recognize the Messiah, the dangerous visit of the Magi and Herod's murderous response, then a roughly 30-year jump to John the Baptist preparing the way for Jesus. The week climaxes with Jesus' baptism — the moment when his public ministry officially begins.

The presentation at the temple is far more than a religious formality. When Simeon takes the infant Jesus into his arms, he utters a prophecy that frames the entire gospel narrative: this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, a sign that will be opposed, and a sword will pierce Mary's own soul. Anna, the aged prophetess who has spent decades in the temple praying and fasting, immediately recognizes the child as the redemption of Jerusalem. These two elderly saints represent the faithful remnant of Israel — those who have been waiting, watching, and believing through the long silence between the testaments. Their recognition of Jesus validates his identity before a single miracle is performed.

From the quiet reverence of the temple, we are thrust into political danger. Matthew's account of the Magi, Herod's paranoia, the flight to Egypt, and the massacre of innocents reveals that the coming of the Messiah was never going to be a peaceful affair. The powers of this world instinctively resist the arrival of God's true King. Yet through all the danger, divine providence guides and protects. When we fast-forward to the Jordan River, we find that God has been working in the wilderness as well. John the Baptist bursts onto the scene as the long-awaited Elijah figure, calling Israel to repentance and preparing the way for the one who will baptize not with water but with the Holy Spirit and fire. When Jesus steps into those waters and the heavens open, the Father's voice declares what Simeon already knew: "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." The identity established at the temple is now confirmed from heaven itself, and the stage is set for everything that follows.

This Week's Readings

Day	Reading	Title
1	Luke 2:21-52	Presentation at Temple & Boy Jesus
2	Matthew 2	Magi Visit, Flight to Egypt, Return to Nazareth
3	Mark 1:1-8	John the Baptist's Ministry
4	Luke 3:1-22	John's Preaching & Jesus' Baptism
5	Matthew 3	Matthew's Baptism Account

Key Characters

- **Simeon** — A devout man in Jerusalem who had been promised by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before seeing the Lord's Messiah. His prophecy (the Nunc Dimittis) announces Jesus as a light to the Gentiles and the glory of Israel.
- **Anna** — An 84-year-old prophetess from the tribe of Asher who never left the temple, worshipping night and day with fasting and prayer. She immediately recognized the infant Jesus and spoke about him to all who were waiting for redemption.
- **The Magi** — Wise men from the East, likely Persia or Babylon, who followed a star to find the newborn king. Their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh carry deep symbolic significance.
- **Herod the Great** — The paranoid Roman client-king of Judea who ordered the massacre of male infants in Bethlehem in a desperate attempt to eliminate a rival to his throne.
- **John the Baptist** — The forerunner of Jesus, son of Zechariah and Elizabeth, who preached a baptism of repentance in the wilderness of Judea and baptized Jesus in the Jordan River.
- **Jesus** — Seen this week as an infant in the temple, a boy of twelve astonishing the teachers, and a man of about thirty stepping into the Jordan to be baptized and begin his public ministry.

Key Locations

- **The Temple in Jerusalem** — Where Jesus is presented according to the Law, where Simeon and Anna encounter him, and where the twelve-year-old Jesus is found among the teachers.
- **Bethlehem** — The birthplace of Jesus and the site of Herod's massacre of the innocents.

Section 1. The Coming of Christ

- **Egypt** — Where Joseph, Mary, and Jesus flee to escape Herod, fulfilling Hosea 11:1: “Out of Egypt I called my son.”
- **Nazareth** — The town in Galilee where Jesus grows up after the family returns from Egypt.
- **The Jordan River** — Where John the Baptist preaches and baptizes, and where Jesus is baptized, marking the beginning of his public ministry.

Key Themes

- **Recognition and Rejection** — Simeon and Anna recognize the Messiah; Herod tries to destroy him. This pattern of acceptance and opposition will define Jesus’ entire ministry and ultimately lead to the cross.
- **Fulfillment of Prophecy** — Matthew repeatedly cites Old Testament prophecy being fulfilled: the Magi’s visit, the flight to Egypt, the massacre in Bethlehem, and the return to Nazareth. God’s ancient plan is unfolding precisely.
- **Preparation and Identity** — John the Baptist prepares the way, and the baptism reveals Jesus’ identity. The voice from heaven, the descending Spirit, and the testimony of the forerunner all converge to establish who Jesus is before he begins his work.
- **The Hidden Years** — Luke alone gives us a glimpse of Jesus at age twelve, showing that even as a boy he understood his unique relationship with the Father. The thirty years of silence remind us that God’s timing is not our own.

Week 3. Tested and Called

Memory Verse: John 3:16-17 (ESV)

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

The Big Picture

Fresh from his baptism, Jesus is driven into the wilderness for 40 days of testing — recapitulating Israel’s 40 years in the desert but succeeding where they failed. Where Adam fell to the serpent’s temptation in a garden of abundance, and where Israel grumbled and turned to idols in the wilderness, Jesus stands firm against the devil’s enticements in a place of absolute deprivation. Every one of his responses comes from Deuteronomy, the very book Moses delivered to Israel at the end of their wilderness wandering. Jesus is revealed as the true and faithful Son of God, the obedient Israel, the last Adam who will not break.

Then John’s Gospel gives us a unique window into the earliest days of Jesus’ ministry that the Synoptics skip entirely: the calling of the first disciples through a chain of personal testimony, the wedding at Cana where water becomes wine (the first of John’s seven signs), the provocative night conversation with Nicodemus about being “born again,” and the revolutionary encounter with the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well. These early events establish Jesus’ identity and mission in ways that are deeply theological. John is not merely recording history; he is unveiling who Jesus is — the Lamb of God, the Son of God, the bridegroom of the new covenant, the source of living water, the Savior of the world.

Together, these readings form a bridge between the preparations of Weeks 1-2 and the explosive Galilean ministry that will dominate Section 2. The temptation narrative shows Jesus qualified for his mission; the early Johannine ministry shows him beginning to execute it. His identity has been declared from heaven at his baptism. Now it is tested in the wilderness and revealed through signs, conversations, and the gathering of a community of followers who will carry his mission forward.

This Week’s Readings

Day	Reading	Title
1	Luke 4:1-13	Temptation in the Wilderness
2	John 1:19-51	John the Baptist’s Witness, First Disciples Called
3	John 2	Wedding at Cana, First Temple Cleansing

Day	Reading	Title
4	John 3	Nicodemus, “You Must Be Born Again”, John’s Final Witness
5	John 4	Samaritan Woman at the Well, Official’s Son Healed

Key Characters

- **Satan / The Devil** — The adversary who tests Jesus in the wilderness, attempting to divert him from God’s appointed path through appeals to appetite, power, and spectacle.
- **Andrew** — One of the first disciples called, originally a follower of John the Baptist, who immediately brings his brother Simon to Jesus.
- **Simon Peter** — Andrew’s brother, renamed “Cephas” (Aramaic for “rock”) by Jesus at their very first meeting, signaling his future role.
- **Philip** — From Bethsaida, the same city as Andrew and Peter; called directly by Jesus with the simple command “Follow me.”
- **Nathanael** — Also called Bartholomew, from Cana; initially skeptical (“Can anything good come from Nazareth?”) but won over by Jesus’ supernatural knowledge.
- **Mary (Jesus’ mother)** — Present at the wedding at Cana, where she prompts Jesus’ first sign despite his enigmatic response about his “hour.”
- **Nicodemus** — A Pharisee and member of the Jewish ruling council (Sanhedrin), who comes to Jesus at night seeking understanding.
- **The Samaritan Woman** — An unnamed woman at Jacob’s well whose encounter with Jesus breaks every social convention and leads to the conversion of her entire village.

Key Locations

- **The Judean Wilderness** — The barren, rocky desert between Jerusalem and the Dead Sea, where Jesus fasts for 40 days and faces Satan’s temptations.
- **Bethany Beyond the Jordan** — Not the Bethany near Jerusalem, but a location on the eastern bank of the Jordan River where John the Baptist was baptizing.
- **Cana of Galilee** — A village in Galilee (exact location debated) where Jesus performs his first sign at a wedding feast.
- **The Jerusalem Temple** — The center of Jewish worship, where Jesus drives out the money changers in what John presents as an early temple cleansing.
- **Samaria / Sychar** — The region between Judea and Galilee, and the specific town near Jacob’s well where Jesus encounters the Samaritan woman.

Key Themes

- **Testing and Obedience** — Jesus’ temptation is not merely a personal trial but a cosmic confrontation. Where Israel failed its wilderness test, Jesus succeeds, demonstrating his fitness to lead a new exodus and inaugurate a new covenant.
- **Identity Revealed** — This week is saturated with Christological titles: Lamb of God, Son of God, Rabbi, Messiah, King of Israel, Son of Man. Jesus’ identity is being unveiled layer by layer through testimony, signs, and personal encounters.
- **Signs and Faith** — John’s concept of “signs” (semeion) is introduced. These are not mere miracles but revelatory events that point beyond themselves to who Jesus is. The water-to-wine sign reveals his glory; the healing of the official’s son reveals his authority over distance and death.
- **New Birth and Living Water** — Jesus introduces radically new spiritual categories. To Nicodemus, the expert in the old covenant, he declares the necessity of being “born from above.” To the Samaritan woman, he offers “living water” that satisfies forever. Both images point to the transforming work of the Holy Spirit.
- **Breaking Boundaries** — Jesus’ ministry from its earliest days crosses social and religious barriers. He speaks theology with a Pharisee at night and with a Samaritan woman at noon. He cleanses the Temple and redefines worship. No one is outside his reach.

Week 4. Ministry Begins

Memory Verse: Mark 1:15 (ESV)

The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.

The Big Picture

This week marks the explosive beginning of Jesus' public ministry in Galilee. After the private early ministry recorded in John (Week 3), the Synoptic Gospels now pick up the story as Jesus returns to Galilee "in the power of the Spirit." He calls his first disciples from their fishing boats, teaches with astonishing authority in the synagogues, heals the sick, and immediately begins attracting both crowds and controversy. His hometown of Nazareth rejects him, but Capernaum becomes his base of operations. The tempo of the narrative quickens dramatically — Mark's breathless use of "immediately" (*euthys*) propels the reader from one astonishing scene to the next, while Luke and Matthew provide their own complementary perspectives on the same events. We witness the Kingdom of God breaking into ordinary life with irresistible force.

By the end of this week, the pattern of Jesus' ministry is firmly established: teaching with unprecedented authority, healing diseases and casting out demons, calling ordinary people to follow him, and confronting the assumptions of the religious establishment. The calling of fishermen and tax collectors signals that this Kingdom operates by different rules than the religious system of the day. The miracles are not mere spectacles but signs that the long-awaited reign of God has arrived. And the controversies that begin this week — over forgiveness of sins, table fellowship with sinners, and the proper interpretation of Sabbath traditions — will escalate steadily until they reach their deadly climax in Jerusalem.

This week bridges Section 1 and Section 2 of our study. The coming of Christ — his birth, preparation, and testing — gives way to the full Galilean ministry. Everything we have studied so far has been prologue; now the main drama begins. The eternal Word who became flesh, who was baptized in the Jordan and tested in the wilderness, now steps onto the public stage and begins to reveal what the Kingdom of God looks like when it breaks into a broken world.

This Week's Readings

Day	Reading	Title
1	Matthew 4	Calling Disciples by the Sea, Ministry Begins in Galilee
2	Luke 4:14-44	Nazareth Rejection, Capernaum Ministry
3	Luke 5	Miraculous Catch of Fish, Levi Called, New Wine
4	Mark 1:14-45	Kingdom Proclaimed, Healings, Leper Cleansed
5	Mark 2	Paralytic Healed, Levi Called, Fasting Questions

Key Characters

- **Simon Peter** — A Galilean fisherman from Bethsaida, later based in Capernaum, who becomes the first called disciple and the leader of the Twelve. His impulsive faith and human frailty make him one of the most vivid personalities in the Gospels.
- **Andrew** — Simon Peter's brother, also a fisherman, who in John's account was first a disciple of John the Baptist before following Jesus. He is consistently portrayed as the one who brings others to Jesus.
- **James and John (Sons of Zebedee)** — Partners in the fishing business with Simon and Andrew. Jesus will later name them *Boanerges*, "Sons of Thunder," suggesting passionate temperaments. They form, with Peter, the inner circle of the Twelve.
- **Levi/Matthew** — A tax collector sitting at his booth in Capernaum, called to follow Jesus in a scene that scandalizes the Pharisees. He represents the social outcasts whom Jesus deliberately seeks out.
- **The Paralytic's Friends** — Four unnamed men whose determination to bring their paralyzed friend to Jesus leads them to dig through a roof. Their faith becomes the occasion for Jesus' most provocative claim yet: the authority to forgive sins.

Key Locations

- **Sea of Galilee** — A freshwater lake about 13 miles long and 8 miles wide, the economic heart of the region. Its fishing industry supported a significant population and connected Galilee to wider trade networks.
- **Capernaum** — A prosperous fishing village on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee that becomes Jesus' adopted hometown and the base of his Galilean ministry. It sat on the Via Maris trade route and had a customs station (where Levi worked) and a synagogue.
- **Nazareth Synagogue** — The local synagogue in Jesus' hometown, where he reads from Isaiah and makes the stunning claim that this Scripture is fulfilled "in your hearing." The violent rejection that follows is one of the most dramatic scenes in Luke's Gospel.

Key Themes

- **The Kingdom of God Has Arrived** — Jesus' opening proclamation in Mark 1:15 sets the theological agenda for his entire ministry: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." The Kingdom is not a distant hope but a present reality breaking into the world through Jesus' words and deeds.
- **Authority** — Every passage this week highlights Jesus' astonishing authority: authority over nature (the miraculous catch), over disease and demons, over sin (forgiving the paralytic), and over the religious traditions of Israel. The crowds consistently respond with amazement because he teaches "not as the scribes."
- **Calling and Discipleship** — Jesus does not wait for students to come to him, as rabbis typically did. He goes to them — on the lakeshore, at the tax booth — and issues a summons that demands everything: "Follow me." The response is always immediate and total.
- **Controversy with Religious Leaders** — The seeds of the final conflict are planted this week. Jesus claims divine prerogatives (forgiving sins), violates social boundaries (eating with sinners), and challenges accepted practices (fasting). The Pharisees begin asking hostile questions, and the trajectory toward the cross becomes visible.
- **New Wine in New Wineskins** — Jesus' parable at the end of Mark 2 signals that what he brings cannot be contained within the existing religious structures. The old forms must give way to something radically new.

Section 2. Galilean Ministry

Weeks 5–11

Over these seven weeks you will walk with Jesus through the heart of his public ministry in Galilee — the period when his fame explodes across the region, his teaching reshapes everything people thought they knew about God, and a single unavoidable question rises to the surface: Who is this man?

It begins with authority. Jesus appoints twelve men as the nucleus of a renewed Israel, then delivers the Sermon on the Mount — the constitution of the Kingdom of God. The Beatitudes turn the world's values upside down. The ethics he lays out are not a stricter moral code but a portrait of what human life looks like when it is rooted in trust rather than anxiety, in generosity rather than self-protection. Then the words become deeds. Storms obey him. Diseases flee. Demons submit. The dead rise. Every miracle is a preview of the world God intends — a glimpse of creation made whole.

As the crowds swell, so does the opposition. The religious leaders grow hostile. Entire cities refuse to repent. Jesus responds by shifting to parables — vivid, earthy stories that reveal the Kingdom to those with open hearts and conceal it from those who have hardened themselves against it. The Kingdom, he teaches, does not arrive with military force. It grows like a seed, works like leaven, and costs like a pearl worth everything you own. Meanwhile, he sends the Twelve out on their own for the first time, entrusting them with his authority to preach and heal — ordinary men carrying an extraordinary mission into a world that will not always welcome them.

At the center of the section stands a question about bread. Jesus feeds five thousand people, then declares himself the bread of life — not a political messiah who fills stomachs, but the true manna from heaven who sustains eternal life. The language is so provocative that the crowds thin. Many disciples walk away. The purity debates intensify: Jesus declares that defilement comes not from unwashed hands but from the human heart, quietly dismantling the boundaries between Jew and Gentile. A Syrophenician woman's faith puts Israel's unbelief to shame. The table is being set for the whole world.

Everything builds toward Caesarea Philippi, where Jesus finally asks the question directly: "Who do you say that I am?" Peter answers: "You are the Christ." It is the right confession — and Peter immediately proves he does not understand what it means. The Christ must suffer, be rejected, and die. Peter rebukes Jesus for saying so. Jesus rebukes Peter right back. On the mountain of Transfiguration, the Father's voice settles the matter: "This is my beloved Son; listen to him." The road to glory, it turns out, runs straight through the cross.

The section closes by asking what all of this means for daily life. If Jesus is the Messiah and his Kingdom is real, how should its citizens live? The answer is breathtaking and demanding in equal measure: with the humility of a child, with forgiveness that has no limit, with compassion that crosses every boundary, and with a trust so deep that anxiety loses its grip. The Kingdom that began with a sermon on a hillside is not an abstraction. It is a way of being human that the world has never seen — and at its center stands not a set of rules but the person who embodies every word he speaks.

Week 5. Authority Revealed

Memory Verse: Matthew 6:33 (ESV)

But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

The Big Picture

This week marks one of the great turning points in Jesus' public ministry. Having begun to preach, heal, and call individual disciples in the preceding weeks, Jesus now takes two decisive actions that reshape everything: he formally appoints twelve men as apostles, and he delivers the most famous sermon in human history. These are not unrelated events. The appointment of the Twelve is an act of reconstitution — just as Israel was founded on twelve tribes descending from the twelve sons of Jacob, Jesus is founding a renewed

Section 2. Galilean Ministry

Israel on twelve chosen men. This is not a rabbi gathering students; it is a king assembling the nucleus of a new covenant people. And the Sermon on the Mount is the constitution of that new community, the manifesto of the Kingdom of God.

The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) and its parallel, the Sermon on the Plain (Luke 6), present Jesus' most sustained ethical and spiritual teaching. But it would be a mistake to read these chapters as a mere moral code. Jesus is not simply telling people to be nicer. He is describing the character of those who live under God's reign — what they look like, how they relate to others, where they place their trust, and how they build their lives. The Beatitudes turn the world's value system upside down: the blessed ones are the poor in spirit, the mourners, the meek, the persecuted. The teachings on prayer, fasting, worry, and judgment are not external rules but invitations into a radically different way of being human, one rooted in trust in a generous Father rather than anxiety about an uncertain world.

Binding these readings together is the theme of authority. In Mark 3, Jesus demonstrates authority over demonic powers and religious opposition. In the Sermon on the Mount, he demonstrates authority over the interpretation of Scripture itself — "You have heard that it was said... but I say to you." No prophet or rabbi in Israel's history had ever spoken this way. Prophets said, "Thus says the Lord." Rabbis cited earlier rabbis. Jesus speaks on his own authority, as the one who gave the Law in the first place. By the end of this week's readings, the crowds will be "astonished at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes" (Matthew 7:29). The question that will drive the rest of the Gospel story is now fully in the open: Who is this man?

This Week's Readings

Day	Reading	Title
1	Mark 3	Twelve Appointed, Beelzebul Controversy
2	Matthew 5	Beatitudes, Salt and Light, Law Fulfilled
3	Matthew 6	Lord's Prayer, Fasting, Treasures, Do Not Worry
4	Matthew 7	Judging Others, Golden Rule, Two Gates, Wise Builder
5	Luke 6	Sermon on the Plain, Love Your Enemies, Build on Rock

Key Characters

- **The Twelve Apostles** — Formally appointed by Jesus in Mark 3: Simon Peter, James son of Zebedee, John son of Zebedee, Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot.
- **The Crowds** — Large gatherings from Galilee, Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, beyond the Jordan, and the region of Tyre and Sidon who come to hear Jesus teach and to be healed.
- **The Scribes and Pharisees** — Religious leaders who accuse Jesus of casting out demons by the power of Beelzebul, representing the growing opposition to his ministry.
- **Jesus' Family** — His mother and brothers who come seeking him, prompting his redefinition of family around obedience to God's will.

Key Locations

- **Mountain near Capernaum** — The traditional site where Jesus delivered the Sermon on the Mount, likely a hillside in the rolling terrain above the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee.
- **Sea of Galilee Region** — The broader area around the lake where Jesus conducted much of his Galilean ministry, moving between towns and open countryside.
- **Capernaum** — Jesus' adopted home base during the Galilean ministry, a fishing village on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee.

Key Themes

- **Kingdom Ethics** — The Sermon on the Mount is not a set of rules for earning God's favor but a description of life lived under God's reign. The Beatitudes, the antitheses, the teachings on prayer and worry all describe the character and priorities of Kingdom citizens.

- **Authority of Jesus** — Whether appointing apostles, reinterpreting the Law, or casting out demons, Jesus acts with an authority that surpasses every category his contemporaries possess. He is greater than Moses, greater than the prophets, greater than the rabbis.
- **Inward Transformation** — Jesus consistently pushes past external behavior to the heart. Murder begins with anger. Adultery begins with lust. Prayer must not be performative. Giving must be secret. The Kingdom of God transforms people from the inside out.
- **Trust versus Anxiety** — Matthew 6 presents a sustained call to trust God for daily provision rather than being consumed by worry about food, clothing, and tomorrow. “Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”

Week 6. Words of Power

Memory Verse: Matthew 9:37-38 (ESV)

Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”

The Big Picture

Last week we heard Jesus teach with astonishing authority. This week we see that authority demonstrated in action. The one who spoke the Sermon on the Mount now speaks to storms and they obey, to diseases and they flee, to demons and they submit, and to the dead and they rise. These are not random displays of supernatural power; they are signs of the Kingdom of God breaking into a world held captive by sin, sickness, and death. Every miracle is a preview of the new creation, a moment where the future wholeness God intends for his world erupts into the present. When Jesus heals a paralytic, he is showing what God’s Kingdom looks like — a place where broken bodies are restored. When he calms a storm, he is revealing himself as the Lord of creation who will one day make all things new.

But this week is not only about miracles. It is also about the words that frame and interpret them. In Mark 4, Jesus teaches in parables — vivid, earthy stories drawn from the agricultural world of Galilee that simultaneously reveal and conceal the mysteries of the Kingdom. The parable of the sower, the lamp under a basket, the seed growing secretly, and the mustard seed all explore the same question: How does God’s Kingdom grow? The answer is surprising. It grows like a seed — small, hidden, seemingly insignificant, easily overlooked, yet carrying within it an unstoppable life force. The Kingdom does not arrive with the military triumph Israel expected but with the quiet, persistent power of a planted word taking root in human hearts.

The week culminates with Jesus sending out the Twelve on their first mission. Having been with him, they are now sent out by him, carrying his authority to preach, heal, and cast out demons. The instructions in Matthew 10 are both practical and prophetic, preparing the apostles not only for a short-term mission in Galilee but for the long-term reality of following a crucified Messiah in a hostile world. Jesus tells them plainly: “I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves.” The same authority that calms storms and raises the dead is now entrusted to twelve ordinary men. The question is no longer just “Who is this man?” but “What kind of people is he creating, and what will they do in his name?”

This Week’s Readings

Day	Reading	Title
1	Matthew 8	Centurion’s Faith, Stilling the Storm, Gadarene Demoniacs
2	Luke 7	Centurion’s Servant, Widow’s Son Raised, John’s Question
3	Matthew 9	Paralytic Healed, Matthew Called, Jairus’ Daughter, Harvest Prayer
4	Mark 4	Parables: Sower, Lamp, Growing Seed, Mustard Seed, Stilling Storm
5	Matthew 10	Sending Out the Twelve - Mission Instructions

Key Characters

- **The Roman Centurion** — A Gentile military officer whose understanding of authority leads to extraordinary faith that astonishes even Jesus. He recognizes that Jesus can heal with a word, just as a centurion commands soldiers with a word.
- **The Widow of Nain** — An unnamed woman in the midst of burying her only son, whom Jesus raises from the dead in an act of unsolicited compassion.
- **John the Baptist (in prison)** — Imprisoned by Herod Antipas, John sends disciples to ask whether Jesus is truly the expected Messiah, prompting one of Jesus' most revealing self-descriptions.
- **Jairus** — A synagogue ruler who falls at Jesus' feet begging him to heal his dying daughter, and whose faith is tested when the child dies before Jesus arrives.
- **The Twelve Apostles** — Now sent out on their first independent mission, carrying Jesus' authority to preach, heal, and cast out demons in the villages of Galilee.
- **Matthew (Levi)** — A tax collector called from his booth to follow Jesus, who then hosts a dinner party that scandalizes the Pharisees.

Key Locations

- **Capernaum** — Jesus' home base, where the centurion's servant is healed, the paralytic is lowered through a roof, and Matthew is called from his tax booth.
- **Nain** — A small town about 25 miles southwest of Capernaum, near Mount Tabor, where Jesus raises a widow's son from the dead.
- **Sea of Galilee** — The setting for the stilling of the storm and the location from which Jesus teaches from a boat.
- **Towns of Galilee** — The broader region to which the Twelve are sent on their first mission.
- **Country of the Gadarenes/Gerasenes** — The eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee, Gentile territory, where Jesus encounters the demoniacs among the tombs.

Key Themes

- **Faith and Authority** — The centurion grasps what the disciples are still learning: Jesus' word carries absolute authority. He does not need to be physically present to heal. His word is sufficient, just as a military command is sufficient to move soldiers.
- **Compassion in Action** — Jesus' miracles are not displays of power for their own sake. They flow from compassion (*splanchnistheis* — a deep, visceral feeling of being moved in the gut) for human suffering. He sees the widow's tears, the leper's isolation, the paralytic's helplessness, and he acts.
- **The Hidden Kingdom** — The parables of Mark 4 reveal that God's Kingdom operates by a logic that confounds human expectations. It begins small, grows secretly, and produces a harvest out of all proportion to its humble beginnings.
- **Mission and Persecution** — Jesus sends the Twelve out with his authority but also with a clear warning: the world will respond with hostility. Following Jesus means sharing not only in his power but in his suffering.

Week 7. Parables of the Kingdom

Memory Verse: Matthew 11:28-30 (ESV)

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

The Big Picture

This week marks a decisive turning point in Jesus' Galilean ministry. As opposition from religious leaders intensifies and entire cities refuse to repent despite witnessing extraordinary miracles, Jesus shifts his primary teaching method to parables. These vivid, earthy stories drawn from agriculture, commerce, and daily life serve a dual purpose: they reveal the mysteries of God's kingdom to those with receptive hearts while

simultaneously concealing those truths from those who have hardened themselves against the message. The parabolic method is not arbitrary cruelty but a reflection of a spiritual principle — the degree to which one receives light determines the degree to which more light is given.

The week opens with a poignant moment: John the Baptist, languishing in Herod's dungeon, sends messengers to ask whether Jesus is truly the Coming One. Jesus' reply points not to military conquest or political liberation but to the signs of messianic healing prophesied in Isaiah. This sets the tone for the entire week's study. The kingdom Jesus announces does not conform to anyone's expectations — not John's, not the Pharisees', not even the crowds'. It grows silently like a mustard seed, works invisibly like leaven, and demands everything like a pearl of incomparable value.

By the end of the week, we encounter the full spectrum of responses to Jesus: the hostile rejection of the Pharisees, the fickle curiosity of the crowds, the quiet faith of the women who follow and support his ministry, and the bewildered devotion of the disciples who, despite their confusion, remain. Luke 8 draws together parables, miracles over nature, demons, disease, and death — demonstrating that the kingdom Jesus proclaims is not mere metaphor but a power that restructures reality itself.

This Week's Readings

Day	Reading	Title
1	Matthew 11	John's Question from Prison, Woes on Cities, Come to Me
2	Matthew 12	Lord of the Sabbath, Beelzebul Controversy, Sign of Jonah
3	Matthew 13:1-30	Parable of the Sower, Weeds Among Wheat, Mustard Seed
4	Matthew 13:31-58	Hidden Treasure, Pearl, Net, Rejection at Nazareth
5	Luke 8	Women Followers, Parable of Sower, Storm Stilled, Legion, Jairus' Daughter

Key Characters

- **Jesus** — Teacher and miracle-worker whose methods shift in response to growing opposition
- **John the Baptist** — Imprisoned prophet wrestling with doubts about Jesus' identity
- **The Pharisees** — Religious leaders whose opposition escalates to accusations of demonic alliance
- **The Twelve** — Disciples who receive private explanations of the parables
- **Women followers** — Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna, and others who financially support the ministry
- **Jairus** — Synagogue ruler whose daughter Jesus raises from death

Key Locations

- **Galilee** — The broader region of Jesus' itinerant ministry
- **Capernaum** — Jesus' home base and site of many confrontations
- **Chorazin, Bethsaida** — Cities denounced for unrepentance
- **Nazareth** — Jesus' hometown, site of rejection
- **Sea of Galilee** — Setting for the teaching from the boat and the storm miracle
- **Region of the Gerasenes** — Gentile territory east of the Sea of Galilee

Key Themes

- **The mystery of the kingdom** — God's reign advances in hidden, unexpected ways
- **Revelation and concealment** — Parables both reveal and hide truth based on the hearer's disposition
- **Escalating opposition** — From questioning to accusation to outright rejection
- **Faith amid doubt** — John the Baptist models honest questioning within faith
- **The cost of discipleship** — The kingdom demands total allegiance
- **Jesus' authority** — Over nature, demons, disease, death, and the Sabbath itself

Week 8. Miracles and Mission

Memory Verse: John 6:35 (ESV)

Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.'

The Big Picture

This week plunges us into the most miracle-dense period of Jesus' Galilean ministry, a sequence of events that forced everyone who witnessed them to confront a single unavoidable question: Who is this man? The week opens with Mark's detailed account of the Gerasene demoniac, the hemorrhaging woman, and Jairus' daughter — stories we encountered from Luke's perspective last week but which Mark tells with his characteristic urgency and vivid detail. The repetition is intentional in our chronological study: these events were so pivotal that multiple Gospel writers preserved them, and comparing their accounts reveals layers of meaning that no single telling captures.

The ministry's scope expands as Jesus sends the Twelve on their first independent mission, equipping them with authority over unclean spirits and sending them out with radical instructions about dependence on God's provision. This commissioning is bracketed by the grim narrative of John the Baptist's execution at the hands of Herod Antipas — a reminder that the kingdom's advance is not without cost, and that the fate of the forerunner foreshadows the fate of the one he announced. The feeding of the five thousand, the only miracle besides the resurrection recorded in all four Gospels, becomes the hinge of the week. It is simultaneously a demonstration of messianic provision, an echo of the wilderness manna, and the trigger for a crisis of understanding that will separate true disciples from the merely curious.

John's Gospel adds theological depth to the miraculous events, recording Jesus' healing at the Pool of Bethesda and the extended discourse on his authority as the Son. The week culminates with the beginning of the Bread of Life discourse in John 6, where Jesus interprets the feeding miracle in terms that will scandalize many and clarify the nature of faith. To receive Jesus is not merely to eat physical bread but to trust in the one whom the Father has sent. The miracles are signs — they point beyond themselves to the identity and mission of the one who performs them, and they demand a response that goes far deeper than amazement.

This Week's Readings

Day	Reading	Title
1	Mark 5	Legion/Gerasene Demoniac, Jairus' Daughter, Bleeding Woman
2	Mark 6:1-29	Rejection at Nazareth, Sending the Twelve, John the Baptist Killed
3	Mark 6:30-56	Feeding the 5000, Walking on Water
4	John 5	Healing at Pool of Bethesda, Jesus' Authority as Son
5	John 6:1-40	Feeding 5000, Walking on Water, Bread of Life Discourse begins

Key Characters

- **Jesus** — Miracle-worker whose signs point to his divine identity and messianic mission
- **The Twelve** — Sent on their first independent mission with authority over unclean spirits
- **John the Baptist** — Martyred by Herod Antipas, his death foreshadowing Jesus' own
- **Herod Antipas** — Tetrarch whose guilt and political weakness lead to John's execution
- **Herodias and Salome** — The wife and stepdaughter whose grudge and dance seal John's fate
- **Jairus** — Synagogue ruler whose faith is tested by delay and death
- **The hemorrhaging woman** — Twelve years of suffering end with a touch of faith
- **The Gerasene demoniac** — Liberated man who becomes the first Gentile evangelist
- **The invalid at Bethesda** — Thirty-eight years of waiting, healed by a word

Key Locations

- **Region of the Gerasenes** — Gentile territory east of the Sea of Galilee
- **Nazareth** — Jesus' hometown, site of rejection
- **Machaerus** — Herod's fortress east of the Dead Sea where John was executed
- **Bethsaida** — Near the site of the feeding of the 5000
- **Sea of Galilee** — Setting for the walking on water
- **Pool of Bethesda** — Jerusalem site of the invalid's healing, near the Sheep Gate
- **Capernaum** — Synagogue where the Bread of Life discourse begins

Key Themes

- **Jesus' identity** — Every miracle forces the question of who Jesus is
- **The cost of discipleship** — John's martyrdom and the Twelve's radical mission demonstrate the kingdom's demands
- **Provision and dependence** — The feeding miracles echo the manna and teach trust in God's sufficiency
- **Signs and faith** — Miracles are not ends in themselves but signs pointing to deeper realities
- **Authority of the Son** — Jesus claims equality with the Father in both action and judgment
- **Bread of Life** — Physical bread points to spiritual sustenance found only in Christ

Week 9. Bread of Life

Memory Verse: John 6:68 (ESV)

Simon Peter answered him, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.'

The Big Picture

The feeding miracles stand at the center of this week's study, and they are far more than displays of supernatural power over matter. When Jesus multiplies loaves and fish for thousands of hungry people on two separate occasions, he is enacting a living parable about who he is and what he has come to do. The crowds see the sign and want to make him king — a political messiah who can solve their material problems. But Jesus refuses to be reduced to a bread-dispensing revolutionary. In one of the most theologically dense discourses in all four Gospels, he declares himself to be the bread of life, the true manna from heaven that the wilderness manna only foreshadowed. His flesh and blood, he insists, are the real food and real drink that sustain eternal life. The language is so graphic, so deliberately provocative, that it shatters the crowd's enthusiasm. Many disciples walk away. The Twelve remain, but barely — and even among them, Jesus knows, one is a devil.

Woven through these chapters is a deepening confrontation between Jesus and the religious authorities over the question of purity. The Pharisees and scribes challenge Jesus' disciples for eating with unwashed hands, invoking the traditions of the elders. Jesus' response is revolutionary: defilement does not come from outside a person through food or physical contact but from within, from the corrupt human heart. Mark's editorial note — "Thus he declared all foods clean" — signals the seismic implications of this teaching. If purity is a matter of the heart rather than the stomach, then the entire system of ritual boundaries that separated Jew from Gentile is being relativized. This is not yet the full-blown Gentile mission, but the theological foundation for it is being laid.

The week's narratives extend this boundary-crossing logic into practice. Jesus heals the daughter of a Syrophoenician (Canaanite) woman — a Gentile whose persistent faith puts Israel's unbelief to shame. He heals a deaf man in the Decapolis, Gentile territory. He feeds four thousand people in a region with a significant Gentile population. And he walks on water, revealing his divine identity to terrified disciples with the words "It is I" — in Greek, *ego eimi*, the divine name. The bread of life is not for Israel alone. The one who commands the sea and multiplies bread is the God of all nations, and his table is open to anyone who will come in faith.

This Week's Readings

Day	Reading	Title
1	John 6:41-71	Hard Teaching — “Unless you eat my flesh”; Many Disciples Desert
2	Matthew 14	John the Baptist's Death, Feeding 5000, Walking on Water
3	Matthew 15	Traditions of Elders, Canaanite Woman's Faith, Feeding 4000
4	Mark 7	Clean and Unclean, Syrophoenician Woman, Deaf Man Healed
5	Mark 8:1-26	Feeding 4000, Pharisees Demand Sign, Blind Man at Bethsaida

Key Characters

- **Jesus** — The bread of life who feeds, heals, and reveals his divine identity
- **The Twelve** — Confronted with the cost of following a Messiah who defies expectations
- **Peter** — Spokesperson who declares, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life”
- **Judas** — Identified proleptically as a betrayer, even as the others remain
- **The Pharisees and scribes** — Challengers of Jesus on purity laws and tradition
- **The Syrophoenician/Canaanite woman** — A Gentile whose faith persists despite apparent rebuff
- **Herod Antipas** — The ruler who executes John the Baptist under political pressure
- **Herodias and her daughter** — Instigators of John's beheading

Key Locations

- **Capernaum synagogue** — Where Jesus delivers the bread of life discourse
- **Sea of Galilee** — Site of the feeding of the 5000 and Jesus walking on water
- **Gennesaret** — Where Jesus lands after walking on water
- **Region of Tyre and Sidon** — Gentile territory where Jesus encounters the Syrophoenician woman
- **The Decapolis** — Gentile region east of the Sea of Galilee, site of healings
- **Bethsaida** — Village where the blind man is healed in stages
- **Machaerus** — Herod's fortress where John the Baptist was imprisoned and executed

Key Themes

- **Jesus as the bread of life** — The feeding miracles point beyond physical sustenance to spiritual nourishment that only Christ can provide
- **Internal versus external purity** — True defilement originates in the human heart, not in food or ritual contamination
- **Faith that crosses boundaries** — The Gentile woman's faith exposes the inadequacy of ethnic and religious barriers
- **The cost of discipleship** — Many followers abandon Jesus when his teaching becomes difficult
- **Divine identity revealed** — Walking on water and the *ego eimi* declaration unveil Jesus as the God who commands creation

Week 10. Who Do You Say I Am?

Memory Verse: Mark 8:29 (ESV)

And he asked them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Peter answered him, ‘You are the Christ.’

The Big Picture

Everything in the Gospels has been building toward this question. For months, the crowds have been speculating about Jesus' identity — is he a prophet, a healer, a political revolutionary, John the Baptist returned from the dead? The religious authorities have rendered their verdict: he is a blasphemer in league

with Beelzebul. The disciples have watched him calm storms, feed thousands, walk on water, and cast out demons, and still their hearts are described as hardened, their eyes as unable to see clearly. Now, at Caesarea Philippi, a pagan city at the foot of Mount Hermon far from the centers of Jewish religious life, Jesus puts the question directly: “Who do people say that I am?” And then, more pointedly: “But who do you say that I am?” Peter’s answer — “You are the Christ” (Mark), “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matthew) — is the hinge on which the entire Gospel narrative turns. Everything before it has led to this confession; everything after it will redefine what the confession means.

For Peter’s confession is immediately followed by the first explicit prediction of Jesus’ suffering and death. The Christ, Jesus insists, must suffer many things, be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, be killed, and after three days rise again. Peter’s reaction is visceral: he rebukes Jesus. The verb Mark uses (*epitimao*) is the same word used for Jesus rebuking demons. Peter is treating Jesus’ prediction of the cross as though it were a demonic temptation, an idea that needs to be exorcised. Jesus’ counter-rebuke is equally fierce: “Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man” (Mark 8:33). The disciple who has just made the greatest confession in the Gospels immediately reveals that he does not yet understand what he has confessed. He has the right title but the wrong definition.

The Transfiguration, which follows six days later, provides divine confirmation of Peter’s confession while simultaneously correcting the disciples’ understanding. On a high mountain, Jesus’ appearance is transformed — his face shines like the sun, his garments become dazzling white. Moses and Elijah appear, representing the Law and the Prophets, and they speak with Jesus about his “departure” (Luke’s word is *exodos*, a deliberate echo of Israel’s liberation from Egypt). The voice from the cloud declares, “This is my beloved Son; listen to him.” The Transfiguration reveals that the suffering Messiah and the glorious Son of God are not contradictions but the same reality seen from different angles. The cross is not a detour from glory; it is the road to glory. And the disciples are commanded to listen — precisely because what Jesus is saying about his death runs so contrary to everything they expected.

This Week’s Readings

Day	Reading	Title
1	Mark 8:27-38	Peter’s Confession at Caesarea Philippi, First Passion Prediction, Take Up Cross
2	Matthew 16	Peter’s Confession, Keys of the Kingdom, Take Up Your Cross
3	Mark 9:1-29	Transfiguration, Boy with Unclean Spirit
4	Matthew 17	Transfiguration, Epileptic Boy, Temple Tax
5	Mark 9:30-50	Second Passion Prediction, Who Is Greatest, Salt

Key Characters

- **Jesus** — The Christ who redefines messiahship through suffering
- **Peter** — The disciple who confesses rightly but understands wrongly, blessed and rebuked in the same conversation
- **James and John** — Inner-circle witnesses of the Transfiguration
- **Moses** — Representative of the Law, appearing at the Transfiguration
- **Elijah** — Representative of the Prophets, appearing at the Transfiguration
- **The father of the epileptic boy** — A man whose desperate cry “I believe; help my unbelief!” captures the reality of imperfect faith
- **The Twelve** — Disciples who argue about greatness while Jesus speaks of death

Key Locations

- **Caesarea Philippi** — A pagan city at the base of Mount Hermon, site of a temple to Pan, where Peter confesses Jesus as the Christ
- **The high mountain** — Traditionally identified as Mount Tabor or Mount Hermon, site of the Transfiguration
- **Capernaum** — Where Jesus teaches about greatness and pays the temple tax

- **Galilee** — The broader region through which Jesus passes while giving the second passion prediction

Key Themes

- **Messianic identity redefined** — Jesus is the Christ, but not the kind of Christ anyone expected; he is a suffering, dying, rising Messiah
- **The cost of discipleship** — Following Jesus means denying self, taking up a cross, and losing one's life to find it
- **Glory revealed through suffering** — The Transfiguration confirms Jesus' divine identity while pointing toward his death as the means of salvation
- **Faith amid failure** — The disciples repeatedly misunderstand, yet Jesus continues to teach, correct, and include them
- **True greatness** — In the kingdom of God, the greatest is the servant of all, and welcoming a child is welcoming God himself

Week 11. Life in the Kingdom

Memory Verse: Luke 10:27 (ESV)

He answered, 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'

The Big Picture

Having established who Jesus is — the Christ, the Son of the living God — the Gospel narrative now turns to what his kingdom looks like in practice. Week 10 ended with Peter's confession and the Transfiguration, revelations of identity that demand a response. This week answers the inevitable follow-up question: if Jesus is the Messiah and his kingdom is breaking into the world, how should the citizens of that kingdom actually live? The answer, delivered across Matthew 18 and Luke 9-12, is both breathtaking in its moral vision and devastating in its challenge to conventional human instinct. Kingdom life is defined not by rank but by humility, not by retribution but by limitless forgiveness, not by tribal loyalty but by radical compassion across every boundary, not by anxious accumulation but by reckless trust in a generous Father.

Matthew 18 opens the week with a discourse on community life within the kingdom. The disciples ask, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" — a question that reveals they are still thinking in the categories of earthly power. Jesus responds by placing a child in their midst, a figure with zero social status in the ancient world, and declares that entry into the kingdom requires becoming like that child. He then delivers teaching on the terrible seriousness of causing others to stumble, the parable of the Lost Sheep (emphasizing God's relentless pursuit of every wanderer), instructions for dealing with sin within the community, and the parable of the Unmerciful Servant, which teaches that those who have been forgiven an infinite debt have no right to withhold forgiveness from others. Luke 9-12 then broadens the picture: the sending of the Twelve and the Seventy-Two demonstrates that the kingdom is meant to expand outward; the story of the Good Samaritan redefines "neighbor" to include even one's ethnic enemy; Mary and Martha present two postures of discipleship; the Lord's Prayer provides the pattern for kingdom communication with the Father; and a series of warnings about hypocrisy, greed, worry, and readiness reveal that kingdom life demands total reorientation of one's values, priorities, and allegiances.

What emerges across these readings is a portrait of a community utterly unlike the world that surrounds it. In the kingdom, the last are first. The forgiven forgive. The enemy is loved. The anxious are invited to rest. And at the center of it all stands not a set of rules but a person — Jesus himself — who embodies every ethic he teaches and calls his followers to do the same.

This Week's Readings

Day	Reading	Title
1	Matthew 18	Who Is Greatest, Lost Sheep, Church Discipline, Parable of Unmerciful Servant
2	Luke 9	Sending Twelve, Feeding 5000, Peter's Confession, Transfiguration,

Day	Reading	Title
		Cost of Following
3	Luke 10	Sending 72, Good Samaritan, Mary and Martha
4	Luke 11	Lord's Prayer, Persistent Friend, Beelzebul Controversy, Sign of Jonah, Woes
5	Luke 12	Fearless Confession, Rich Fool, Do Not Worry, Watchful Servants, Division

Key Characters

- **Jesus** — The teacher who embodies the kingdom ethics he proclaims
- **The Twelve** — Sent out with authority yet still arguing about rank and greatness
- **The Seventy-Two** — A wider circle of disciples sent ahead of Jesus, returning with joy
- **The Good Samaritan** — An outsider who fulfills the law of love while the religious insiders pass by
- **Mary and Martha** — Two sisters representing contemplative devotion and active service
- **The Rich Fool** — A man whose abundant harvest could not add a single hour to his life
- **The Unmerciful Servant** — A debtor forgiven everything who refuses to forgive anything

Key Locations

- **Capernaum** — Setting for the discourse on greatness and forgiveness in Matthew 18
- **The road from Jerusalem to Jericho** — The dangerous descent where the Good Samaritan parable is set
- **Bethany** — The village of Mary and Martha, near Jerusalem
- **Various towns in Galilee and beyond** — The expanding mission territory of the Twelve and the Seventy-Two

Key Themes

- **Humility and childlikeness** — Kingdom greatness is measured by lowliness and dependence, not by power or status
- **Radical forgiveness** — The forgiven community must be a forgiving community; the measure of grace received sets the measure of grace extended
- **Love without boundaries** — The Good Samaritan shatters every ethnic, religious, and social barrier to mercy
- **Prayer as kingdom posture** — The Lord's Prayer teaches dependence on the Father for daily provision, forgiveness, and deliverance
- **Freedom from anxiety** — Trusting the Father's provision liberates believers from the tyranny of accumulation and worry
- **Readiness and watchfulness** — The kingdom demands alert, faithful stewardship because the Master's return is certain but its timing unknown

Section 3. Road to Jerusalem

Weeks 12–16

Over these five weeks the road narrows. Jesus sets his face toward Jerusalem, and everything — the teaching, the miracles, the confrontations — takes on the weight of what is coming. The Galilean crowds thin. The opposition hardens. And the one who calmed storms and multiplied bread walks steadily toward the city that kills its prophets.

The journey begins with a collision between conflict and compassion. At the Festival of Tabernacles, Jesus makes claims that force everyone to choose — “Before Abraham was, I am” — while in the same breath defending a condemned woman and telling parables about a God who runs down the road to embrace the lost. He declares himself the Light of the World and the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep. The religious leaders pick up stones. The crowds are divided. And Jesus keeps teaching, keeps healing, keeps walking south.

Along the way, the parables grow sharper. A shrewd manager. A rich man and a beggar. A persistent widow. A Pharisee and a tax collector praying side by side in the temple, only one of whom goes home justified. These are not comfortable stories. They dismantle our assumptions about who deserves God’s favor and expose how easily religion becomes a mask for self-righteousness. At the same time, Jesus blesses children, confronts a rich young man about the cost of following him, and teaches that the Kingdom operates on an accounting system that has nothing to do with human merit.

Then comes the sign that changes everything. Jesus raises Lazarus from a tomb after four days, declaring “I am the resurrection and the life” — and the gift of life to one man becomes the trigger for the plot to kill another. The high priest pronounces it expedient that one man die for the people, speaking a deeper truth than he knows. In Jericho, a tax collector named Zacchaeus climbs a tree to see Jesus and comes down a transformed man. The Kingdom is drawing near, and it looks nothing like what anyone expected.

The final two weeks erupt in Jerusalem. Jesus rides into the city on a donkey — a deliberate prophetic act claiming the throne of David in the humblest way possible. He drives the merchants from the temple, curses a fruitless fig tree, and engages in a series of confrontations with the religious authorities that leave them silenced but seething. Then, from the Mount of Olives, he weeps over Jerusalem and delivers his longest teaching on the end of the age — the destruction of the temple, the coming of the Son of Man, and three parables that press a single question: When the master returns, will you be ready? The answer, he says, will not be measured by theological sophistication but by whether you fed the hungry, welcomed the stranger, and visited the prisoner.

By the end of Section 3, the stage is set. The claims have been made, the battle lines drawn, the prophecies spoken. Jesus has arrived in Jerusalem for the last time. What happens next will shake the foundations of the world.

Week 12. Conflict and Compassion

Memory Verse: John 8:12 (ESV)

Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, ‘I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.’

The Big Picture

As Jesus moves toward Jerusalem, the tension between his mission and the religious establishment intensifies dramatically. This week opens at the Festival of Tabernacles, one of the three great pilgrimage feasts of Israel, where Jerusalem swelled with worshippers from across the Jewish world. In this highly charged atmosphere, Jesus makes some of his most provocative public declarations — offering living water, proclaiming himself the Light of the World, and asserting his pre-existence with the stunning claim, “Before Abraham was, I am.” These are not the words of a gentle moral teacher but of someone deliberately forcing a decision: who is this

man? The crowds are divided, the Pharisees are enraged, and the stakes are climbing toward a point of no return.

Yet woven through this escalating conflict is an extraordinary thread of compassion. Jesus defends a woman caught in adultery when everyone else is ready to stone her. He tells three of the most beloved parables in all of Scripture — the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin, and the Prodigal Son — each one a window into the heart of a God who actively seeks the lost and throws a party when they are found. Luke’s travel narrative gives us some of the most penetrating teaching on discipleship, including the cost of following Jesus and the upside-down values of the Kingdom, where the humble are exalted and the self-righteous are left outside the door.

The juxtaposition is deliberate. John shows us Jesus confronting religious hypocrisy and claiming divine authority, while Luke shows us Jesus revealing what God is actually like — not a distant judge waiting to condemn but a father running down the road to embrace his wayward child. These two portraits are not contradictory but complementary: the one who has the authority to judge chooses instead to seek and save. This is the theological heart of the gospel, and it is on full display this week.

This Week’s Readings

Day	Reading	Title
1	John 7	Festival of Tabernacles
2	John 8	Light of the World
3	Luke 13	Repent or Perish
4	Luke 14	Cost of Discipleship
5	Luke 15	Parables of the Lost

Key Characters

- **Jesus** — Publicly teaching in Jerusalem during the Festival of Tabernacles, making explosive claims about his identity while also revealing God’s boundless compassion through parables.
- **The Pharisees** — Growing increasingly hostile to Jesus, attempting to trap him with the woman caught in adultery and challenging his claims to divine authority.
- **The Woman Caught in Adultery** — Brought before Jesus as a test case, she becomes a living illustration of grace triumphing over condemnation.
- **The Prodigal Son** — The younger son in Jesus’ most famous parable, who squanders his inheritance but is welcomed home by his father’s extravagant love.
- **The Elder Brother** — Represents the self-righteous who resent God’s grace extended to sinners, a mirror held up to the Pharisees.
- **The Crowds** — Divided over Jesus’ identity, some believing and others wanting him arrested.

Key Locations

- **Jerusalem / The Temple Courts** — Where Jesus teaches publicly during the Festival of Tabernacles, making his great claims in the most public forum in Israel.
- **The Pool of Siloam (referenced)** — Connected to the water-pouring ceremony of Tabernacles, the backdrop for Jesus’ offer of living water.
- **The Road to Jerusalem** — Luke’s extended travel narrative places much of Jesus’ teaching in this journey context.

Key Themes

- **Divine Identity** — Jesus’ “I Am” statements in John 7-8 are claims to deity, deliberately echoing God’s self-revelation to Moses at the burning bush. These are the most direct christological claims in the Gospels.
- **Grace and Judgment** — The tension between Jesus’ authority to judge and his choice to show mercy runs through every passage this week, from the woman caught in adultery to the parables of the lost.
- **The Cost of Discipleship** — Luke 14 lays out in uncompromising terms what it means to follow Jesus: counting the cost, carrying the cross, and surrendering everything.

- **God's Heart for the Lost** — The three parables of Luke 15 form a crescendo revealing God as one who actively seeks the lost with relentless love and joy.

Week 13. Parables of Grace

Memory Verse: John 10:10 (ESV)

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

The Big Picture

This week continues the extraordinary interweaving of Luke's travel narrative and John's Festival discourses, both of which are building toward the climactic events in Jerusalem. Luke gives us some of Jesus' most challenging and beloved parables — the Shrewd Manager, the Rich Man and Lazarus, the Persistent Widow, and the Pharisee and Tax Collector — each one a window into how God's Kingdom operates on principles that confound human expectations. These are not comfortable stories. They challenge our relationship with money, our assumptions about who is righteous, and our confidence that God owes us something for our good behavior. Woven through them are teachings on faith, gratitude, and the radical humility required to enter the Kingdom.

John's contribution this week includes two of the most dramatic chapters in his Gospel. In John 9, Jesus heals a man born blind, setting off a chain of events that serves as a brilliant extended metaphor: the physically blind man progressively sees more clearly who Jesus is, while the sighted Pharisees become progressively more blind. In John 10, Jesus declares himself the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep, bringing to fulfillment one of the Old Testament's richest images of God's relationship with his people. His claim "I and the Father are one" at the Festival of Dedication (Hanukkah) pushes the conflict with the religious authorities toward the breaking point.

Together, these readings paint a picture of a God who defies every category we construct. He is the shepherd who dies for the sheep, the judge who hears the persistent widow, the one who justifies the tax collector rather than the Pharisee. The Kingdom of God is not a reward for the deserving but a gift for those humble enough to receive it — like a child (Luke 18:17), like a blind beggar who simply cries out for mercy.

This Week's Readings

Day	Reading	Title
1	Luke 16	Shrewd Manager and Rich Man
2	Luke 17	Faith, Gratitude, and the Kingdom
3	Luke 18	Persistent Widow and Humble Prayer
4	John 9	The Man Born Blind
5	John 10	The Good Shepherd

Key Characters

- **The Shrewd Manager** — A dishonest steward whose worldly wisdom Jesus paradoxically commends, not for his dishonesty but for his strategic urgency.
- **The Rich Man and Lazarus** — Characters in Jesus' most vivid parable about the eternal consequences of ignoring the poor at your gate.
- **The Ten Lepers** — Healed by Jesus, but only one — a Samaritan — returns to give thanks, highlighting the theme of gratitude.
- **The Pharisee and the Tax Collector** — Two men at prayer, one confident in his own righteousness and one throwing himself on God's mercy. Only one goes home justified.
- **The Man Born Blind** — A man whose physical healing becomes a journey of spiritual illumination, ultimately leading to worship of Jesus and expulsion from the synagogue.
- **Jesus as the Good Shepherd** — Using the most beloved pastoral image of the Old Testament, Jesus claims to be the shepherd prophesied in Ezekiel 34 who lays down his life for his flock.

Key Locations

- **The Road to Jerusalem** — The continuing journey context for Luke's parables and teachings.
- **Jerusalem / The Temple** — Where the man born blind is healed and the Good Shepherd discourse takes place.
- **Solomon's Colonnade** — The covered portico on the eastern side of the temple, where Jesus speaks during the Festival of Dedication (John 10:22-23).
- **The Border Between Samaria and Galilee** — Where Jesus encounters the ten lepers (Luke 17:11).

Key Themes

- **Right Use of Wealth** — Luke 16 presents two parables that challenge every comfortable assumption about money, possessions, and their eternal significance.
- **Faith and Humility** — From mustard-seed faith to the tax collector's prayer, these passages insist that the path to God is through honest dependence, not self-sufficient religiosity.
- **Spiritual Sight and Blindness** — John 9 is the Gospel's great parable-in-action: physical blindness is healed while spiritual blindness is exposed and condemned.
- **The Good Shepherd** — Jesus' shepherd discourse fulfills Ezekiel 34 and reveals the sacrificial heart of God's love: the shepherd does not flee from the wolf but lays down his life.

Week 14. Signs and Confrontations

Memory Verse: John 11:25-26 (ESV)

Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?'

The Big Picture

This week brings us to the threshold of the final week. Jesus teaches about marriage, blesses children, and confronts a rich young man about the cost of discipleship. Then comes the most dramatic sign of all — the raising of Lazarus from the dead, which paradoxically triggers the plot to kill Jesus. The week closes with Zacchaeus and the Parable of the Minas as Jesus approaches Jerusalem for the last time.

The opening readings in Matthew 19-20 find Jesus in the region "beyond the Jordan" (Perea), teaching large crowds as he makes his way south toward Jerusalem. The Pharisees test him with a question about divorce, hoping to entangle him in the contentious debate between the schools of Hillel and Shammai. Jesus bypasses the rabbinic dispute entirely and goes back to Genesis — to creation itself — declaring that marriage is a one-flesh union established by God and not to be severed by human convenience. The encounter with children follows naturally: in a world that discounted the young and powerless, Jesus insists that the kingdom belongs precisely to those who come with nothing to offer. The Rich Young Man then presents the cost of discipleship in its starkest form. He has kept the commandments since youth — a claim Jesus does not dispute — but he is unwilling to release his wealth. He goes away sorrowful, and Jesus delivers the devastating verdict that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom. Matthew 20 opens with the Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard, which reveals that God's grace operates on a fundamentally different accounting system than human merit. The third passion prediction follows, and the chapter closes with the mother of James and John requesting thrones for her sons — prompting Jesus' declaration that the Son of Man "came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

The narrative then shifts to John 11, the theological climax of the Book of Signs. The raising of Lazarus is the seventh and greatest sign in John's Gospel, and it is also the most paradoxical. Jesus deliberately delays his arrival in Bethany so that Lazarus has been dead four days — well past the rabbinic belief that the soul lingered near the body for three days. Before the tomb, Jesus delivers one of his most profound "I AM" declarations: "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live" (11:25). He then weeps at the tomb, commands the stone removed, and calls Lazarus out with a commanding voice. The gift of life to Lazarus becomes the trigger for the plot against Jesus' life. Caiaphas, the high priest, delivers his cynical but unconsciously prophetic verdict: "It is better that one man should die for the people."

John notes with devastating irony that Caiaphas “did not say this of his own accord” — the political calculator spoke a deeper truth than he knew.

The week closes in Jericho with Zacchaeus, the chief tax collector who climbed a sycamore tree to see Jesus and came down to host him at his table. Salvation came to his house not through moral reform but through encounter with Jesus, and his spontaneous generosity — giving half his goods to the poor and restoring fourfold to anyone he had defrauded — demonstrated the reality of his transformation. The Parable of the Ten Minas, told because the crowds expected the kingdom to appear immediately, teaches that the time before the king’s return is a time for faithful stewardship, not idle waiting.

This Week’s Readings

Day	Reading	Title
1	Matthew 19	Divorce Teaching, Let the Children Come, Rich Young Man
2	Matthew 20	Workers in the Vineyard, Third Passion Prediction, Servanthood
3	John 11:1-44	Raising of Lazarus — “I Am the Resurrection and the Life”
4	John 11:45-57	Sanhedrin Plots, Caiaphas’ Unconscious Prophecy
5	Luke 19:1-27	Zacchaeus, Parable of Ten Minas

Key Characters

- **Jesus** — The one who raises the dead, weeps at the grave, and declares himself the resurrection and the life
- **The Rich Young Man** — A moral exemplar who cannot release his wealth and walks away from Jesus sorrowful
- **Lazarus** — The dead man Jesus calls back to life, the seventh and greatest sign in John
- **Martha and Mary** — Sisters who each confront Jesus about Lazarus’ death with the same words but different postures
- **Caiaphas** — The high priest whose political calculation becomes an unwitting prophecy of substitutionary atonement
- **Zacchaeus** — The chief tax collector whose encounter with Jesus produces radical, spontaneous generosity

Key Locations

- **Perea (“beyond the Jordan”)** — The region where Jesus teaches about marriage and encounters the rich young man
- **Bethany** — The village two miles from Jerusalem where Lazarus, Martha, and Mary live
- **Ephraim** — The remote village where Jesus withdraws after the Sanhedrin decides to kill him
- **Jericho** — The ancient city where Jesus meets Zacchaeus on the road to Jerusalem

Key Themes

- **The cost of discipleship** — The rich young man’s inability to part with his wealth reveals that following Jesus requires releasing whatever competes for ultimate allegiance
- **Grace beyond merit** — The Workers in the Vineyard parable shatters the assumption that God’s generosity operates on a merit-based system
- **Life through death** — The raising of Lazarus demonstrates Jesus’ authority over death while simultaneously setting in motion the events that lead to his own death
- **Prophetic irony** — Caiaphas’ political calculation that one man should die for the nation becomes, in John’s hands, a statement of substitutionary atonement
- **Salvation as transformation** — Zacchaeus’ radical generosity demonstrates that genuine encounter with Jesus produces visible, measurable change

Week 15. The Final Week Begins

Memory Verse: Mark 12:30-31 (ESV)

And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these.

The Big Picture

Jesus has arrived in Jerusalem, and everything changes. For months he has been traveling southward from Galilee, teaching along the way, warning his disciples of what awaits him in the holy city. Now, as Passover approaches and the city swells with pilgrims, Jesus makes his move — not with the stealth of a fugitive but with the deliberate, public symbolism of a king claiming his throne. The Triumphal Entry, narrated in both Matthew and Mark, is a calculated prophetic action. By riding a donkey into Jerusalem while crowds wave palm branches and shout Hosanna, Jesus consciously enacts Zechariah 9:9, declaring himself the long-awaited messianic king. Yet the mode of his arrival — humble, on a donkey rather than a war horse — signals that his kingdom will not conform to the political expectations of the crowds or the fears of the authorities.

The Temple cleansing that follows is equally deliberate. Jesus overturns the tables of the money changers and merchants in the Court of the Gentiles, the only space in the Temple complex where non-Jews could approach God in prayer. By driving out commerce, Jesus is not merely protesting corruption; he is enacting Malachi 3:1-3, the prophecy that the Lord would suddenly come to his Temple and purify the sons of Levi. The cursing of the fig tree, sandwiched around the Temple action in Mark's account, serves as a prophetic parable: Israel, and particularly its Temple establishment, has the outward appearance of vitality but produces no fruit. The time for judgment has come. These intertwined events — entry, cursing, cleansing — form a single prophetic drama announcing that the old order is passing away.

The religious leaders respond immediately. They challenge Jesus' authority, asking by what right he acts and teaches in the Temple precincts. Jesus answers with counter-questions and parables — the Two Sons, the Wicked Tenants, the Wedding Banquet — each of which indicts the religious establishment for rejecting God's messengers and, now, God's own Son. The tension ratchets upward through a series of trap questions about taxes, resurrection, and the greatest commandment. Yet in the midst of this conflict, Mark preserves a moment of extraordinary beauty: a scribe agrees with Jesus about the primacy of love, and Jesus tells him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." Even in the gathering storm, the door remains open for those willing to walk through it.

This Week's Readings

Day	Reading	Title
1	Matthew 21:1-22	Triumphal Entry, Temple Cleansing, Fig Tree Cursed
2	Matthew 21:23-46	Authority Questioned, Parable of Two Sons, Parable of Tenants
3	Mark 11	Triumphal Entry, Fig Tree, Temple Cleansing, Authority Questioned
4	Mark 12:1-27	Parable of Tenants, Taxes to Caesar, Resurrection Question
5	Mark 12:28-44	Greatest Commandment, David's Son, Widow's Offering

Key Characters

- **Jesus** — Messianic king who enters Jerusalem with prophetic intentionality and confronts the Temple establishment
- **The Twelve** — Disciples who witness the unfolding drama but struggle to grasp its significance
- **Chief Priests and Elders** — Temple authorities who challenge Jesus' right to teach and act
- **The Pharisees and Herodians** — Unlikely allies united in their desire to trap Jesus
- **The Sadducees** — Temple aristocracy who pose the resurrection question
- **The Scribe** — A Torah scholar who sincerely engages Jesus about the greatest commandment

- **The Poor Widow** — An unnamed woman whose offering embodies total devotion

Key Locations

- **Bethphage and Bethany** — Villages on the Mount of Olives where Jesus stages his entry
- **Mount of Olives** — The ridge east of Jerusalem with profound prophetic associations (Zechariah 14:4)
- **Jerusalem** — The holy city, swollen with Passover pilgrims
- **The Temple** — Center of Jewish worship, commerce, and political power
- **Court of the Gentiles** — The outer court where money changers and merchants operated

Key Themes

- **Messianic kingship** — Jesus publicly claims his identity through prophetic actions, not political force
- **Judgment on fruitlessness** — The fig tree and Temple cleansing declare that outward religion without genuine faith is condemned
- **Authority and confrontation** — The question of Jesus' authority becomes the central issue of the Passion Week
- **Prophetic fulfillment** — Zechariah 9:9, Malachi 3:1-3, Psalm 118, and Isaiah 56:7 converge in these events
- **Total devotion** — From the widow's offering to the greatest commandment, wholehearted love is the standard

Week 16. Olivet Discourse

Memory Verse: Matthew 25:40 (ESV)

And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'

The Big Picture

Having silenced his opponents in the Temple debates, Jesus now turns from defense to offense. Matthew 22 records the final confrontational exchanges — the Parable of the Wedding Banquet, the trap questions about taxes and resurrection, and the question about the greatest commandment — before Jesus launches into the most sustained denunciation in the Gospels: the Seven Woes against the scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 23. These woes are not the ravings of a bitter critic but the lament of a broken-hearted prophet who sees the religious leaders of Israel leading the nation toward catastrophe. The chapter ends with one of the most poignant moments in Scripture: Jesus weeping over Jerusalem, crying out, "How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!"

From the Temple courts, Jesus and his disciples cross the Kidron Valley to the Mount of Olives, where the disciples point out the grandeur of the Temple buildings. Herod's Temple was one of the architectural wonders of the ancient world — its white limestone and gold leaf were visible for miles. Jesus' response is devastating: "There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down." This triggers the Olivet Discourse, the longest block of eschatological teaching in the Synoptic Gospels. In Matthew 24-25, Jesus addresses the destruction of the Temple, the signs preceding the end of the age, the coming of the Son of Man, and the final judgment. The discourse weaves together near-horizon events (the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70) and far-horizon events (the return of Christ and the consummation of history) in a way that has challenged interpreters for two millennia.

The teaching culminates in three extended parables — the Ten Virgins, the Talents, and the Sheep and Goats — each pressing the same urgent question: When the master returns, will you be ready? The virgins remind us that preparation cannot be borrowed at the last minute. The talents insist that faithful stewardship requires risk, not mere preservation. And the Sheep and Goats reveal that the ultimate criterion of judgment is not theological sophistication but practical compassion: "As you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me." Luke 21 provides a parallel account of the Olivet Discourse, adding the widow's offering as a prelude and offering its own distinctive emphasis on Jerusalem's fall as a time "fulfilled" within God's

sovereign plan. Together, these chapters form the theological bridge between the ministry of Jesus and the eschatological hope of the early church.

This Week's Readings

Day	Reading	Title
1	Matthew 22	Wedding Banquet, Taxes to Caesar, Resurrection, Greatest Command
2	Matthew 23	Seven Woes to Scribes and Pharisees, Lament over Jerusalem
3	Matthew 24	Signs of the End, Abomination, Coming of Son of Man, Stay Ready
4	Matthew 25:1-30	Parable of Ten Virgins, Parable of the Talents
5	Matthew 25:31-46 + Luke 21	Sheep and Goats, Luke's Olivet Discourse

Key Characters

- **Jesus** — Prophet, judge, and coming King who pronounces woes, foretells destruction, and describes the final judgment
- **The Pharisees and Scribes** — Targets of the Seven Woes, representatives of a corrupt religious system
- **The Disciples** — Private audience for the Olivet Discourse, struggling to comprehend the scope of what Jesus describes
- **The Wise and Foolish Virgins** — Parabolic figures representing prepared and unprepared believers
- **The Servants with Talents** — Stewards whose faithfulness or fear determines their master's judgment
- **"The Least of These"** — The hungry, thirsty, stranger, naked, sick, and imprisoned in whom Christ is encountered

Key Locations

- **The Temple** — Setting for the final debates and the Seven Woes, and the building whose destruction Jesus predicts
- **The Mount of Olives** — The ridge east of Jerusalem where Jesus delivers the eschatological discourse
- **Jerusalem** — The city that kills the prophets, over which Jesus weeps

Key Themes

- **Prophetic judgment** — The Seven Woes and the Olivet Discourse declare that God's patience with corrupt leadership has reached its end
- **Eschatological readiness** — Every parable in Matthew 24-25 presses the question of preparedness for the master's return
- **Hypocrisy unmasked** — The woes expose the gap between outward religiosity and inward corruption
- **Faithful stewardship** — What God has entrusted must be invested, not buried; readiness is active, not passive
- **Compassion as criterion** — The final judgment scene reveals that service to "the least" is service to Christ himself

Section 4. Passion and Resurrection

Weeks 17–20

These four weeks carry the weight of the entire story. Everything before them has been building to this. Everything after them flows from it. In the span of a few days, the one who spoke the universe into existence will wash his disciples' feet, sweat blood in a garden, stand silent before his accusers, hang on a Roman cross, and walk out of a sealed tomb into the morning light.

It begins in a borrowed room on the night before he dies. Jesus gathers his closest followers for a final meal — not to say goodbye but to equip them for everything that is coming. He takes bread and wine and gives them new meaning. He kneels with a towel and a basin and redefines greatness. He speaks for five unbroken chapters in John's Gospel about vines and branches, about a Helper who is coming, about a love so deep it lays down its life for its friends. He prays aloud — not for deliverance but for the Father's glory, for his disciples' protection, and for the unity of every person who will ever believe. Every word is saturated with the knowledge that the cross is hours away.

From the intimacy of that room, the story plunges into darkness. In Gethsemane, Jesus falls on his face and asks whether the cup might pass — the cup of divine wrath that no human being could bear — and then submits: "Not my will, but yours." Judas arrives with a kiss. The disciples scatter. Peter denies knowing him three times before the rooster crows. The trials that follow are a parade of injustice — an illegal midnight session of the Sanhedrin, false witnesses who cannot agree, a Roman governor who knows the prisoner is innocent and hands him over anyway. Through every indignity, Jesus remains in control. He is not a victim. He is the Lamb who goes willingly.

Then the cross. Two Gospel writers — Luke and John — walk us through every hour. Luke shows us the compassion: Jesus praying for his executioners, promising paradise to a dying criminal, committing his spirit to the Father. John shows us the sovereignty: a king striding toward his throne, orchestrating the care of his mother, declaring "It is finished" not as a cry of defeat but as a shout of completion. The sky goes dark. The earth shakes. The temple curtain tears from top to bottom. The Author of life dies, and creation itself shudders.

And then — the empty tomb. The stone rolled away. The grave clothes lying undisturbed. An angel sitting where a corpse should be. Mary Magdalene weeping in the garden until a familiar voice speaks her name. Two heartbroken travelers on the road to Emmaus whose eyes are opened at the breaking of bread. Thomas, the honest doubter, placing his fingers in the nail marks and falling to his knees: "My Lord and my God." Peter, restored by the lakeshore with a threefold question that mirrors his threefold denial: "Do you love me?" The witnesses are many, the details vary, the emotions range from terror to uncontainable joy — exactly what you would expect from people trying to describe an event so immense that no single perspective could hold it all.

By the end of these four weeks, you will have walked through the darkest valley and emerged into the light on the other side. The cross is not a tragedy redeemed. It is the redemption itself. And the resurrection is not a postscript. It is the beginning of a new world — the firstfruits of everything God has promised. The risen Christ now commissions his followers to carry this story to every nation on earth. That mission begins in Section 5.

Week 17. The Upper Room

Memory Verse: John 15:5 (ESV)

I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

The Big Picture

On the night before his death, Jesus withdrew from the crowds, the controversies, and the public ministry that had defined his earthly life, and gathered his closest disciples in a borrowed upper room in Jerusalem. What happened in that room constitutes some of the most intimate, theologically profound material in the entire New Testament. Luke records the final Passover meal — the institution of the Lord’s Supper, the dispute among the disciples about who would be greatest, and the chilling prediction that one of them would betray him and another would deny him before dawn. The irony is devastating: at the very moment Jesus is breaking bread as a symbol of his broken body, his disciples are arguing about status. Yet Jesus responds not with condemnation but with breathtaking grace, redefining greatness as servanthood and assuring Peter that he has prayed for him even though the denial is certain.

John’s account of the upper room occupies five full chapters (13-17) and is often called the Farewell Discourse, a literary form well known in the ancient world where a dying patriarch or leader gives final instructions to his successors. But Jesus’ farewell surpasses every precedent. Beginning with the shocking act of washing his disciples’ feet — work reserved for the lowest household slave — he proceeds to lay open the deepest mysteries of his relationship with the Father and the coming Holy Spirit. The “I am” declarations reach their crescendo here: “I am the way, the truth, and the life”; “I am the true vine.” These are not abstract philosophical claims but relational invitations. Jesus is not pointing to a path; he is the path. He is not describing a system of viticulture; he is describing the organic, life-sustaining union between himself and every believer.

The Farewell Discourse also introduces the Paraclete — the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in Jesus’ name. This is the provision that makes Jesus’ physical departure not a tragedy but an advantage. The Spirit will teach, remind, convict, and guide. He will glorify Christ by taking what belongs to Christ and declaring it to the disciples. The upper room, then, is not merely the scene of a farewell meal; it is the birthplace of the new covenant community, the place where Jesus equips his followers to live, love, and bear fruit in a world that will hate them as it hated him. Every word spoken here is saturated with the knowledge that the cross is only hours away, lending an urgency and tenderness to these chapters that is unmatched anywhere in Scripture.

This Week’s Readings

Day	Reading	Title
1	Luke 22:1-38	Plot to Kill Jesus, Preparation for Passover, Last Supper, Dispute About Greatness, Peter’s Denial Foretold
2	John 13	Foot Washing, Betrayal Announced, New Commandment
3	John 14	I Am the Way / Truth / Life, The Father’s House, Holy Spirit Promised
4	John 15	I Am the True Vine, Abide in Me, World’s Hatred
5	John 16	The Spirit’s Work, Grief Will Turn to Joy, “I Have Overcome the World”

Key Characters

- **Jesus** — Host of the final Passover meal who transforms a farewell into a foundation for the new covenant
- **Peter** — Impulsive disciple whose denial is foretold even as Jesus prays for his restoration
- **Judas Iscariot** — The betrayer who departs into the night after receiving the morsel
- **The Twelve** — Disciples who dispute about greatness even at this solemn hour
- **The Holy Spirit (Paraclete)** — The promised Advocate who will continue Jesus’ work after his departure
- **Thomas** — The questioner whose honest doubt elicits “I am the way, the truth, and the life”
- **Philip** — The disciple whose request to see the Father reveals how much they still do not understand

Key Locations

- **The Upper Room** — A large furnished room in Jerusalem, possibly in the home of John Mark's family, where the Last Supper takes place
- **Jerusalem** — The city preparing for Passover, filled with pilgrims and political tension
- **The Temple** — The backdrop against which the chief priests and scribes plot Jesus' arrest

Key Themes

- **Servant leadership** — Jesus redefines greatness by washing feet and breaking bread, overturning every human hierarchy
- **The new commandment** — "Love one another as I have loved you" establishes self-sacrificial love as the defining mark of discipleship
- **Abiding in Christ** — The vine and branches metaphor teaches that spiritual fruitfulness depends entirely on union with Jesus
- **The promised Holy Spirit** — The Paraclete will teach, convict, guide, and glorify Christ in the age to come
- **Farewell and hope** — Jesus prepares his disciples for his departure while assuring them that separation is not abandonment

Week 18. Gethsemane and Trial

Memory Verse: John 17:3 (ESV)

And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

The Big Picture

Week 18 traces the most agonizing arc in the New Testament: from the heights of Jesus' High Priestly Prayer to the depths of Gethsemane's anguish, and from there into the grinding machinery of religious and political injustice that would end at Golgotha. The week opens with John 17, where Jesus prays aloud in the presence of his disciples — not for deliverance from the cross but for the glorification of the Father, the protection of his followers, and the unity of all who will ever believe. This prayer is often called the "Holy of Holies" of the New Testament, the moment when we are permitted to overhear the Son speaking to the Father with a transparency that reveals the innermost dynamics of the Trinity. It is the longest recorded prayer of Jesus, and every phrase pulsates with love — for the Father, for the disciples, and for the future church that does not yet exist.

From the serenity of prayer, the narrative plunges into the darkness of Gethsemane. The Garden of Gethsemane, whose name means "oil press," was located on the western slope of the Mount of Olives, across the Kidron Valley from the temple mount. Here Jesus experienced what the author of Hebrews would later describe as offering "prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears" (Hebrews 5:7). Matthew records that Jesus was "sorrowful, even to death" and fell on his face to pray, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me, yet not as I will, but as you will." The "cup" is the Old Testament image for divine wrath (Isaiah 51:17, 22; Jeremiah 25:15-16), and Jesus is not shrinking from physical pain alone but from the unfathomable prospect of bearing the full weight of human sin under the judgment of a holy God. The agony is real, the submission is voluntary, and the two together constitute the hinge on which all of redemptive history turns.

The arrest, trials, and denials that follow expose the worst of human nature in nearly every character involved. Judas betrays with a kiss — the customary greeting of a disciple for his rabbi, now weaponized into the signal for armed seizure. The Sanhedrin convenes an illegal nighttime trial, violating multiple provisions of their own judicial code as recorded in the Mishnah tractate Sanhedrin. False witnesses are recruited and cannot agree. Caiaphas resorts to placing Jesus under oath and asking directly whether he is the Messiah, the Son of God — and when Jesus answers affirmatively, the high priest tears his robes and declares it blasphemy. Peter, who swore he would die rather than deny Jesus, crumbles under the questioning of a servant girl. Pilate, who recognizes Jesus' innocence, capitulates to political pressure and releases Barabbas —

a convicted insurrectionist — while handing over the innocent one to be scourged and crucified. Mark's account of the Roman soldiers' mockery — the purple robe, the crown of thorns, the mock salute "Hail, King of the Jews!" — reveals the cruelty that passes for entertainment in an empire built on violence. And yet, through every indignity, Jesus remains in sovereign control. He is not a victim of circumstances but the Lamb who goes willingly to the slaughter, fulfilling what the prophets spoke and accomplishing what the Father ordained before the foundation of the world.

This Week's Readings

Day	Reading	Title
1	John 17	High Priestly Prayer — For Himself, Disciples, All Believers, Unity
2	Matthew 26:1-46	Anointing at Bethany, Last Supper, Gethsemane Prayer
3	Matthew 26:47-75	Judas' Betrayal/ Arrest, Sanhedrin Trial, Peter's Denial
4	Mark 14	Anointing, Passover Meal, Gethsemane, Arrest, Trial, Peter's Denial
5	Mark 15:1-20	Trial Before Pilate, Barabbas Released, Mocking by Soldiers

Key Characters

- **Jesus** — The suffering Messiah who prays, agonizes, submits, and endures injustice in obedience to the Father's will
- **Judas Iscariot** — The disciple who betrays Jesus with a kiss for thirty pieces of silver
- **Peter** — The rock who crumbles, denying Jesus three times before the rooster crows
- **Caiaphas** — The high priest who orchestrates an illegal trial and unwittingly prophesies (John 11:49-52)
- **Pontius Pilate** — The Roman governor who finds no guilt in Jesus but condemns him anyway
- **Barabbas** — The insurrectionist and murderer released in Jesus' place
- **The Roman soldiers** — Instruments of imperial cruelty who mock the King of kings
- **The unnamed woman at Bethany** — The anointer whose extravagant act Jesus declares will be remembered wherever the gospel is preached

Key Locations

- **The Upper Room** — Where the High Priestly Prayer is spoken and the Last Supper observed
- **Gethsemane** — The olive garden on the Mount of Olives where Jesus agonizes in prayer
- **The High Priest's Courtyard** — Where Peter denies Jesus as the Sanhedrin trial proceeds within
- **The Praetorium** — Pilate's official residence in Jerusalem, likely the Antonia Fortress or Herod's palace, where the Roman trial takes place

Key Themes

- **Intercessory prayer** — Jesus' High Priestly Prayer reveals the Son's ongoing ministry of intercession for his people
- **Submission to the Father's will** — Gethsemane shows that obedience is not the absence of anguish but faithfulness in the midst of it
- **The failure of human justice** — Both Jewish and Roman legal systems fail catastrophically when confronted with the innocent Son of God
- **Betrayal and denial** — The closest circle of disciples includes a traitor and a denier, exposing the frailty of human loyalty
- **Substitutionary exchange** — Barabbas, the guilty one, goes free while Jesus, the innocent one, takes his place — a living parable of the atonement

Week 19. The Cross

Memory Verse: Luke 23:34 (ESV)

And Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.’

The Big Picture

This week we enter the darkest hours of human history — and the most theologically significant. Two Gospel writers, Luke and John, guide us step by step from the olive groves of Gethsemane to the rock-hewn tomb of Joseph of Arimathea. Every scene pulses with paradox: the Sovereign of the universe is arrested by temple guards, the Judge of all the earth stands trial before corrupt magistrates, and the Author of life is executed on a Roman cross. Yet these are not the events of a plan gone wrong. From Gethsemane’s agonized “Not my will, but yours be done” to Calvary’s triumphant “It is finished,” we witness the deliberate, voluntary, substitutionary act by which God reconciles the world to himself. The cross is not a tragedy redeemed; it is the redemption itself.

Luke’s account is marked by his characteristic attention to mercy, prayer, and the inclusion of the marginalized. Only Luke records Jesus healing the ear of the high priest’s servant during the arrest, praying for his executioners from the cross, and promising paradise to the repentant criminal. Luke alone tells us of Jesus’ appearance before Herod Antipas and the weeping women of Jerusalem. John’s account, by contrast, is steeped in theological symbolism and sovereign control. In John’s telling, Jesus is not a victim dragged to execution but a king striding toward his throne. He steps forward to meet his captors in the garden, he interrogates Pilate rather than the reverse, and he orchestrates the care of his mother from the cross. Where Luke emphasizes the compassion of the Suffering Servant, John reveals the glory of the Lamb of God.

Together, these two accounts form a breathtaking composite. We see the full humanity of Jesus — sweating drops like blood, crying out in thirst, committing his spirit to the Father — alongside his full divinity, as creation itself responds to his death with darkness, earthquake, and the tearing of the temple curtain from top to bottom. The events of this week demand a verdict. As we read, the question presses in: what will you do with this man who hangs on the cross?

This Week’s Readings

Day	Reading	Title
1	Luke 22:39-71	Gethsemane, Arrest, Peter’s Denial, Sanhedrin Hearing
2	Luke 23:1-25	Trial Before Pilate, Sent to Herod, Barabbas Released
3	Luke 23:26-56	Road to Calvary, Crucifixion, Death, Burial
4	John 18	Arrest, Trial Before Annas and Caiaphas, Peter’s Denial, Before Pilate
5	John 19	Flogging, Crucifixion, “It Is Finished,” Burial

Key Characters

- **Jesus** — The sinless Son of God who willingly submits to arrest, unjust trials, and crucifixion, fulfilling the Father’s plan of redemption while demonstrating sovereign composure and boundless mercy.
- **Peter** — The most vocal of the disciples, who follows Jesus to the high priest’s courtyard only to deny him three times, exactly as Jesus predicted.
- **Pontius Pilate** — The Roman governor who finds no guilt in Jesus yet lacks the moral courage to release him, choosing political expediency over justice.
- **Herod Antipas** — The tetrarch of Galilee who treats Jesus as entertainment, hoping to see a miracle, then mocks him and sends him back to Pilate.
- **Barabbas** — An insurrectionist and murderer released in place of Jesus, a living picture of substitutionary atonement.
- **Simon of Cyrene** — Compelled by Roman soldiers to carry Jesus’ cross, a witness conscripted into the Passion narrative.
- **Joseph of Arimathea** — A wealthy member of the Sanhedrin who requests Jesus’ body and provides his own new tomb for the burial.

- **Nicodemus** — Mentioned in John's account, he brings seventy-five pounds of burial spices, finally stepping out of the shadows to honor Jesus publicly.
- **Mary, Mother of Jesus** — Standing at the foot of the cross in John's account, entrusted by Jesus to the care of the beloved disciple.

Key Locations

- **Gethsemane / Mount of Olives** — The olive grove east of Jerusalem where Jesus prays in agony and is arrested. The name means "oil press," an image heavy with symbolism as Jesus is "pressed" under the weight of the world's sin.
- **The High Priest's House** — Where Jesus faces the Sanhedrin's preliminary hearing and Peter denies him in the courtyard below.
- **Pilate's Praetorium** — The Roman governor's headquarters in Jerusalem, likely the former palace of Herod the Great, where Jesus is tried and sentenced.
- **Herod's Palace** — Where Herod Antipas interrogates Jesus during Passover week.
- **Golgotha / Calvary** — "The Place of the Skull," outside the city walls, where Jesus is crucified between two criminals.
- **The Garden Tomb** — The new tomb belonging to Joseph of Arimathea, hewn from rock, where Jesus' body is laid before the Sabbath.

Key Themes

- **Substitutionary Atonement** — The innocent dies in the place of the guilty. Barabbas walks free while Jesus takes his cross. This is the gospel in miniature.
- **The Sovereignty of the Suffering Servant** — Jesus is not overwhelmed by events but moves through them with deliberate purpose, fulfilling Scripture at every turn.
- **The Seven Last Words from the Cross** — Jesus' final sayings form a composite theology of the crucifixion: forgiveness, salvation, love, abandonment, suffering, completion, and trust.
- **The Failure of Human Justice** — Every human institution — religious and civil, Jewish and Roman — fails Jesus. The cross exposes the bankruptcy of all systems apart from God.
- **The Torn Curtain** — The temple veil ripping from top to bottom signals the end of the old sacrificial system and the opening of direct access to God for all people.

Week 20. He Is Risen

Memory Verse: Matthew 28:18-20 (ESV)

And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'

The Big Picture

Everything hinges on this week. If the events recorded in these chapters did not happen, then, as Paul wrote with unflinching honesty, "our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain" (1 Corinthians 15:14). But if they did happen — if the stone was rolled away, if the tomb was empty, if the grave clothes lay undisturbed, if Jesus of Nazareth walked out of death and into the morning light — then everything changes. Every promise is validated, every sin is atoned for, every fear is answered, and death itself has been permanently defeated. This week we read the resurrection accounts from all four Gospels, and together they form the most consequential testimony in human history.

We begin with Matthew's account of the crucifixion, death, and burial, including details unique to his Gospel: Judas' suicide, the dream of Pilate's wife, Pilate's hand-washing, the earthquake, the raising of dead saints, and the posting of a Roman guard at the tomb. Matthew then gives us the resurrection morning — the angel descending like lightning, the soldiers fainting like dead men, and the risen Christ commissioning his followers to make disciples of all nations. Mark's compressed narrative of the crucifixion and burial gives way to the startling brevity of his resurrection account, ending (in the earliest manuscripts) with the women

fleeing in trembling and astonishment. Luke contributes the incomparable Road to Emmaus story, where the risen Jesus walks alongside two heartbroken disciples and opens the Scriptures to show that the Christ had to suffer before entering his glory. And John provides the most intimate resurrection scenes in all of Scripture: Mary Magdalene weeping at the empty tomb, Thomas placing his fingers in the nail marks, and Peter being restored by the lakeshore with the threefold question, “Do you love me?”

What strikes the careful reader is the diversity of these accounts within their fundamental unity. The witnesses are different, the details vary, the emotional textures shift from terror to joy to doubt to worship. This is precisely what we would expect from genuine, independent testimony to an event so overwhelming that no single perspective could capture it all. The resurrection is not a tidy theological abstraction. It erupted into history on a specific morning, in a specific garden, and it was first announced to specific women who were not believed by the men. The risen Christ appeared to individuals and groups, indoors and outdoors, to skeptics and believers, over a period of forty days. He ate fish. He cooked breakfast. He invited Thomas to touch his wounds. He walked through locked doors. He is not a ghost, not a metaphor, not a wish. He is alive, and because he is alive, so are we.

This Week’s Readings

Day	Reading	Title
1	Matthew 27	Judas’ Suicide, Pilate’s Trial, Crucifixion, Death, Burial, Guard Posted
2	Matthew 28	Resurrection, Angel at Tomb, Great Commission
3	Mark 15:21-47 + Mark 16	Crucifixion, Death, Burial, Empty Tomb, Resurrection Appearances
4	Luke 24	Empty Tomb, Road to Emmaus, Appearance to Disciples, Ascension
5	John 20 + John 21	Empty Tomb, Mary Magdalene, Thomas, Breakfast on Shore, Restoration of Peter

Key Characters

- **Jesus** — Crucified, buried, and risen. He appears to multiple witnesses over forty days, eats and drinks with them, teaches them from the Scriptures, restores Peter, and commissions his followers to take the gospel to every nation.
- **Mary Magdalene** — The first witness to the risen Christ in John’s account, she initially mistakes him for the gardener until he speaks her name. She becomes the “apostle to the apostles,” carrying the news to the disciples.
- **Peter** — Runs to the empty tomb, encounters the risen Christ, and is restored through a threefold dialogue that mirrors and heals his threefold denial.
- **Thomas** — Absent during the first appearance to the disciples, he refuses to believe without physical evidence, then makes the highest christological confession in the Gospels: “My Lord and my God!”
- **The Two on the Road to Emmaus** — Cleopas and an unnamed companion whose hearts burn within them as Jesus opens the Scriptures, and whose eyes are opened in the breaking of bread.
- **Judas Iscariot** — His suicide in Matthew 27 provides a devastating contrast to Peter’s restoration: both betrayed Jesus, but only Peter returned in repentance.
- **Joseph of Arimathea** — Provides the tomb for Jesus’ burial, unwittingly fulfilling prophecy and establishing the verifiable location of the resurrection.
- **The Roman Guards** — Posted at the tomb to prevent theft of the body, they become unwilling witnesses to the resurrection and are bribed to spread the first counter-narrative.

Key Locations

- **Golgotha** — The crucifixion site, revisited in Matthew’s and Mark’s accounts, completing the full four-Gospel witness to the cross.
- **The Garden Tomb** — The new tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, where Jesus was buried and from which he rose, located in a garden setting that evokes Eden.

- **The Road to Emmaus** — Approximately seven miles from Jerusalem, the setting for Luke's masterful narrative of the risen Christ opening the Scriptures to two disciples.
- **The Upper Room** — Where the risen Jesus appeared to the gathered disciples, passing through locked doors, showing his wounds, and breathing the Holy Spirit upon them.
- **The Sea of Galilee (Tiberias)** — Where Jesus appeared to seven disciples, cooked breakfast on the shore, and restored Peter with the threefold commission to "feed my sheep."
- **A Mountain in Galilee** — Where the Great Commission was given, the risen Christ sending his followers to make disciples of all nations.

Key Themes

- **The bodily resurrection** — Jesus did not rise as a spirit or a memory but in a transformed physical body that could be touched, could eat, and yet could pass through walls. The resurrection is the foundation of Christian hope.
- **The Great Commission** — The risen Christ claims all authority in heaven and on earth and sends his followers to make disciples, baptize, and teach, promising his presence to the end of the age.
- **Restoration after failure** — Peter's threefold restoration mirrors his threefold denial, demonstrating that failure is not final for those whom Jesus loves.
- **Faith and doubt** — Thomas's doubt is met not with rebuke but with evidence, and his response — "My Lord and my God!" — becomes the highest confession of faith in the Gospels.
- **The opened Scriptures** — On the Emmaus road, Jesus shows that the entire Old Testament points to his suffering and glory, providing the hermeneutical key to all of Scripture.

Section 5. The Early Church

Weeks 21–41

This is the longest section of the study — twenty-one weeks — and for good reason. In Section 5 you will watch the resurrection of Jesus produce an explosion that reshapes the ancient world. A handful of frightened disciples become a Spirit-empowered movement that crosses every boundary the ancient world could construct: Jew and Gentile, slave and free, east and west, synagogue and empire. And you will read the story the way it actually happened, with Paul's letters placed at the points in Acts when he wrote them, so that the theology and the history illuminate each other.

It begins in a locked room in Jerusalem and ends in a rented house in Rome. On the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit falls like fire, and Peter — who weeks earlier could not admit to a servant girl that he knew Jesus — stands before thousands and preaches a sermon that baptizes three thousand people in a single day. The infant church devotes itself to teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayer. It shares its possessions. It heals in Jesus' name. And it immediately attracts the hostility of the same authorities who crucified its Lord.

The first martyr, Stephen, dies with a vision of heaven and a prayer for his killers. His death scatters the believers beyond Jerusalem, and what looks like a catastrophe becomes the engine of the gospel's advance. Philip carries the message to Samaria and to an Ethiopian official on a desert road. Then God does something no one expected: he strikes down Saul of Tarsus, the church's most zealous persecutor, on the road to Damascus and remakes him into its greatest missionary. Peter receives a vision that overturns centuries of Jewish dietary law and baptizes a Roman centurion named Cornelius. The door to the Gentiles swings open, and it will never close again.

From Antioch — the first church with a truly mixed Jewish-Gentile congregation — Paul and Barnabas launch into the wider Mediterranean world. The gospel reaches Cyprus, the mountains of Asia Minor, and the sophisticated cities of Greece. At every stop the pattern repeats: Paul preaches in the synagogue, some Jews believe, most resist, Gentiles flood in, and controversy follows. The letter to the Galatians erupts from this tension — a fierce defense of the gospel of grace against those who would require Gentile converts to keep the Jewish law. The Jerusalem Council settles the matter: salvation is by grace through faith, not by circumcision and Torah observance. The theological foundation of Christianity is laid in these chapters, and you will read it as it unfolded in real time.

Paul's second and third missionary journeys take the gospel deeper into the Roman world — to Philippi, Thessalonica, Athens, Corinth, and Ephesus. At each city he plants churches, and to those churches he writes the letters that make up the heart of the New Testament. You will read 1 and 2 Thessalonians while Paul is in Corinth, wrestling with questions about the return of Christ and the fate of believers who have died. You will read 1 and 2 Corinthians while Paul is in Ephesus, confronting a church torn apart by divisions, sexual immorality, lawsuits, and misunderstandings about spiritual gifts, worship, and the resurrection. These are not abstract theological treatises. They are urgent pastoral letters written to real communities struggling with real problems — and the problems sound remarkably familiar two thousand years later.

At the center of this section stands the letter to the Romans — Paul's masterpiece, spread across three full weeks. Written from Corinth on the eve of his final journey to Jerusalem, Romans is the most systematic presentation of the gospel in all of Scripture. It moves from the universal reality of human sin through the gift of justification by faith, the freedom of life in the Spirit, the mystery of God's purposes for Israel, and the practical outworking of the gospel in everyday community life. If you have ever wondered what the gospel actually is — not as a slogan but as a comprehensive account of what God has done, is doing, and will do — Romans is the answer.

The section closes with gathering storm clouds. Paul returns to Jerusalem against the warnings of his friends, is arrested in the temple, and spends years in Roman custody — first in Caesarea, then on a harrowing sea voyage to Rome itself. From prison he writes some of his most luminous letters: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. Chains cannot silence him. The letter to the Philippians, written from a Roman cell, is saturated with joy. The letter to the Ephesians soars to the highest heights of New Testament theology

— the eternal purpose of God to unite all things in Christ. And the brief letter to Philemon, about a runaway slave, demonstrates what the gospel looks like when it reaches down into the most ordinary and unjust structures of the ancient world and begins to transform them from within.

By the end of Section 5, the gospel has traveled from a locked room in Jerusalem to the capital of the empire. The church is no longer a Jewish sect. It is a global movement, messy and magnificent, sustained not by human strategy but by the Spirit who fell at Pentecost and has never left.

Week 21. Birth of the Church

Memory Verse: Acts 1:8 (ESV)

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

The Big Picture

The resurrection of Jesus changed everything, but the birth of the church required one more event: Pentecost. This week we cross one of the most significant thresholds in all of Scripture — the transition from the Gospels to the Acts of the Apostles, from the earthly ministry of Jesus to the Spirit-empowered ministry of his followers. Luke, who carefully narrated Jesus’ life in his Gospel, now picks up the story where he left off. Acts 1 opens with the risen Christ spending forty days with his disciples, teaching them about the kingdom of God and issuing final instructions. His ascension from the Mount of Olives is not an abandonment but a commissioning: “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). That single verse provides the outline for the entire book of Acts and, in a real sense, for the entire history of the Christian movement.

The Day of Pentecost, fifty days after Passover, was already one of the great pilgrimage festivals of Judaism — the Feast of Weeks, celebrating the wheat harvest and, by later tradition, the giving of the Torah at Sinai. Into this charged setting, the Holy Spirit descends with wind and fire, and the disciples begin speaking in the languages of the gathered nations. Peter, who weeks earlier denied Jesus three times, now stands before thousands and delivers a sermon so powerful that three thousand people are baptized in a single day. The Jerusalem church that emerges from Pentecost is marked by four practices: the apostles’ teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayer. It is a community that shares possessions, worships in the temple, and grows daily. But it is also a community on a collision course with the same religious authorities who crucified Jesus.

By the end of the week, we see the pattern that will define the early church’s existence: miraculous signs, bold proclamation, rapid growth, and fierce opposition. Peter and John heal a lame man at the temple and are hauled before the Sanhedrin. The apostles are arrested, freed by an angel, and arrested again. Ananias and Sapphira test the Holy Spirit with devastating consequences. The infant church discovers that the same power that raised Jesus from the dead now operates through ordinary fishermen and tax collectors — and that the cost of bearing witness to the resurrection is the same kind of suffering their Master endured.

This Week’s Readings

Day	Reading	Title
1	Acts 1	Jesus’ Final Instructions, Ascension, Matthias Replaces Judas
2	Acts 2	Day of Pentecost, Peter’s Sermon, 3000 Saved, Community Life
3	Acts 3	Lame Man Healed at Beautiful Gate, Peter’s Temple Sermon
4	Acts 4	Peter & John Arrested, Boldness Before Sanhedrin, Believers Share
5	Acts 5	Ananias & Sapphira, Signs & Wonders, Apostles Arrested & Freed

Key Characters

- **Jesus** — Risen Lord who gives final instructions and ascends to the Father
- **Peter** — Transformed denier who becomes the leading voice of the early church

Section 5. The Early Church

- **John** — Peter's companion in healing, preaching, and arrest
- **The Twelve** — Now reconstituted with Matthias replacing Judas
- **Ananias & Sapphira** — Couple whose deception about their offering leads to sudden death
- **Gamaliel** — Pharisee and respected teacher who counsels caution toward the apostles

Key Locations

- **Mount of Olives** — Site of Jesus' ascension, east of Jerusalem
- **Upper Room** — Where the 120 gathered for prayer before Pentecost
- **Temple (Solomon's Portico)** — Where Peter preaches and healing occurs
- **Beautiful Gate** — Temple entrance where the lame man is healed
- **Sanhedrin** — The Jewish ruling council before which the apostles are tried

Key Themes

- **The Holy Spirit's power** — The promised Comforter arrives and transforms fearful disciples into bold witnesses
- **Apostolic proclamation** — The resurrection of Jesus is the central message of every sermon
- **Community and generosity** — The early church models radical sharing and mutual care
- **Opposition and boldness** — Persecution from the authorities only intensifies the church's witness
- **Continuity with Israel** — Peter consistently appeals to Old Testament prophecy to explain what God is doing
- **Divine judgment and holiness** — The Ananias and Sapphira episode reveals the seriousness of the Spirit's presence

Week 22. Stephen and Scattering

Memory Verse: James 1:22 (ESV)

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

The Big Picture

This week we witness one of the early church's defining crises and one of its most consequential results. As the Jerusalem church grows, internal tensions arise between Hebraic Jews and Hellenistic Jews over the daily distribution of food to widows. The apostles' response — appointing seven men "full of the Spirit and of wisdom" to oversee the practical ministry — establishes a principle that will shape church governance for centuries: spiritual leadership must be shared, and serving tables is as Spirit-dependent as preaching sermons. Among the seven, Stephen stands out. Luke describes him as "full of grace and power" (Acts 6:8), a man whose wisdom in debate is unanswerable. His opponents resort to false witnesses and haul him before the Sanhedrin on charges of blasphemy against Moses and God.

Stephen's defense before the council is the longest speech in Acts — a sweeping retelling of Israel's history from Abraham to Solomon. But it is not a history lesson; it is a prosecutorial argument. Stephen demonstrates a recurring pattern: God's chosen agents — Joseph, Moses, the prophets — are consistently rejected by the very people they were sent to save. The climax is devastating: "You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit" (Acts 7:51). Stephen's martyrdom — he is stoned while seeing a vision of Jesus standing at the right hand of God — makes him the first Christian to die for the faith. The young man guarding the coats of the executioners is Saul of Tarsus, who will soon become the church's most feared persecutor and, eventually, its greatest missionary.

The scattering that follows Stephen's death is one of the great ironies of redemptive history. The persecution Saul leads drives believers out of Jerusalem and into Judea, Samaria, and beyond — fulfilling the very commission of Acts 1:8 that the Jerusalem church had been slow to obey. Philip brings the gospel to Samaria and to an Ethiopian official on the Gaza road. And into this context of scattering and suffering, we read the letter of James — almost certainly the earliest document in the New Testament, written by Jesus' half-brother to Jewish believers dispersed by persecution. James addresses the practical realities of faith under pressure:

how to endure trials, how to treat the poor, how to tame the tongue, and how to demonstrate that genuine faith always produces works.

This Week's Readings

Day	Reading	Title
1	Acts 6	Seven Chosen to Serve, Stephen's Wisdom, Accusations
2	Acts 7	Stephen's Speech — Survey of Israel's History — and Martyrdom
3	Acts 8	Saul Persecutes Church, Philip in Samaria, Simon the Sorcerer, Ethiopian Eunuch
4	James 1	Trials Produce Perseverance, Every Good Gift, Be Doers Not Hearers
5	James 2	No Favoritism, Faith Without Works Is Dead, Abraham & Rahab

Key Characters

- **Stephen** — One of the seven deacons, the first Christian martyr, whose speech reinterprets Israel's history
- **Philip** — Another of the seven, who becomes the first evangelist to Samaria and to an African court official
- **Saul of Tarsus** — Introduced as a zealous persecutor who approves Stephen's execution
- **Simon the Sorcerer** — A Samaritan magician whose response to the gospel reveals mixed motives
- **The Ethiopian Eunuch** — A court official from the kingdom of Meroe who encounters the gospel through Isaiah 53
- **James** — The half-brother of Jesus and leader of the Jerusalem church, author of the letter

Key Locations

- **Jerusalem** — Site of Stephen's trial and martyrdom, center of the initial persecution
- **Samaria** — Region of mixed Jewish-Gentile heritage where Philip brings the gospel
- **The Gaza Road** — Desert route where Philip meets the Ethiopian eunuch
- **The Diaspora** — The scattered communities of Jewish believers to whom James writes

Key Themes

- **Servant leadership** — The appointment of the seven demonstrates that practical ministry requires spiritual qualifications
- **Rejection of God's messengers** — Stephen's speech reveals a pattern in Israel's history that culminates in the rejection of Jesus
- **Persecution as catalyst** — The scattering drives the gospel beyond Jerusalem, fulfilling God's purpose through human opposition
- **Faith and works** — James insists that genuine faith always expresses itself in action
- **The word of God and the poor** — Both Acts and James emphasize that the gospel creates communities of justice and generosity

Week 23. Faith That Works

Memory Verse: James 4:8 (ESV)

Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.

The Big Picture

We complete the letter of James with its intensely practical wisdom about speech, humility, and prayer, then pivot to two of the most transformative events in church history — Saul's conversion on the Damascus road

Section 5. The Early Church

and the Holy Spirit falling on Cornelius's household. James teaches us how to live the faith; Acts shows us how God expands it beyond all boundaries.

James 3-5 reads like a master craftsman finishing a piece of furniture — every joint is tight, every surface is smooth, and the whole thing is built to bear weight. James begins with the tongue, the smallest member that sets the course of life, and uses two vivid images — a ship's rudder and a forest fire — to show that the words we speak reveal and shape the hearts we carry. He then contrasts two kinds of wisdom: the earthly wisdom that produces envy, selfish ambition, and disorder, and the heavenly wisdom that is "first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere" (3:17). Chapter 4 diagnoses the root cause of conflict within the community — desires that battle within us, friendship with the world that constitutes enmity with God — and prescribes the remedy: humble submission to God. Chapter 5 closes the letter with a prophetic warning to rich oppressors, a call to patience modeled on Job and the prophets, and an extraordinary invitation to communal prayer, including the anointing of the sick and the prayer of faith that will save the one who is ill. The letter ends not with a formal benediction but with a call to restore the wanderer — a fitting conclusion for a document that has been relentlessly concerned with the practical outworking of genuine faith.

Then we turn to Acts 9-10, and the pace shifts from pastoral instruction to dramatic narrative. Saul of Tarsus, the church's most feared persecutor, encounters the risen Christ on the Damascus road in a blinding theophany that transforms him from destroyer to proclaimer. The story is told three times in Acts (chapters 9, 22, and 26), a repetition that underscores its significance for Luke's narrative. God sends the reluctant disciple Ananias to restore Saul's sight and deliver the commission: "He is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel" (9:15). Barnabas, the great encourager, vouches for the converted persecutor before the suspicious Jerusalem church. In Acts 10, the scope of God's plan explodes further as Peter receives a vision declaring all foods clean — a symbol for the inclusion of all peoples — and is summoned to the house of Cornelius, a Roman centurion. When the Holy Spirit falls on Cornelius's household before baptism and without circumcision, Peter can only conclude: "Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" (10:47). The walls between Jew and Gentile, which had stood for centuries, begin to crumble under the sheer weight of God's initiative.

This Week's Readings

Day	Reading	Title
1	James 3	Taming the Tongue, Two Kinds of Wisdom
2	James 4	Friendship with the World, Submit to God
3	James 5	Warning to the Rich, Prayer of Faith
4	Acts 9	Saul's Conversion on the Damascus Road
5	Acts 10	Cornelius' Vision, the Gospel to the Gentiles

Key Characters

- **James** — The Lord's brother, author of this practical letter, pastor of the Jerusalem church
- **Saul/Paul** — The church's fiercest persecutor, transformed by an encounter with the risen Christ on the Damascus road
- **Ananias** — A disciple in Damascus who overcomes fear to deliver God's commission to Saul
- **Barnabas** — "Son of Encouragement," who vouches for the converted Saul before the skeptical Jerusalem church
- **Peter** — Apostle who receives the rooftop vision and carries the gospel to Cornelius's household
- **Cornelius** — A Roman centurion, God-fearer, whose conversion opens the door for Gentile inclusion
- **Job** — Referenced by James as a model of patient endurance through suffering
- **Elijah** — Referenced by James as a model of effective, fervent prayer

Key Locations

- **Jerusalem** — Home base of the early church and the community James addresses
- **Damascus** — Where Saul encounters Christ and begins preaching in the synagogues

- **Caesarea** — Roman administrative capital where Cornelius is stationed
- **Joppa** — Where Peter receives the vision of the sheet with unclean animals

Key Themes

- **The power of speech** — The tongue has the power of life and death; teachers bear greater accountability
- **Heavenly versus earthly wisdom** — True wisdom is demonstrated by conduct, not credentials
- **Humility before God** — Drawing near to God requires resisting the devil and submitting to divine authority
- **Radical conversion** — God transforms the most unlikely people into the most powerful witnesses
- **Gentile inclusion** — The Holy Spirit breaks through ethnic and religious boundaries to create one people of God
- **The prayer of faith** — James envisions a community that prays with expectation and restores those who wander

Week 24. The Gospel to the Gentiles

Memory Verse: Acts 13:47 (ESV)

For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, ‘I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.’

The Big Picture

The conversion of Cornelius in Acts 10 cracked open the door to the Gentile world; this week, the church kicks it wide open. Acts 11 begins with Peter defending his controversial table fellowship with uncircumcised Gentiles before skeptical Jewish believers in Jerusalem. His defense succeeds, but the real engine of Gentile evangelism is already firing in Antioch, where unnamed believers from Cyprus and Cyrene — scattered by the persecution following Stephen’s martyrdom — begin preaching to Greeks for the first time. Antioch, the Roman Empire’s third-largest city, becomes the launching pad for the global mission that will eventually carry the gospel to the ends of the earth. Barnabas is dispatched to investigate, and he wisely recruits Saul from Tarsus to help lead this multiethnic congregation. It is at Antioch that the followers of Jesus are first called “Christians,” a name that signaled to the watching world that this movement had grown beyond the boundaries of Judaism.

The narrative then takes a dramatic turn. Herod Agrippa I executes the apostle James and imprisons Peter, only to be struck down by divine judgment. With political persecution momentarily lifted, the church surges forward. The Holy Spirit commissions Barnabas and Saul from the Antioch church, and they embark on what we call the first missionary journey — sailing to Cyprus, then crossing into the rugged interior of Asia Minor. Paul’s sermon at Pisidian Antioch is a masterpiece of salvation history, tracing God’s faithfulness from the patriarchs through David to Jesus, and boldly declaring that “through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses” (Acts 13:38-39). The pattern of synagogue preaching, Jewish rejection, and turning to receptive Gentiles is established here and will repeat throughout Paul’s career.

The week concludes with the opening chapter of Galatians, likely written from Antioch shortly after the first missionary journey, around 48-49 AD. Paul is furious. False teachers have infiltrated the Galatian churches he planted, insisting that Gentile converts must be circumcised and observe the Mosaic law. Paul’s response is volcanic: there is no other gospel. His apostolic authority comes not from human appointment but from direct revelation of Jesus Christ. The theological battle lines are drawn, and the stakes could not be higher — the very nature of salvation is at issue.

This Week’s Readings

Day	Reading	Title
1	Acts 11	Peter Defends Gentile Inclusion, Antioch Church Founded
2	Acts 12	James Killed by Herod, Peter Imprisoned and Miraculously Freed,

Day	Reading	Title
		Herod's Death
3	Acts 13	Barnabas & Saul Commissioned, Cyprus Ministry, Pisidian Antioch Sermon
4	Acts 14	Iconium, Lystra — Paul Stoned, Derbe, Return Journey, Report to Antioch
5	Galatians 1	No Other Gospel, Paul's Calling and Conversion Testimony

Key Characters

- **Peter** — Defends his Gentile ministry before the Jerusalem church and is later miraculously delivered from prison
- **Barnabas** — “Son of Encouragement” who becomes the senior partner in the first missionary journey
- **Saul/Paul** — Transitions from junior partner to lead spokesman; his Pisidian Antioch sermon establishes his theological framework
- **Herod Agrippa I** — Grandson of Herod the Great who persecutes the church and dies under divine judgment
- **James (son of Zebedee)** — The first apostle martyred, killed by Herod's sword
- **John Mark** — Accompanies Barnabas and Paul but later withdraws from the mission
- **Sergius Paulus** — Roman proconsul of Cyprus who believes the gospel
- **Bar-Jesus/Elymas** — Jewish sorcerer who opposes Paul on Cyprus

Key Locations

- **Antioch (Syria)** — Third-largest city in the Roman Empire; the first predominantly Gentile church and missionary sending base
- **Jerusalem** — Center of the Jewish-Christian mother church
- **Cyprus** — Island in the eastern Mediterranean; Barnabas' homeland and first missionary destination
- **Pisidian Antioch** — Roman colony in the interior of Asia Minor; site of Paul's programmatic sermon
- **Iconium** — City in the region of Lycaonia/Phrygia where Paul and Barnabas faced fierce opposition
- **Lystra** — Lycaonian city where Paul was stoned and left for dead
- **Derbe** — Easternmost point of the first missionary journey

Key Themes

- **The Gentile mission authorized** — God's initiative in bringing Gentiles to faith without requiring Jewish conversion
- **The church as a missionary body** — The Antioch model of Spirit-led commissioning and sending
- **Suffering and perseverance** — From James' martyrdom to Paul's stoning, the gospel advances through opposition
- **Justification by faith** — Paul's Pisidian Antioch sermon and Galatians 1 both declare freedom from the law
- **Apostolic authority** — Paul defends his calling as rooted in divine revelation, not human appointment
- **The sovereignty of God** — Herod's death and Peter's deliverance demonstrate God's control over earthly power

Week 25. Gospel of Freedom

Memory Verse: Galatians 5:22-23 (ESV)

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

The Big Picture

This week we immerse ourselves entirely in Paul's letter to the Galatians, one of the most passionate and theologically concentrated documents in the New Testament. Having established in chapter 1 that his gospel came by direct revelation from Christ, Paul now builds his case across five devastating chapters that dismantle the theology of the Judaizers and construct in its place a vision of Christian freedom so radical that it unsettled not only his opponents but the church for centuries to come. The letter to the Galatians is not merely a first-century theological tract; it is the Magna Carta of Christian liberty, the document Martin Luther called "my Katie von Bora" — the text he loved most dearly because it proclaimed the freedom of the gospel most clearly.

In chapter 2, Paul demonstrates that the Jerusalem apostles — the "pillars" James, Peter, and John — added nothing to his gospel and formally acknowledged his mission to the Gentiles. He then recounts his confrontation with Peter at Antioch, where even the great apostle was guilty of withdrawing from Gentile table fellowship under pressure from Jewish Christians. This is not ancient gossip but theological dynamite: if even Peter could compromise the gospel through social pressure, no one is immune. Chapters 3 and 4 form the theological core of the letter, as Paul argues from Scripture, experience, and logic that righteousness has always come through faith, not through the law. Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness — four centuries before the law was given. The law was never intended to give life but to serve as a temporary guardian until Christ came. Those who belong to Christ are Abraham's offspring and heirs of the promise, regardless of ethnicity, social status, or gender.

The final two chapters move from theology to ethics. Christian freedom is not a license for self-indulgence but a call to live by the Spirit rather than the flesh. Paul's catalogue of the fruit of the Spirit — love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control — is one of the most beloved passages in all of Scripture, and it stands as the definitive answer to the question: if we are free from the law, what keeps us from moral chaos? The Spirit does. The letter closes with practical exhortations about bearing one another's burdens, doing good to all, and the principle of sowing and reaping. Paul's final line, written in his own large handwriting, is a parting declaration: "Neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation" (6:15).

This Week's Readings

Day	Reading	Title
1	Galatians 2	Accepted by Jerusalem Apostles, Confronting Peter at Antioch
2	Galatians 3	Faith vs. Law, Justified by Faith, Abraham's Blessing for All Nations
3	Galatians 4	No Longer Slaves but Sons, Allegory of Hagar and Sarah
4	Galatians 5	Freedom in Christ, Don't Submit to Yoke Again, Fruit of the Spirit
5	Galatians 6	Bear One Another's Burdens, Sow to the Spirit, New Creation

Key Characters

- **Paul** — Apostle to the Gentiles, passionately defending the gospel of grace against legalistic distortion
- **Peter (Cephas)** — Fellow apostle who affirmed Paul's gospel but wavered under social pressure at Antioch
- **James** — The Lord's brother, leader of the Jerusalem church, whose emissaries inadvertently triggered the Antioch crisis
- **John** — One of the three "pillars" who endorsed Paul's Gentile mission
- **Barnabas** — Paul's missionary partner, who was "carried away" by Peter's hypocrisy at Antioch
- **Abraham** — The patriarch whose faith-based righteousness is Paul's primary Old Testament argument
- **Hagar and Sarah** — Used allegorically to represent the covenants of slavery and freedom

Key Locations

- **Jerusalem** — Site of the private meeting where Paul's gospel was affirmed by the apostolic pillars
- **Antioch (Syria)** — Where the confrontation between Paul and Peter took place over table fellowship
- **The Galatian churches** — The communities in southern Asia Minor (Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe) to whom the letter is addressed
- **Mount Sinai / Arabia** — Allegorically linked to the covenant of slavery under the law
- **The Jerusalem above** — Allegorically linked to the covenant of freedom through promise

Key Themes

- **Justification by faith alone** — Righteousness before God comes through trusting in Christ, not through observing the Mosaic law
- **The unity of Jew and Gentile in Christ** — In Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female
- **Freedom versus legalism** — The gospel liberates from the bondage of religious performance
- **The fruit of the Spirit** — Authentic Christian character is produced by the Spirit's work, not by external rule-keeping
- **The law as temporary guardian** — The Mosaic law served a preparatory function, pointing toward Christ
- **New creation** — The ultimate reality that transcends all human categories

Week 26. The Jerusalem Council

Memory Verse: Acts 17:28 (ESV)

For 'In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we are indeed his offspring.'

The Big Picture

This week marks one of the most consequential turning points in the history of Christianity: the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15, where the apostles and elders gathered to answer the question that had been building since Peter's vision on the rooftop in Joppa and the conversion of Cornelius — must Gentile converts be circumcised and keep the Mosaic law to be saved? The answer, forged through vigorous debate and guided by the Holy Spirit, was an emphatic no. Salvation comes through the grace of the Lord Jesus, for Gentile and Jew alike. The council's decision was not merely administrative; it was theological dynamite. By formally separating salvation from Torah observance, the Jerusalem church acknowledged what Paul had been preaching all along: the gospel of grace is sufficient. The letter sent to the Gentile churches asked only that they abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals, and from blood — requirements rooted not in the ceremonial law but in the universal moral expectations and the practical realities of mixed Jewish-Gentile fellowship.

With the theological question settled, the narrative accelerates into Paul's second missionary journey, which would carry the gospel from Asia Minor into Europe for the first time. Paul chooses young Timothy as a traveling companion, circumcising him not as a requirement for salvation but as a strategic concession for ministry among Jews — a decision that perfectly illustrates the difference between theological principle and missionary practice. The Macedonian vision in Acts 16 redirects Paul's itinerary from Asia to Europe, and the first European convert is Lydia, a wealthy dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who opens her heart and her home to the missionaries. The gospel's arrival in Philippi brings immediate conflict: a slave girl freed from a spirit of divination, an enraged mob, a Roman beating, an earthquake, and the dramatic conversion of the Philippian jailer and his household. Luke's narrative is a masterclass in showing how the gospel disrupts every dimension of life — economic, social, legal, and spiritual.

The week concludes in two of the great intellectual centers of the ancient world. At Thessalonica, Paul's synagogue preaching produces both converts and riots, and he is forced to flee by night to Berea, where the Jewish community earns the title "noble-minded" for their willingness to examine the Scriptures daily to verify Paul's claims. Finally, at Athens, Paul encounters the philosophical capital of the Western world and

delivers his extraordinary Areopagus speech. Surrounded by altars and temples, provoked by the city's idolatry, Paul finds a point of contact in an altar inscribed "To an Unknown God" and announces the Creator who does not live in temples made by human hands, who is not served by human hands as though he needed anything, and who now commands all people everywhere to repent because he has appointed a day of judgment and confirmed it by raising a man from the dead. The speech is a model of contextual evangelism — engaging the intellectual categories of the audience without compromising the scandal of the resurrection.

This Week's Readings

Day	Reading	Title
1	Acts 15	Jerusalem Council — Must Gentiles Be Circumcised? James' Decision, Letter to Churches
2	Acts 16:1-15	Timothy Circumcised and Joins Paul, Macedonian Vision Call, Lydia Converted at Philippi
3	Acts 16:16-40	Slave Girl Freed, Paul & Silas Beaten/Imprisoned, Earthquake, Philippian Jailer Saved
4	Acts 17:1-15	Thessalonica — Jason's House, Riots; Berea — Noble-Minded, Searching Scriptures
5	Acts 17:16-34	Athens — Paul Distressed by Idols, Areopagus Speech, "Unknown God", Some Believe

Key Characters

- **Paul** — Apostle to the Gentiles, now embarking on his second missionary journey with the Jerusalem Council's endorsement
- **Barnabas** — Paul's former partner, who parts ways over the question of taking John Mark
- **Silas (Silvanus)** — Paul's new traveling companion, a prophet and Roman citizen from the Jerusalem church
- **Timothy** — A young disciple from Lystra with a Jewish mother and Greek father, who becomes Paul's protege
- **James** — The Lord's brother, who presides over the Jerusalem Council and renders its final judgment
- **Peter** — Whose testimony about the Cornelius episode provides decisive evidence at the council
- **Lydia** — A dealer in purple cloth from Thyatira, the first European convert
- **The Philippian Jailer** — A Roman official who converts with his household after an earthquake
- **Jason** — Paul's host in Thessalonica, who is dragged before the city authorities

Key Locations

- **Jerusalem** — Site of the apostolic council that resolved the Gentile question
- **Lystra** — Timothy's hometown, where Paul recruits him for the journey
- **Troas** — The port city where Paul receives the Macedonian vision
- **Philippi** — A Roman colony in Macedonia, the first European city to receive the gospel
- **Thessalonica** — Capital of the Roman province of Macedonia, where riots erupt over Paul's preaching
- **Berea** — A city whose Jewish community is praised for examining Scripture
- **Athens** — The intellectual capital of the Greek world, site of the Areopagus speech

Key Themes

- **Grace alone for salvation** — The Jerusalem Council definitively settles that Gentiles are saved by grace through faith, not by works of the law
- **The gospel crosses into Europe** — The Macedonian vision marks a new geographical phase of the church's expansion

- **Contextual evangelism** — Paul adapts his approach for different audiences while maintaining the core gospel message
- **Suffering and mission** — Beatings, imprisonment, and riots accompany the advance of the gospel at every turn
- **The sovereignty of the Spirit** — The Holy Spirit directs the missionaries' itinerary, closing some doors and opening others

Week 27. Paul in Corinth

Memory Verse: 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 (ESV)

For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.

The Big Picture

Paul's arrival in Corinth marks one of the most strategically important moments in the expansion of the early church. After his mixed reception in Athens, where philosophical sophistication yielded only a handful of converts, Paul comes to a city that could hardly be more different. Corinth was a booming Roman colony, a commercial crossroads situated on the narrow isthmus connecting mainland Greece to the Peloponnese. Its two harbors — Lechaenum on the Corinthian Gulf and Cenchreae on the Saronic Gulf — made it a gateway between East and West. Goods, people, religions, and vices flowed through Corinth in equal measure. The city's reputation for moral excess was so widespread that the Greek verb "to Corinthianize" (*korinthiazomai*) had become a euphemism for sexual immorality. A massive temple to Aphrodite sat atop the Acrocorinth, the imposing hill that dominated the city skyline. Into this environment Paul brings the gospel, and here he will stay for eighteen months — his longest missionary residence to this point.

In Corinth, Paul meets Aquila and Priscilla, Jewish tentmakers recently expelled from Rome by the emperor Claudius. This couple will become among the most important co-workers in Paul's entire ministry. Paul works alongside them at the tentmaking trade while reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath. When Silas and Timothy arrive from Macedonia, Paul devotes himself fully to preaching, and the inevitable conflict with the synagogue follows. But in Corinth, the opposition leads to a remarkable turn: Crispus, the synagogue ruler himself, believes, and Paul moves next door to the house of Titius Justus. The Lord speaks to Paul in a night vision — "Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you" — and promises that "I have many people in this city." When the Jews drag Paul before Gallio, the Roman proconsul of Achaia, Gallio dismisses the case as an internal Jewish dispute, inadvertently establishing an important legal precedent for the early church.

It is during this Corinthian stay, around 50-51 AD, that Paul writes his two letters to the Thessalonians. Timothy has just returned from Thessalonica with an encouraging report: the young church is standing firm under persecution, growing in faith and love. But they have questions — especially about believers who have died before Christ's return. Paul's response in 1 Thessalonians is one of the warmest and most pastoral letters in the New Testament. He reminds them of his ministry among them, expresses his deep affection, and offers both comfort about the dead in Christ and instruction about the Day of the Lord. These are among the earliest documents in the New Testament, written barely two decades after the crucifixion, and they open a window into what the first Christians believed, practiced, and hoped for.

This Week's Readings

Day	Reading	Title
1	Acts 18:1-17	Paul in Corinth — Aquila & Priscilla, Gallio's Judgment Seat
2	1 Thessalonians 1	Thanksgiving for Thessalonians' Faith, Model to All Believers
3	1 Thessalonians 2	Paul's Ministry Among Them — Not Flattery but Faithful
4	1 Thessalonians 3	Timothy's Encouraging Report, Prayer for Their Growth
5	1 Thessalonians 4	Live to Please God, Sexual Purity, Those Who Have Fallen Asleep

Key Characters

- **Paul** — Apostle to the Gentiles, now planting a church in one of the Roman Empire's most important cities
- **Aquila & Priscilla** — Jewish couple, tentmakers, expelled from Rome, who become Paul's close co-workers
- **Silas & Timothy** — Paul's traveling companions who arrive from Macedonia with support and news
- **Crispus** — Synagogue ruler in Corinth who believes in Christ
- **Titius Justus** — God-fearer whose house becomes Paul's base after leaving the synagogue
- **Gallio** — Roman proconsul of Achaia who dismisses the Jewish charges against Paul

Key Locations

- **Corinth** — Major port city on the isthmus, capital of Roman Achaia
- **Synagogue in Corinth** — Where Paul initially preaches every Sabbath
- **Gallio's Judgment Seat (Bema)** — The raised platform in the Corinthian agora where the proconsul heard cases
- **Thessalonica** — The Macedonian city whose young church Paul addresses by letter

Key Themes

- **The gospel in a pagan city** — Paul brings the message of Christ into one of the most morally and religiously diverse cities in the empire
- **Faithful labor and partnership** — Tentmaking, co-workers, and the practical realities of missionary life
- **Comfort concerning the dead in Christ** — Paul addresses the fear that deceased believers have missed the Lord's return
- **Holy living in an unholy world** — Sexual purity, love for one another, and quiet faithfulness as marks of the Christian life
- **The second coming of Christ** — The return of Jesus is the dominant theme of both Thessalonian letters

Week 28. The Day of the Lord

Memory Verse: 2 Thessalonians 3:3 (ESV)

But the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one.

The Big Picture

This week we complete Paul's correspondence with the Thessalonians and witness the beginning of his third missionary journey. The dominant theological theme is eschatology — the doctrine of last things — but in Paul's hands this is never abstract speculation. The Day of the Lord, the man of lawlessness, the return of Christ: all of these cosmic realities are brought to bear on the most practical questions of daily Christian living. How should we live while we wait? How do we discern truth from deception? What does faithful endurance look like when persecution intensifies?

First Thessalonians 5 completes the first letter with a rapid-fire series of instructions that have shaped Christian devotion for two millennia: "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances." These are not pious platitudes but descriptions of a life oriented entirely toward the returning Christ. The Day of the Lord will come "like a thief in the night," Paul warns, but believers are not in darkness — they are children of light, armed with faith, love, and hope. The eschatological framework that has pervaded the entire letter now becomes an ethical imperative: because Christ is coming, live this way now.

Second Thessalonians, written shortly after the first letter (probably still from Corinth around 51 AD), addresses two problems that have emerged or intensified in the community. First, the Thessalonians are suffering even more severe persecution, and Paul writes to encourage them with the assurance that God's

justice will ultimately prevail. Second, someone — perhaps through a letter falsely attributed to Paul — has told the Thessalonians that “the Day of the Lord has already come” (2 Thessalonians 2:2). This has caused alarm and confusion. Paul corrects this error by teaching that certain events must precede the Day: a great rebellion (apostasia) and the revelation of “the man of lawlessness” who will set himself up in God’s temple. This is one of the most debated passages in the New Testament, and we will explore it carefully.

The week closes with Acts 18:18-28, which narrates Paul’s departure from Corinth, his brief stop in Ephesus (planting a seed he will later water at length), and his return to Antioch via Caesarea and Jerusalem. Luke also introduces Apollos, the eloquent Alexandrian Jew who knew only the baptism of John until Priscilla and Aquila “explained to him the way of God more accurately.” These transitional verses set the stage for Paul’s third missionary journey, which will center on Ephesus and produce some of his most important letters.

This Week’s Readings

Day	Reading	Title
1	1 Thessalonians 5	Day of the Lord, Be Ready, Rejoice Always, Pray Continually
2	2 Thessalonians 1	Encouragement in Persecution, God’s Righteous Judgment
3	2 Thessalonians 2	Man of Lawlessness, Stand Firm in Teaching
4	2 Thessalonians 3	Warning Against Idle Living, Work or Don’t Eat
5	Acts 18:18-28	Paul Returns to Antioch via Ephesus, Third Journey Begins, Apollos

Key Characters

- **Paul** — Writing from Corinth to address confusion about the Day of the Lord and problems of idleness
- **Silas & Timothy** — Co-senders of both Thessalonian letters
- **Priscilla & Aquila** — Travel with Paul to Ephesus, where they instruct Apollos
- **Apollos** — Eloquent Alexandrian Jew, mighty in the Scriptures, who learns “the way of God more accurately”
- **The Man of Lawlessness** — Mysterious eschatological figure who must appear before the Day of the Lord

Key Locations

- **Corinth** — Where Paul writes 2 Thessalonians and eventually departs from
- **Cenchreae** — Eastern port of Corinth, where Paul cuts his hair in fulfillment of a vow
- **Ephesus** — Major city in Asia Minor where Paul briefly stops and leaves Priscilla and Aquila
- **Caesarea & Antioch** — Paul’s route back to his sending church before beginning the third journey

Key Themes

- **The Day of the Lord** — A central Old Testament concept now reinterpreted through the lens of Christ’s return
- **The man of lawlessness** — An eschatological figure of deception who must be revealed before the end
- **Faithful endurance under persecution** — God’s justice is certain even when it is delayed
- **The dignity and necessity of work** — Idle living dishonors the community and contradicts the gospel
- **The ongoing need for accurate teaching** — Even Apollos, brilliant as he was, needed correction and further instruction

Week 29. Paul in Ephesus

Memory Verse: 1 Corinthians 1:18 (ESV)

For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

The Big Picture

Paul's extended stay in Ephesus, which lasted over two years according to Acts 19:10, represents one of the most significant chapters in the expansion of early Christianity. Ephesus was the de facto capital of the Roman province of Asia, a city of approximately 250,000 people, and home to one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World: the Temple of Artemis (Diana). It was a center of commerce, religion, and magic, a place where the spiritual powers of the Greco-Roman world were concentrated in extraordinary density. Into this environment Paul brings the gospel, and the results are both spectacular and volatile.

Acts 19 reads like an action-packed narrative: Paul encounters disciples who know only John's baptism and lays hands on them to receive the Holy Spirit. He teaches daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus for two years, and "all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks." God performs "extraordinary miracles" through Paul — even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him carry healing power. Seven sons of a Jewish chief priest named Sceva attempt to use the name of Jesus as a magic formula and are violently attacked by a demonized man. The incident triggers a citywide reckoning: practitioners of magic bring their scrolls and burn them publicly in a bonfire valued at 50,000 pieces of silver. And then, at the height of Paul's success, the silversmiths who make shrines of Artemis incite a riot that nearly destroys the church.

It is during this Ephesian period, around 53-55 AD, that Paul writes his first letter to the Corinthians. Reports have reached him — through "Chloe's people" (1 Corinthians 1:11) and through a letter the Corinthians themselves sent (1 Corinthians 7:1) — that the church he planted in Corinth is fracturing along multiple fault lines. There are personality-based factions ("I follow Paul," "I follow Apollos," "I follow Cephas"), lawsuits between believers, sexual immorality, disputes about food offered to idols, chaos in worship, and confusion about the resurrection. First Corinthians is Paul's pastoral response to this cascade of problems, and it begins where all good theology must begin: with the cross.

The opening chapters of 1 Corinthians (1-4) lay the theological foundation for everything that follows. The divisions in Corinth are not merely a leadership problem; they reflect a fundamental misunderstanding of the gospel itself. The Corinthians have imported the values of their culture — rhetorical sophistication, social status, philosophical factionalism — into the church. Paul's response is not to choose a better leader but to dismantle the entire value system by pointing to the cross. The message of the cross is "foolishness" (*moria*) to the perishing but "the power of God" to those being saved. God has deliberately chosen the foolish, the weak, and the low to shame the wise and strong. The foundation of the church is not human wisdom but Christ crucified, and no one can lay any other.

This Week's Readings

Day	Reading	Title
1	Acts 19	Ephesus — Disciples of John, Extraordinary Miracles, Sons of Sceva, Riot
2	1 Corinthians 1	Divisions in Corinth, Wisdom of the Cross, Foolishness of God
3	1 Corinthians 2	God's Wisdom Revealed by the Spirit, Mind of Christ
4	1 Corinthians 3	Spiritual Immaturity, God's Temple, Building on the Foundation
5	1 Corinthians 4	Servants of Christ, Fools for Christ, Kingdom of Power

Key Characters

- **Paul** — Apostle ministering in Ephesus and writing to Corinth to address divisions and confusion
- **Apollos** — Gifted teacher whose work in Corinth inadvertently became a rallying point for factions
- **Cephas (Peter)** — Another figure around whom Corinthian factions have formed
- **Chloe's people** — Messengers from Corinth who report the divisions to Paul
- **Sons of Sceva** — Jewish exorcists whose failed attempt to invoke Jesus' name exposes the difference between genuine faith and magical manipulation

- **Demetrius** — Silversmith in Ephesus who incites a riot to protect his trade in Artemis shrines

Key Locations

- **Ephesus** — Major city in Asia Minor, center of the Artemis cult and a hub of magic and commerce
- **Hall of Tyrannus** — Lecture hall where Paul teaches daily during the heat of the day
- **Temple of Artemis** — One of the Seven Wonders, center of Ephesian civic and religious identity
- **Corinth** — The church Paul is writing to, now plagued by divisions and moral confusion

Key Themes

- **The power of the gospel over the powers of darkness** — In Ephesus, the gospel confronts and defeats magic, idolatry, and demonic forces
- **The foolishness of the cross** — God's wisdom is revealed in the crucified Christ, which overturns all human systems of status and power
- **Unity in Christ versus personality cults** — The church belongs to Christ, not to any human leader, and divisions based on teacher loyalty betray the gospel
- **Spiritual maturity versus spiritual infancy** — The Corinthians' divisions reveal that they are still thinking like the world, not like people taught by the Spirit
- **Christ as the only foundation** — All ministry is building on the one foundation already laid; the quality of that building will be tested by fire

Week 30. Church Problems

Memory Verse: 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 (ESV)

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

The Big Picture

Paul's first letter to the Corinthians is the most pastorally urgent document in the New Testament. Written from Ephesus around 53-55 AD, it responds to a series of crises that threatened to tear apart one of Paul's most promising yet most troubled congregations. Corinth was no ordinary city. Destroyed by the Romans in 146 BC and refounded by Julius Caesar as a Roman colony in 44 BC, it had grown in a single century into one of the largest and wealthiest cities in the empire. Straddling the narrow isthmus connecting mainland Greece with the Peloponnese, Corinth controlled two harbors and profited from the trade flowing between Rome and the East. Its population was a volatile mixture of Roman veterans, Greek freedmen, Jewish merchants, and immigrants from across the Mediterranean. The city was famous for its temple of Aphrodite, its biennial Isthmian Games (second only to the Olympics), and its reputation for sexual license — the Greek verb *korinthiazomai*, "to act like a Corinthian," was slang for sexual immorality.

Into this environment Paul had planted a church during his second missionary journey, spending eighteen months in the city (Acts 18:1-18). The Corinthian believers came predominantly from the lower social strata, though a few wealthy patrons like Gaius, Crispus, and Erastus provided homes for house-church gatherings. After Paul's departure, the church had been influenced by other teachers — Apollos, and possibly followers claiming allegiance to Peter — and had splintered into rival factions. Worse, the Corinthians had absorbed the values of their surrounding culture far more readily than the values of the gospel. Sexual immorality, litigation among believers, disputes about marriage and food offered to idols, and chaotic worship all testified to a community that was spiritually gifted but spiritually immature.

This week we encounter Paul at his most direct and his most pastoral. In chapters 5-9, he addresses a cascade of problems: a man living in sexual immorality that would shock even the pagans, believers suing each other in Roman courts, confusion about marriage and celibacy, and the thorny question of whether Christians could eat meat that had been offered to pagan gods. Through it all, Paul articulates a revolutionary ethic grounded not in rules but in relationships — the believer's relationship to Christ's body, to the community of faith, and to the weaker brother or sister. His famous declaration that the body is "a temple of the Holy Spirit" (6:19) and his pastoral principle of becoming "all things to all people" (9:22) remain among the most influential ethical teachings in Christian history. Paul does not simply lay down laws; he models how to think

theologically about the messy realities of life in a pluralistic, morally confused culture — which is precisely why these chapters speak with such directness to the twenty-first century church.

This Week's Readings

Day	Reading	Title
1	1 Corinthians 5	Expel the Immoral Brother, Sexual Immorality in the Church
2	1 Corinthians 6	Lawsuits Among Believers, Your Body Is a Temple of the Holy Spirit
3	1 Corinthians 7	Marriage, Singleness, Remain as You Are, Undivided Devotion
4	1 Corinthians 8	Food Offered to Idols, Knowledge Puffs Up but Love Builds Up
5	1 Corinthians 9	Paul's Rights as an Apostle, "I Become All Things to All People"

Key Characters

- **Paul** — Apostle and church planter writing from Ephesus to address urgent pastoral crises
- **The immoral brother** — Unnamed man living in sexual immorality with his father's wife
- **Chloe's people** — Members of Chloe's household who reported the Corinthian problems to Paul
- **Apollos** — Alexandrian teacher whose eloquence attracted a faction in Corinth
- **Barnabas** — Mentioned alongside Paul as an apostle who worked for a living

Key Locations

- **Corinth** — Wealthy, cosmopolitan port city on the isthmus between mainland Greece and the Peloponnese
- **Ephesus** — City in Asia Minor from which Paul writes this letter
- **Pagan temples** — Sites where meat was sacrificed to idols before being sold in the marketplace
- **Roman courts** — The judicial system before which Corinthian believers were suing one another

Key Themes

- **Church discipline and holiness** — Paul insists that the community must address blatant sin rather than ignoring it in the name of tolerance
- **The body as temple** — Individual believers and the corporate body are the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit
- **Freedom and responsibility** — Christian liberty must be exercised in love, with consideration for the weaker brother or sister
- **Marriage and singleness** — Both are gifts from God; neither is spiritually superior to the other
- **Apostolic example** — Paul models the sacrificial love he preaches by forgoing his apostolic rights
- **Cultural engagement** — Believers must navigate pagan culture without either withdrawing from it or being absorbed by it

Week 31. Worship and Gifts

Memory Verse: 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 (ESV)

Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

The Big Picture

Having addressed the Corinthians' moral failures and disputes about marriage, food, and freedom in chapters 5-9, Paul now turns to the equally urgent matter of how the community conducts itself when it gathers for worship. The problems are no less severe. In 1 Corinthians 10-14, Paul confronts a congregation that is participating in idol feasts, dishonoring one another at the Lord's Supper, turning spiritual gifts into

instruments of self-promotion, and conducting worship services so chaotically that outsiders would think they were insane (14:23). At the heart of every problem is the same Corinthian disease: an inflated sense of individual spiritual status that tramples concern for the community. Paul's response is one of the most sustained and theologically rich treatments of corporate worship in the entire New Testament, culminating in the literary masterpiece of chapter 13 — the love chapter — which is not a digression from the discussion of spiritual gifts but its theological center of gravity.

Paul's argument builds with architectural precision. Chapter 10 warns the Corinthians through Israel's wilderness failures that spiritual privilege does not immunize against spiritual disaster, then draws a sharp line between participation in the Lord's Table and participation in the table of demons. Chapter 11 addresses two distinct worship problems: the head-covering controversy, which concerns the proper expression of gender distinctions in worship, and the scandalous abuse of the Lord's Supper, where wealthy members were gorging themselves while the poor went hungry. Chapters 12-14 form a tightly unified unit on spiritual gifts. Chapter 12 establishes the theological foundation: one Spirit, many gifts, one body with many interdependent members. Chapter 13 supplies the essential criterion: without love, even the most spectacular gifts are worthless noise. Chapter 14 provides the practical application: in corporate worship, intelligibility and mutual edification must take priority over individual spiritual experience. The refrain running through these five chapters is unmistakable: worship is about building up the body, not elevating the self.

These chapters are among the most debated in Pauline scholarship, touching on questions that remain live in the contemporary church: the role of women in worship, the nature and continuation of charismatic gifts, and the proper balance between order and spontaneity in corporate worship. Whatever positions one holds on these contested questions, Paul's central conviction is clear — the gathered community is the body of Christ, and every element of worship must serve the edification of that body in love.

This Week's Readings

Day	Reading	Title
1	1 Corinthians 10	Israel's Wilderness Warnings, Flee Idolatry
2	1 Corinthians 11	Head Coverings in Worship, Lord's Supper Abuses
3	1 Corinthians 12	Varieties of Spiritual Gifts, One Body Many Members
4	1 Corinthians 13	Without Love = Nothing, Faith Hope Love
5	1 Corinthians 14	Prophecy > Tongues for Edification, Orderly Worship

Key Characters

- **Paul** — Apostle writing from Ephesus to correct serious worship disorders in the Corinthian church
- **Moses** — Leader of Israel through the wilderness, whose generation serves as a warning example
- **The Corinthian factions** — Competing groups within the church who have turned worship into a display of spiritual superiority
- **The "weaker" and "stronger" members** — Those with differing levels of spiritual maturity whose mutual care is essential to the body's health

Key Locations

- **Corinth** — Wealthy port city teeming with pagan temples and idol feasts
- **The wilderness** — Israel's forty-year sojourn, used typologically as a warning to the church
- **The house churches** — Private homes where the Corinthian believers gathered for worship and the Lord's Supper
- **Pagan temples** — Sites of idol feasts that some Corinthian believers continued to attend

Key Themes

- **Idol feasts and the Lord's Table** — Participation in pagan worship is incompatible with participation in the body and blood of Christ
- **The body of Christ** — The church is a single organism with diverse, interdependent members, each gifted by the same Spirit

- **Love as the supreme gift** — Without love, all spiritual gifts are rendered meaningless; love is the “more excellent way”
- **Orderly worship** — Corporate worship must prioritize intelligibility, mutual edification, and the building up of the whole community
- **The Lord’s Supper** — A communal meal that proclaims Christ’s death and demands self-examination and mutual care
- **Spiritual gifts** — Given by the one Spirit for the common good, not for individual prestige or competition

Week 32. Resurrection Hope

Memory Verse: 1 Corinthians 15:55-57 (ESV)

O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Big Picture

This week marks the climax of Paul’s Corinthian correspondence and the beginning of his second letter to the troubled congregation. In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul delivers what is arguably the most important chapter in the New Testament on the resurrection of Jesus Christ and its implications for all who believe. Some Corinthians had begun to deny the bodily resurrection of the dead, likely influenced by Greek philosophical assumptions that viewed the body as a prison and salvation as the escape of the immortal soul. Paul demolishes this position with a four-part argument: the historical evidence for Christ’s resurrection (vv. 1-11), the devastating consequences if there were no resurrection (vv. 12-19), the cosmic scope of Christ’s resurrection as the “firstfruits” of a universal harvest (vv. 20-34), and the nature of the resurrection body itself (vv. 35-58). Chapter 16 then closes the letter with practical matters — the collection for Jerusalem, travel plans, and final greetings — before Paul takes the pen from his secretary and writes the closing in his own hand.

Second Corinthians opens in a very different emotional register. Written perhaps a year after 1 Corinthians, after a painful visit to Corinth that went badly (2:1) and a severe letter that Paul regretted writing (7:8), 2 Corinthians is Paul’s most emotionally transparent epistle. Chapters 1-3 introduce us to an apostle who has been brought to the brink of despair by suffering in Asia (perhaps the Ephesian riot of Acts 19, or a serious illness, or an imprisonment), who has had to defend his change of travel plans against charges of fickleness, and who must explain why he wrote a harsh letter instead of coming in person. Yet out of this crucible of suffering comes some of the most profound theology in the Pauline corpus: the God of all comfort who comforts us so that we may comfort others (1:3-7), the new covenant ministry of the Spirit that surpasses the glory of Moses (3:7-18), and the transformative vision of believers who, with unveiled faces, are being changed from one degree of glory to another by the Lord who is the Spirit (3:18).

The thread connecting these diverse chapters is hope — the certain hope of bodily resurrection, the lived hope of comfort in suffering, and the transforming hope of glory. For Paul, hope is not wishful thinking but a reality so certain that it reshapes the present. Because Christ has been raised, death has lost its sting. Because God comforts us in affliction, our suffering becomes a ministry to others. Because the Spirit is removing the veil from our faces, we are already being transformed into the image of Christ.

This Week’s Readings

Day	Reading	Title
1	1 Corinthians 15	Resurrection — Eyewitness Testimony, Resurrection Body
2	1 Corinthians 16	Collection for Jerusalem, Travel Plans, Stand Firm
3	2 Corinthians 1	God of All Comfort, Paul’s Sufferings in Asia
4	2 Corinthians 2	Forgive the Offender, Triumphal Procession
5	2 Corinthians 3	Ministers of New Covenant, Unveiled Faces Reflecting Glory

Key Characters

- **Paul** — Apostle writing from Ephesus (1 Cor) and later from Macedonia (2 Cor), deeply vulnerable about his sufferings
- **Cephas (Peter)** — Listed among the eyewitnesses of the risen Christ in the creedal formula
- **James** — The Lord's brother, also an eyewitness of the resurrection
- **The five hundred** — A large group who saw the risen Christ, most of whom were still alive when Paul wrote
- **Titus** — Paul's trusted emissary who carried the "severe letter" to Corinth and brought back good news
- **Moses** — Whose veiled face provides the typological basis for Paul's new covenant theology

Key Locations

- **Corinth** — The church struggling with denial of bodily resurrection and strained relations with Paul
- **Ephesus** — Where Paul wrote 1 Corinthians and where he suffered a crisis that brought him near death
- **Macedonia** — Where Paul wrote 2 Corinthians after receiving Titus's encouraging report
- **Jerusalem** — The destination of the collection Paul is organizing from his Gentile churches
- **Troas** — Where Paul hoped to meet Titus but could not rest when he did not find him

Key Themes

- **The bodily resurrection of Christ** — The historical foundation of the Christian faith, attested by multiple eyewitnesses and forming the basis of all Christian hope
- **The resurrection body** — Not a resuscitated corpse but a transformed, imperishable, glorious, spiritual body fit for the age to come
- **The God of all comfort** — God comforts the afflicted not as an end in itself but so they may become comforters of others
- **New covenant ministry** — The ministry of the Spirit surpasses the ministry of the law as permanent glory surpasses fading glory
- **Transformation into glory** — With unveiled faces, believers are being progressively changed into the image of Christ by the Spirit

Week 33. Treasure in Jars of Clay

Memory Verse: 2 Corinthians 4:7 (ESV)

But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.

The Big Picture

Second Corinthians is the most personally revealing letter Paul ever wrote. If Romans is his theological masterpiece and 1 Corinthians his manual for church order, 2 Corinthians is his heart laid bare — vulnerable, passionate, wounded, and triumphant all at once. This week we enter the first half of this extraordinary letter, covering chapters 4 through 8, where Paul develops what may be the most profound theology of suffering and ministry found anywhere in Scripture.

The background is essential for understanding the emotional temperature of the letter. After writing 1 Corinthians, Paul made a "painful visit" to Corinth (2 Corinthians 2:1) that went badly. False teachers — whom Paul sarcastically dubs "super-apostles" (11:5) — had infiltrated the congregation, questioning Paul's authority, his speaking ability, his physical appearance, and even his sincerity. Paul left Corinth humiliated and wrote a "tearful letter" (2:4) that is now lost to history, sending it via Titus. He then waited in agony for news of how the Corinthians would respond. When Titus finally arrived in Macedonia with a largely positive report (7:5-7), Paul wrote 2 Corinthians — part relief, part renewed appeal, part blistering defense of his apostleship.

Chapters 4 and 5 contain some of the most luminous passages in the New Testament. Paul's metaphor of "treasure in jars of clay" (4:7) captures the paradox of Christian ministry: the infinite power of God is deposited in fragile, cracked, ordinary human vessels. This is not despite their weakness but because of it — "to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us" (4:7). Paul catalogs his afflictions — hard pressed, perplexed, persecuted, struck down — but insists that each suffering carries within it the life of Jesus made visible to the world. Chapter 5 moves from suffering to hope: the "earthly tent" of our mortal body will give way to a "building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (5:1). This leads directly to the ministry of reconciliation — God in Christ reconciling the world to himself and entrusting to his broken messengers the word of reconciliation.

Chapter 6 shows us what that ministry costs. Paul's catalog of hardships — beatings, imprisonments, sleepless nights, hunger — is not a complaint but a credential. In a culture that valued rhetorical polish, social status, and visible success, Paul argues that authentic ministry is proven by endurance through suffering. He then pivots to a passionate appeal: "Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers" (6:14), grounding the command in the staggering promise that God himself dwells among his people as their Father.

Chapter 7 brings emotional resolution. The godly sorrow that Paul's tearful letter produced in the Corinthians led to repentance, vindication, and restored relationship. Paul distinguishes sharply between "godly grief" that produces repentance leading to salvation and "worldly grief" that produces death (7:10) — a distinction every believer must learn to discern. Chapter 8 then transitions to practical generosity, holding up the impoverished Macedonian churches as models of joyful, sacrificial giving. The theological foundation for Christian generosity is breathtaking: "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich" (8:9).

This Week's Readings

Day	Reading	Title
1	2 Corinthians 4	Treasure in Jars of Clay, Light of the Gospel, Eternal Weight of Glory
2	2 Corinthians 5	Earthly Tent vs Heavenly Dwelling, Ministry of Reconciliation, Ambassadors
3	2 Corinthians 6	Paul's Hardships, Don't Be Unequally Yoked, Temple of the Living God
4	2 Corinthians 7	Godly Sorrow vs Worldly Sorrow, Joy at Titus' Report
5	2 Corinthians 8	Macedonian Generosity, Grace of Giving, Jesus Became Poor

Key Characters

- **Paul** — Apostle writing with raw vulnerability, defending his ministry through the lens of weakness
- **Titus** — Paul's trusted delegate who carried the tearful letter to Corinth and returned with good news
- **The "super-apostles"** — False teachers who challenged Paul's authority and impressed the Corinthians with polished rhetoric
- **The Macedonian churches** — Impoverished congregations (Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea) whose generosity shamed wealthier Corinth

Key Locations

- **Corinth** — Wealthy, cosmopolitan port city; the troubled church Paul addresses
- **Macedonia** — Northern province (modern Greece) where Paul waited for Titus and where the generous churches were located
- **Troas** — Coastal city where Paul had hoped to meet Titus but could not rest (2:12-13)

Key Themes

- **Power through weakness** — God's strength is displayed most clearly through human frailty and suffering

- **The ministry of reconciliation** — Believers are ambassadors carrying God’s message of peace to a hostile world
- **Godly sorrow and repentance** — True conviction produces transformation, not despair
- **Radical generosity** — Christian giving flows from the grace of Christ who became poor for our sake
- **Eternal perspective** — Present sufferings are momentary and light compared to an eternal weight of glory
- **Authenticity in ministry** — True apostleship is validated by endurance, not eloquence or outward success

Week 34. Paul’s Defense

Memory Verse: 2 Corinthians 12:9 (ESV)

But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

The Big Picture

This week we complete our journey through 2 Corinthians, covering chapters 9 through 13 — the most emotionally intense and theologically daring section of the letter. If last week revealed Paul’s heart as a pastor and theologian of suffering, this week reveals Paul as a warrior for truth, a fool for Christ, and a man who discovered that divine power reaches its full expression only in the crater of human weakness. These five chapters contain some of the most memorable passages in all of Scripture: the cheerful giver, the demolition of strongholds, the catalog of sufferings, the thorn in the flesh, and the trinitarian benediction that has closed Christian worship services for two millennia.

The conflict driving these chapters is the ongoing challenge from the “super-apostles” — itinerant teachers who arrived in Corinth with impressive credentials, polished rhetoric, and a gospel subtly different from what Paul had preached. They questioned Paul’s authority, mocked his unimpressive appearance and speech, pointed to his suffering as evidence of God’s disfavor, and demanded financial support as proof of their own legitimacy. Paul had already addressed these rivals obliquely in the letter’s opening chapters, but in chapters 10-13 he takes them on directly in what scholars call the “fool’s speech” — a brilliant, anguished, deliberately ironic passage where Paul “boasts” in the very things his opponents despise: weakness, suffering, and dependence on God.

Chapter 9 completes Paul’s appeal for the Jerusalem collection, anchoring generosity in the character of God who gives “seed to the sower and bread for food” (9:10). The famous verse “God loves a cheerful giver” (9:7) is not a fundraising slogan but a revelation of divine character — God himself is the ultimate cheerful giver, and human generosity participates in and reflects that divine nature. Chapters 10-11 then shift dramatically in tone. Paul defends his authority not with the rhetorical weapons his opponents wielded but with “divine power to demolish strongholds” (10:4). He catalogs his sufferings in 11:23-28 — five times flogged, three times beaten with rods, once stoned, three times shipwrecked, constantly in danger from rivers, bandits, his own countrymen, and Gentiles — not as a complaint but as a paradoxical credential. In the Greco-Roman honor culture, this was anti-boasting: Paul’s resume is written in scars.

Chapter 12 contains the astonishing account of Paul’s visionary experience — caught up to the “third heaven” or “paradise” — followed immediately by the revelation of his “thorn in the flesh,” the mysterious affliction God refused to remove. The Lord’s response to Paul’s three-fold prayer for deliverance became the theological bedrock of Christian understanding of suffering: “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (12:9). Chapter 13 closes the letter with final warnings, the call to self-examination, and the trinitarian benediction — “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all” (13:14) — one of the earliest and most complete statements of trinitarian theology in the New Testament.

This Week's Readings

Day	Reading	Title
1	2 Corinthians 9	Cheerful Giving, God Loves a Cheerful Giver, God's Abundant Provision, Indescribable Gift
2	2 Corinthians 10	Paul's Authority, Divine Weapons for Demolishing Strongholds, Boasting in the Lord
3	2 Corinthians 11	Paul vs False "Super-Apostles", Catalog of Sufferings — Beatings, Shipwrecks, Dangers
4	2 Corinthians 12	Caught Up to Third Heaven, Thorn in the Flesh, "My Grace Is Sufficient", Power in Weakness
5	2 Corinthians 13	Final Warnings, Examine Yourselves, Trinitarian Benediction

Key Characters

- **Paul** — Apostle making his most passionate and personal defense, boasting in weakness as the paradoxical proof of authentic ministry
- **The "super-apostles"** — False teachers whose polished rhetoric, demand for financial support, and triumphalist theology directly contradicted Paul's gospel of the cross
- **Titus** — Paul's trusted emissary who helped organize the Jerusalem collection and carried Paul's correspondence
- **Satan** — Named as the source of Paul's "thorn in the flesh" (12:7) and the power behind false apostles who disguise themselves as "angels of light" (11:14)

Key Locations

- **Corinth** — Wealthy Greek port city; the troubled church receiving this letter
- **Macedonia** — Northern Greek province where the generous churches set the example Paul holds before Corinth
- **Jerusalem** — Destination of the collection; the mother church struggling with poverty
- **Third heaven / Paradise** — The realm of God's presence to which Paul was caught up in his visionary experience

Key Themes

- **Cheerful generosity** — God's own nature as the ultimate giver provides both the model and the power for human generosity
- **Spiritual warfare** — The Christian's weapons are not worldly but divinely powerful for tearing down ideological strongholds
- **Power perfected in weakness** — The central paradox of the Christian life: God's strength flows most freely through human frailty
- **Authentic vs. counterfeit apostleship** — True ministry is validated by suffering, service, and dependence on God, not by eloquence, credentials, or visible success
- **Self-examination** — Believers are called to test themselves and confirm that Christ is truly in them
- **Trinitarian blessing** — The earliest complete trinitarian formula, affirming the distinct and united work of Father, Son, and Spirit

Week 35. The Letter to Rome (Part 1)

Memory Verse: Romans 1:16-17 (ESV)

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, 'The righteous shall live by faith.'

The Big Picture

This week marks one of the most significant moments in the New Testament story: Paul composes his letter to the Romans, arguably the most influential theological document in the history of Christianity. Written from Corinth during the three-month stay recorded in Acts 20:2-3 (approximately 57 AD), Romans is unlike any of Paul's other letters. He had not founded the Roman church and had never visited it. The letter served as both a theological introduction of himself and his gospel to a congregation he hoped to visit on his way to Spain (Romans 15:23-29), and as a comprehensive statement of the gospel's logic — how God has acted in Christ to save both Jew and Gentile through faith.

We begin the week with Acts 20:1-6, which provides the narrative context: Paul is traveling through Macedonia and Greece, collecting the offering for Jerusalem and preparing for the journey that will eventually bring him to Rome — though not in the way he imagined. During his three months in Greece (Corinth), he writes the letter that Martin Luther called “the most important piece in the New Testament and the purest Gospel.” Augustine's conversion was sparked by Romans 13. Luther's Reformation was ignited by Romans 1:17. John Wesley's heart was “strangely warmed” while hearing Luther's preface to Romans read aloud. Karl Barth's commentary on Romans launched twentieth-century theology. No document outside the Gospels has shaped Christian thought more profoundly.

Romans 1-4 constitutes the first major section of the letter, and its argument is devastating in its comprehensiveness. Paul begins with the gospel as “the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes” (1:16) and then demonstrates that this salvation is urgently needed by everyone — Gentile and Jew alike. The Gentile world is under God's wrath for suppressing the truth about God visible in creation (1:18-32). The Jewish world, despite its possession of the law, stands equally condemned because knowledge of the law does not produce obedience to it (2:1-3:8). The conclusion is universal and inescapable: “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (3:23). But this universal diagnosis is followed by a universal remedy: “and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus” (3:24). Chapter 4 then presents Abraham as the paradigmatic case: the father of the faithful was justified by faith, not by works of the law or by circumcision, establishing the pattern for all who would follow — Jew and Gentile alike. Paul's argument is at once deeply Jewish (rooted in the Old Testament), radically universal (embracing all humanity), and relentlessly christological (centered on the death and resurrection of Jesus).

This Week's Readings

Day	Reading	Title
1	Acts 20:1-6	Paul Through Macedonia and Greece
2	Romans 1	Gospel = Power of God, Wrath Against Suppressing Truth
3	Romans 2	God's Righteous Judgment, True Circumcision of the Heart
4	Romans 3	None Righteous, Justified Freely by Grace
5	Romans 4	Abraham Justified by Faith, Promise Through Faith to All

Key Characters

- **Paul** — Apostle writing from Corinth to introduce himself and his gospel to the Roman church he has never visited
- **Abraham** — The father of Israel whose justification by faith (Genesis 15:6) provides the paradigm for all believers
- **David** — Cited as a second witness to justification apart from works (Psalm 32:1-2)
- **Paul's travel companions** — Sopater, Aristarchus, Secundus, Gaius, Timothy, Tychicus, and Trophimus, representing the Gentile churches

Key Locations

- **Corinth** — Where Paul writes Romans during his three-month stay (~57 AD)
- **Rome** — The capital of the empire and home to the church Paul hopes to visit
- **Macedonia and Greece** — Paul's travel route as he collects the offering for Jerusalem
- **Troas** — Where the group reassembles before sailing to Jerusalem

Key Themes

- **The gospel as God's power** — The gospel is not merely information about salvation but the active power of God that accomplishes salvation for everyone who believes
- **Universal sin** — Both Gentile and Jew stand under God's righteous judgment; no one is exempt from the diagnosis of sin
- **Justification by faith** — God declares sinners righteous through faith in Christ, apart from works of the law, freely by his grace
- **The righteousness of God** — God's righteousness is both his own attribute (his faithful justice) and his gift to those who believe
- **Abraham as paradigm** — Abraham was justified by faith before circumcision and before the law, establishing the pattern for both Jewish and Gentile believers

Week 36. The Letter to Rome (Part 2)

Memory Verse: Romans 8:28 (ESV)

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

The Big Picture

The heart of Romans pulses through chapters 5 through 9, carrying the reader from the quiet assurance of peace with God through one of the most dramatic theological journeys in all of Scripture. Paul begins where he left off at the end of chapter 4: having established that justification comes by faith apart from works of the law, he now explores what that justification produces. The answer is nothing less than cosmic in scope. In chapter 5, Paul traces the origin of humanity's problem back to Adam and reveals that Christ is the new Adam whose single act of obedience has undone the catastrophe of the first Adam's disobedience. Grace does not merely match sin; it superabounds. From this foundation Paul moves to the believer's union with Christ in baptism (chapter 6), the agonizing struggle with indwelling sin (chapter 7), and the soaring, triumphant declaration that nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus (chapter 8). Romans 8 is often regarded as the greatest single chapter in the Bible, and for good reason: it moves from "no condemnation" to "no separation," encompassing the work of the Spirit, the hope of creation's renewal, and the golden chain of salvation stretching from foreknowledge to glorification.

Then, at the peak of this theological mountain, Paul turns to the question that has haunted him throughout the letter: What about Israel? If the gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, why have the majority of God's own covenant people rejected their Messiah? Romans 9 is Paul's anguished, deeply personal wrestling with this question. He would wish himself accursed for the sake of his kinsmen. Yet he insists that God's word has not failed; rather, God's sovereign purposes have always operated through election and calling, not merely through ethnic descent. The image of the potter and the clay, drawn from Isaiah and Jeremiah, reminds the reader that God's justice and mercy are not subject to human approval. This is theology forged in tears — the tears of an apostle who loves both his Lord and his people, and who must somehow hold both loyalties together.

These five chapters form the theological backbone not only of Romans but of the entire Pauline corpus. They have shaped every major theological movement in Christian history, from Augustine's debates with Pelagius, to Luther's breakthrough on justification, to Wesley's emphasis on the Spirit's transforming work, to the contemporary debates over the New Perspective on Paul. To read them carefully is to encounter the full sweep of the gospel: what God has done, what God is doing, and what God will yet do.

This Week's Readings

Day	Reading	Title
1	Romans 5	Peace with God Through Faith, Adam vs Christ, Grace Abounds
2	Romans 6	Dead to Sin Alive in Christ, Baptism Into His Death, Slaves of Righteousness
3	Romans 7	Released from the Law, Inner Struggle — "What I Want to Do I Do

Day	Reading	Title
		Not Do"
4	Romans 8	No Condemnation, Life in the Spirit, Abba Father, Nothing Can Separate Us
5	Romans 9	God's Sovereign Choice, Potter and Clay, Israel's Rejection

Key Characters

- **Paul** — Apostle writing from Corinth to the Roman churches, laying out the most systematic presentation of the gospel in all his letters
- **Adam** — The first man whose disobedience brought sin and death to all humanity, the antitype of Christ
- **Christ** — The second Adam whose obedience and sacrifice bring justification and life to all who believe
- **Israel** — God's covenant people whose rejection of the Messiah raises profound questions about God's faithfulness
- **The Holy Spirit** — The agent of the believer's new life, who intercedes with groanings too deep for words

Key Locations

- **Rome** — The capital of the empire, home to multiple house churches of both Jewish and Gentile believers
- **Corinth** — The city from which Paul writes, during his third missionary journey (around 57 AD)
- **Eden** — The background setting for the Adam-Christ typology of chapter 5

Key Themes

- **Justification and its fruits** — Peace with God, access to grace, hope of glory, and love poured out by the Holy Spirit
- **Union with Christ** — Through baptism believers participate in Christ's death and resurrection, breaking sin's dominion
- **The believer's struggle** — The inner war between the renewed mind and the flesh, and the Spirit's deliverance
- **Life in the Spirit** — No condemnation, adoption as children, the Spirit's intercession, and the assurance of final glorification
- **God's sovereignty and election** — God's freedom to show mercy and harden, and the mystery of Israel's unbelief

Week 37. The Letter to Rome (Part 3)

Memory Verse: Romans 12:1-2 (ESV)

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

The Big Picture

This week we reach the theological and ethical climax of Paul's letter to the Romans. Having laid the doctrinal foundation in chapters 1-8 (the universal need for justification, the gift of righteousness through faith, life in the Spirit, and the assurance that nothing can separate believers from God's love) and having wrestled with the painful question of Israel's place in God's plan in chapters 9-11, Paul now draws out the practical implications of everything he has argued. The famous word "Therefore" (*oun*) at the opening of chapter 12 is the hinge between theology and ethics, between what God has done and how God's people are

to live. For Paul, doctrine without ethics is dead abstraction, and ethics without doctrine is moralism. The two are inseparable, and chapters 10-14 weave them together with extraordinary skill.

Chapters 10-11 complete Paul's anguished meditation on Israel. Having argued in chapter 9 that God's sovereign choice has always operated within Israel (not all descendants of Abraham are children of the promise), Paul now turns to the human side: Israel has stumbled because they pursued righteousness through the law rather than through faith (10:1-4). Yet God has not abandoned his people. A remnant remains by grace (11:1-6), and the Gentiles' inclusion is itself part of God's strategy to provoke Israel to jealousy and ultimately to save "all Israel" (11:26). Paul's olive tree metaphor (11:17-24) — natural branches broken off and wild branches grafted in — warns Gentile believers against arrogance toward the Jewish people and points toward a future in which the natural branches will be grafted back. The section culminates in one of the great doxologies of the Bible: "Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!" (11:33).

Chapters 12-14 then translate Paul's theology into a comprehensive ethic for the Christian community. Chapter 12 moves from the foundational act of worship (presenting one's body as a living sacrifice) to the transformation of the mind, to the exercise of diverse gifts within the body, to a catalog of ethical imperatives that conclude with the revolutionary command to "overcome evil with good." Chapter 13 addresses the believer's relationship to the state (submit to governing authorities), to the neighbor (love fulfills the law), and to the eschatological moment (the day is near; put on Christ). Chapter 14 tackles the divisive issue of "disputable matters" — food restrictions and holy days — with a pastoral wisdom that refuses to let secondary issues destroy the unity that the gospel creates. Through it all, love is the supreme ethic: "Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law" (13:10).

This Week's Readings

Day	Reading	Title
1	Romans 10	Salvation for All Who Call, Faith Comes by Hearing
2	Romans 11	Remnant of Grace, Olive Tree, All Israel Saved
3	Romans 12	Living Sacrifice, Renewed Mind, Overcome Evil with Good
4	Romans 13	Submit to Authorities, Love Fulfills the Law, Put on Christ
5	Romans 14	Don't Judge on Disputable Matters, Don't Cause Stumbling

Key Characters

- **Paul** — Apostle whose heart's desire is Israel's salvation, now also laying out the ethical vision of the gospel
- **Israel** — The covenant people who have stumbled over Christ but whom God has not abandoned
- **The remnant** — The Jewish believers who, like Paul, have embraced Christ and demonstrate that God's promises have not failed
- **Elijah** — Prophet who despaired that he was alone, to whom God revealed the seven thousand faithful
- **The "strong" and the "weak"** — Believers in Rome who differ on food and holy days, representing Jewish and Gentile sensibilities

Key Locations

- **Rome** — The multi-ethnic capital of the empire, home to a church composed of both Jewish and Gentile believers
- **Spain** — Paul's intended western mission field, representing the furthest reaches of the known world
- **The olive tree** — Paul's metaphorical image for the people of God, rooted in the patriarchs, with branches both natural and grafted

Key Themes

- **Israel's stumble and future salvation** — Israel rejected the gospel by pursuing law-righteousness, but God has not rejected his people; a future ingathering is promised

- **The olive tree** — Gentile believers are grafted into Israel’s heritage, not the other way around; arrogance toward Israel is forbidden
- **The living sacrifice** — True worship is the offering of one’s entire life to God, accompanied by the renewal of the mind that discerns God’s will
- **Love as the fulfillment of the law** — Every ethical command is summarized in love, which does no wrong to the neighbor
- **Christian liberty and mutual responsibility** — Believers must not judge one another on disputable matters but must exercise their freedom with sensitivity to those whose consciences are weaker
- **Eschatological urgency** — “The night is nearly over; the day is almost here” — ethical living is motivated by the nearness of Christ’s return

Week 38. To Jerusalem

Memory Verse: Acts 20:24 (ESV)

But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

The Big Picture

This week carries us through some of the most emotionally charged passages in the New Testament. Paul is wrapping up his greatest letter — Romans — with its remarkable window into the relational networks of the early church, and then Luke takes us on a journey that Paul himself knows will end in chains. The closing chapters of Romans reveal not abstract theology but a living community: Phoebe the deacon, Priscilla and Aquila the co-workers, Junia the apostle, and more than twenty-six individuals whom Paul greets by name. These are not footnotes; they are the faces of the movement that would reshape the world. Paul’s plan to visit Rome on the way to Spain shows a missionary strategist thinking in continental terms, but the letter’s theological foundations remind us that the strategy is always grounded in the gospel of grace.

Then the scene shifts dramatically. Acts 20 gives us one of the Bible’s most vivid vignettes — a young man named Eutychus falling from a third-story window during Paul’s all-night sermon — followed immediately by one of its most moving farewells. Paul’s address to the Ephesian elders at Miletus is his pastoral testament, the only speech in Acts addressed to a Christian audience. He reviews his ministry, warns of coming wolves, and commends them to the God whose grace can build them up. The tears and embraces on the beach at Miletus are the last time these elders will see Paul’s face, and they know it.

Acts 21-22 then plunges us into crisis. Despite repeated prophetic warnings — Agabus dramatically binding his own hands and feet with Paul’s belt — Paul presses on to Jerusalem, convinced that the Holy Spirit is leading him there. His arrest in the Temple, following a Nazarite vow intended to demonstrate his continued respect for Jewish custom, sets in motion the chain of events that will eventually bring him to Rome — not as a free missionary but as a prisoner of the empire. Paul’s defense speech from the steps of the Antonia Fortress, delivered in Hebrew to a hostile crowd, is a masterpiece of personal testimony: the zealous Pharisee, the Damascus road encounter, the commission to the Gentiles. It is at the word “Gentiles” that the crowd erupts, and Rome intervenes.

This Week’s Readings

Day	Reading	Title
1	Romans 15	Accept One Another as Christ Accepted You
2	Romans 16	Greetings, Warnings, and Doxology
3	Acts 20:7-38	Eutychus and Farewell to the Ephesian Elders
4	Acts 21	Journey to Jerusalem and Arrest in the Temple
5	Acts 22	Paul’s Defense — Conversion Testimony in Hebrew

Key Characters

- **Paul** — Apostle completing his letter to Rome and traveling toward Jerusalem with full knowledge that suffering awaits
- **Phoebe** — Deacon of the church at Cenchreae, entrusted with delivering the letter to the Romans
- **Priscilla and Aquila** — Paul's co-workers, who risked their own necks for his life
- **Eutychus** — Young man in Troas who fell from a window during Paul's sermon and was raised
- **Agabus** — Prophet from Judea who foretold Paul's arrest with a dramatic symbolic action
- **The Ephesian Elders** — Overseers summoned to Miletus for Paul's farewell address
- **James** — Leader of the Jerusalem church who advises Paul to take a Nazarite vow
- **Claudius Lysias** — Roman tribune who arrests Paul in the Temple and discovers his Roman citizenship

Key Locations

- **Corinth/Cenchreae** — Where Romans was written and where Phoebe served as deacon
- **Troas** — Where Eutychus fell and was restored; the site of Paul's all-night teaching
- **Miletus** — Port city south of Ephesus where Paul delivered his farewell to the elders
- **Jerusalem** — The Temple where Paul was arrested after completing the Nazarite vow
- **The Antonia Fortress** — The Roman garrison overlooking the Temple, from whose steps Paul addressed the crowd

Key Themes

- **The gospel creates community** — Romans 15-16 reveal a network of relationships spanning cities, ethnicities, and social classes, all united by the gospel
- **Pastoral farewell and the cost of leadership** — Paul's Miletus address is a model of transparent, sacrificial ministry that finishes the course regardless of personal cost
- **Obedience despite suffering** — Paul walks toward Jerusalem knowing that chains and affliction await, because faithfulness, not safety, is the measure of discipleship
- **Testimony as defense** — Paul's conversion story is simultaneously his legal defense and his most powerful evangelistic tool
- **Jew-Gentile unity as God's eternal purpose** — From Romans 15's vision of Jew and Gentile glorifying God together to Acts 22's explosive mention of the Gentile mission, the inclusion of all nations remains the central issue

Week 39. Trials and Imprisonment

Memory Verse: Acts 26:28-29 (ESV)

And Agrippa said to Paul, 'In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?' And Paul said, 'Whether short or long, I would to God that not only you but also all who hear me this day might become such as I am — except for these chains.'

The Big Picture

Paul's journey through the Roman legal system is one of the great adventure stories of the ancient world, and Luke narrates it with the eye of a historian and the skill of a novelist. From the moment forty men swear an oath to kill Paul in Jerusalem, a chain of events unfolds that no human strategist could have planned but that God's sovereign hand orchestrates with breathtaking precision. The conspiracy of the assassins leads to Paul's dramatic midnight transfer under a guard of nearly five hundred soldiers to Caesarea, where he will spend two full years in the custody of one Roman governor and then another — not because justice demands it, but because Felix hopes for a bribe and Festus inherits the mess.

The successive trial scenes before Felix, Festus, and Agrippa form a legal triptych that reveals Paul as the most compelling advocate the gospel ever had. Before Felix, Paul speaks of righteousness, self-control, and coming judgment until the corrupt governor trembles. Before Festus, Paul appeals to Caesar — invoking his

rights as a Roman citizen and setting in motion the very journey to Rome that the risen Christ had promised (Acts 23:11). Before Agrippa, Paul delivers the fullest account of his conversion and commission, climaxing in Agrippa's famous response: "In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?" (26:28). Each hearing is simultaneously a legal proceeding and an evangelistic opportunity, and Paul treats every courtroom as a pulpit.

Then comes the sea. Luke's account of the voyage to Rome in Acts 27 is the most detailed description of ancient seafaring that has survived from antiquity. Scholars of maritime history prize it for its technical accuracy — the names of winds, the procedures for undergirding a ship, the casting of anchors from the stern, the jettisoning of cargo and tackle. But for Luke, the storm is not merely an adventure; it is a parable of faith. In the midst of a fourteen-day tempest, when all hope of survival has been abandoned, Paul stands among the terrified crew and declares, "I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. For this very night there stood before me an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I worship" (27:22-23). The shipwreck on Malta is the final proof that no human conspiracy, no political cowardice, and no force of nature can prevent God's purposes from reaching their destination.

This Week's Readings

Day	Reading	Title
1	Acts 23	Plot Against Paul, 40 Men Vow to Kill Him, Transfer to Caesarea Under Guard
2	Acts 24	Trial Before Governor Felix, Paul Speaks of Righteousness and Judgment
3	Acts 25	Appeal to Caesar, Festus Consults Agrippa
4	Acts 26	Paul's Defense Before King Agrippa — "Almost Persuaded"
5	Acts 27	Voyage to Rome, Storm at Sea, Shipwreck on Malta

Key Characters

- **Paul** — Apostle and Roman citizen, navigating the legal system with theological brilliance and unshakable trust in God's promise
- **Claudius Lysias** — Roman tribune in Jerusalem who rescues Paul and transfers him to Caesarea
- **Felix** — Roman governor of Judea (52-59 AD), notoriously corrupt, who kept Paul imprisoned hoping for a bribe
- **Festus** — Felix's successor, who inherited Paul's case and was bewildered by the theological charges
- **King Agrippa II** — The last of the Herodian dynasty, knowledgeable in Jewish law, who heard Paul's defense
- **Bernice** — Agrippa's sister, present at the hearing, a figure of considerable political influence
- **Julius** — The Roman centurion of the Augustan Cohort who treated Paul kindly during the voyage

Key Locations

- **Jerusalem** — The Antonia Fortress where Paul is held; the site of the assassination plot
- **Caesarea Maritima** — The Roman administrative capital of Judea, where Paul is imprisoned for two years
- **The Mediterranean Sea** — The setting for the dramatic voyage, storm, and shipwreck
- **Malta (Melita)** — The island where the ship runs aground and the survivors winter

Key Themes

- **God's sovereignty over human schemes** — Neither assassination plots, corrupt governors, nor Mediterranean storms can thwart God's plan
- **The gospel in the courtroom** — Paul transforms every legal hearing into a proclamation of the resurrection and the kingdom
- **Roman citizenship and divine citizenship** — Paul uses his legal rights strategically, but his ultimate allegiance is to a higher King

- **Providence in the storm** — God does not always prevent suffering but sustains his people through it and accomplishes his purposes within it
- **The continuity of Israel's hope** — Paul consistently argues that the gospel is not a departure from Judaism but its fulfillment

Week 40. Paul in Rome

Memory Verse: Ephesians 2:8-9 (ESV)

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

The Big Picture

Acts reaches its open-ended conclusion — Paul in Rome, freely preaching the gospel under house arrest. From those chains he writes Ephesians, perhaps his most majestic letter, soaring from God's eternal plan of redemption to the practical unity of the church as one new humanity in Christ.

The final chapter of Acts is one of the most surprising endings in all of literature. After twenty-eight chapters of relentless forward motion — from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria to the ends of the earth — Luke does not give us Paul's trial before Caesar, his verdict, or his death. Instead, he gives us an image: Paul in a rented house in Rome, welcoming all who come to him, "proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance" (28:31). The Greek word *akolytos* — "without hindrance" — is the final word of Acts, and it is Luke's theological statement: the gospel cannot be stopped. Chains cannot silence it. The empire that crucified Jesus is now hosting the apostle who proclaims him, and Rome cannot prevent the word from going out.

From this Roman imprisonment, Paul writes what many consider the crown jewel of his letters. Ephesians begins not with local problems but with the cosmos — God's eternal purpose, conceived before the foundation of the world, to gather all things in heaven and on earth under one head, Christ (1:10). The first three chapters are a sustained meditation on what God has done: chosen us, redeemed us, sealed us with the Spirit, raised us from death in sin to life in Christ, destroyed the wall of hostility between Jew and Gentile, and revealed the mystery that has been hidden for ages — that the Gentiles are co-heirs, co-members, and co-sharers in the promise. The language is cosmic, the sentences are staggeringly long (1:3-14 is a single sentence in Greek), and the vision is breathtaking.

Chapter 4 then pivots with a single word: "therefore." Everything that follows — unity, maturity, truthful speech, the putting off of the old self and the putting on of the new — flows from the indicative of grace. Paul does not say "do these things so that God will accept you." He says "God has done all of this; therefore, live worthy of it." Ethics in Ephesians is always a response to grace, never a means of earning it.

This Week's Readings

Day	Reading	Title
1	Acts 28	Malta, Rome, and the Open Ending
2	Ephesians 1	Every Spiritual Blessing in the Heavenly Places
3	Ephesians 2	"But God" — Grace, Faith, and One New Humanity
4	Ephesians 3	The Mystery Revealed — Prayer for Power and Love
5	Ephesians 4	Walk Worthy — Unity, Gifts, and the New Self

Key Characters

- **Paul** — Apostle and prisoner, preaching the kingdom from a rented house in Rome and writing his most exalted letter
- **The Jewish leaders in Rome** — Those who come to hear Paul's message, some believing and some refusing

Section 5. The Early Church

- **Luke** — Paul's traveling companion and the narrator of Acts, present throughout the Malta sojourn and the arrival in Rome
- **The Ephesian church** — The community (or communities) to whom Paul writes, possibly a circular letter to multiple churches

Key Locations

- **Malta** — The island where Paul's ship ran aground, where he was bitten by a viper and healed the sick
- **Rome** — The capital of the empire, Paul's destination since Acts 19:21, where he finally arrives as a prisoner
- **Ephesus** — The city in Asia Minor where Paul spent three years, though Ephesians may have been a circular letter

Key Themes

- **The unstoppable gospel** — Acts ends with Paul preaching "without hindrance" in the heart of the empire; chains cannot silence the word
- **God's eternal purpose** — Ephesians reveals a plan conceived before creation: to unite all things in Christ and create one new humanity
- **Grace as the foundation of ethics** — The magnificent "But God" of Ephesians 2 establishes that salvation is entirely God's gift; ethical living is the response, never the cause
- **The mystery revealed** — Gentiles are not afterthoughts but co-heirs, co-members, and co-sharers in God's promise through Christ
- **Unity in diversity** — The church is one body with many gifts, called to maintain the unity the Spirit has already created

Week 41. Prison Letters

Memory Verse: Philippians 2:5-8 (ESV)

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

The Big Picture

This week concludes Ephesians with its vision of Spirit-filled relationships and the famous Armor of God passage, then moves to Philippians — Paul's most personal and joyful letter, written from prison chains yet overflowing with gratitude. The Christ Hymn of Philippians 2 is one of the most important Christological passages in the entire New Testament.

Ephesians 5 opens with the command to "walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us" — a love defined not by sentiment but by sacrifice. Paul draws a sharp line between the darkness of the old life and the light of the new, urging believers to expose the unfruitful works of darkness rather than participate in them. He then issues one of his most memorable commands: "Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit" (5:18). The Spirit-filled life expresses itself in singing, thanksgiving, and mutual submission. This leads into the household code, where Paul takes the common Greco-Roman structure of household relationships and transforms it from the inside out by grounding every duty in the relationship between Christ and the church. The marriage metaphor reaches its crescendo when Paul quotes Genesis 2:24 and declares, "This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church" (5:32).

Ephesians 6 extends the household code to children and parents, slaves and masters, then pivots to the climactic section of the entire letter: the Armor of God. Paul has spent five chapters describing the cosmic scope of God's redemptive plan; now he acknowledges that this plan unfolds on a battlefield. The believer's struggle is "not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness" (6:12). Each piece of armor — belt of truth, breastplate of righteousness,

shoes of the gospel, shield of faith, helmet of salvation, and sword of the Spirit — is drawn from Old Testament imagery of God's own battle dress (Isaiah 11:5; 59:17). The warrior who stands in God's armor is clothed in God's own character.

Philippians shifts the tone dramatically. Written from prison (likely Rome, though Ephesus and Caesarea have been proposed), this letter radiates a joy that circumstances cannot explain. Philippi was a Roman colony in Macedonia, the first European city to receive the gospel (Acts 16), and the church there held a special place in Paul's heart. They were the only congregation from which he consistently accepted financial support — a mark of deep trust and genuine partnership. The letter is suffused with gratitude, affection, and a relentless insistence that joy is possible even in chains.

Philippians 1 introduces the theme of gospel partnership and Paul's famous dilemma: "To live is Christ, and to die is gain" (1:21). Chapter 2 contains the magnificent Christ Hymn (2:5-11), which traces the arc from pre-existent glory to incarnate humility to cosmic exaltation — the theological heart of the entire letter and one of the earliest and most exalted statements of Christology in the New Testament. Chapter 3 rounds out the week with Paul's autobiographical testimony: his impeccable Jewish credentials are counted as "rubbish" compared to the surpassing worth of knowing Christ, and his life is reframed as a race toward a heavenly prize.

This Week's Readings

Day	Reading	Title
1	Ephesians 5	Walk in Love, Be Filled with the Spirit, Christ and the Church
2	Ephesians 6	Children and Parents, The Full Armor of God
3	Philippians 1	Joy in Chains, To Live Is Christ
4	Philippians 2	The Christ Hymn — Kenosis and Exaltation
5	Philippians 3	Knowing Christ, Pressing On, Citizenship in Heaven

Key Characters

- **Paul** — Apostle writing from prison, chained to Roman guards yet overflowing with joy and theological vision
- **The Ephesian church** — A predominantly Gentile congregation needing to understand their new identity and relationships in Christ
- **The Philippian church** — Paul's most beloved congregation, partners in the gospel since the beginning, located in a proud Roman colony
- **Timothy** — Paul's trusted co-worker, commended to the Philippians as one who genuinely cares for their welfare
- **Epaphroditus** — The Philippians' messenger to Paul, who nearly died from illness while serving the apostle

Key Locations

- **Ephesus** — The great city of Asia Minor whose church receives Paul's cosmic vision of the body of Christ
- **Philippi** — A Roman colony in Macedonia, site of Paul and Silas's imprisonment and the earthquake that freed them (Acts 16)
- **Rome (or place of imprisonment)** — Where Paul writes both letters, chained to members of the imperial guard (praetorium)

Key Themes

- **Walking in light and love** — The ethical life flows from identity in Christ, not from mere moral effort
- **Spirit-filled community** — Worship, submission, and household relationships are all transformed by the indwelling Spirit
- **Spiritual warfare** — The Christian life is lived on a cosmic battlefield requiring divine armor

Section 5. The Early Church

- **Joy in suffering** — Philippians demonstrates that joy is not the absence of hardship but the presence of Christ
- **The pattern of Christ** — Humility leading to exaltation (the kenosis hymn) becomes the template for all Christian living
- **Knowing Christ above all** — Every human achievement pales beside the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus

Section 6. Letters and Revelation

Weeks 42–52

These final eleven weeks bring the New Testament to its close — and what a close it is. You will hear the last words of a dying apostle, encounter the most sustained argument for the supremacy of Christ in all of Scripture, walk with scattered believers through persecution and false teaching, and finish in a throne room where every tear is wiped away and all things are made new.

The section opens with Paul in chains, but his spirit is anything but captive. From prison he completes his letter to the Philippians — a letter so saturated with joy that you would never guess its author is facing execution. Then Colossians lifts your eyes to the cosmic Christ, the one in whom all things hold together, while the tiny letter to Philemon shows what the gospel looks like when it reaches into the most ordinary injustice and transforms it from within. These are not the writings of a man who has been defeated. They are the final songs of a man who has found something worth everything.

From there you will enter the Pastoral Epistles — Paul’s letters to Timothy and Titus, the next generation of church leaders. These are practical, urgent, and deeply personal. How should the church worship? Who should lead? What do you do when false teachers infiltrate? And woven through the practical counsel is Paul’s final testimony, written from a Roman dungeon as he awaits the executioner’s sword: “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.” These are among the last words we have from the apostle who did more than any other human being to carry the gospel across the ancient world.

Then the letter to the Hebrews takes you to theological heights unlike anything else in the New Testament. Written to Jewish Christians tempted to abandon their faith under persecution, Hebrews builds an extraordinary case: Jesus is greater than the angels, greater than Moses, a better high priest, the mediator of a better covenant, the once-for-all sacrifice that renders every other sacrifice obsolete. The argument is sustained, relentless, and beautiful — and at its heart stands not an abstraction but an invitation: come boldly to the throne of grace. The great faith chapter surveys the entire sweep of Israel’s history, from Abel to the prophets, and then turns to you: since you are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, run with endurance the race set before you, eyes fixed on Jesus.

The General Epistles follow — letters from Peter, Jude, and John that address the messy, human reality of first-century church life. Peter writes to scattered believers with pastoral tenderness, reframing their suffering within the story of Christ’s own suffering and vindication. His second letter and the fiery epistle of Jude confront false teachers who have infiltrated the church, distorting grace into a license for immorality — yet both letters end not in despair but in breathtaking hope: new heavens and a new earth where righteousness dwells, and a God who is able to keep you from stumbling. John’s three letters circle again and again around the simplest and most profound realities: God is light. God is love. And authentic faith shows itself in both right belief and right living.

The year ends where the Bible ends — in the book of Revelation. Over the final two weeks, you will enter a world of visions, symbols, and cosmic drama that has captivated and confounded readers for two thousand years. But the central message is profoundly simple: Jesus wins. The risen Christ stands among his churches, calling them to faithfulness. The Lamb who was slain stands at the center of heaven’s throne, holding the destiny of the world. The powers of evil rage and fall. Babylon crumbles. Death itself is destroyed. And then — the vision that has sustained Christian hope across every century — a new heaven and a new earth, the holy city descending like a bride, God dwelling with his people, every tear wiped away, the river of life flowing, the tree of life bearing fruit for the healing of the nations. The curse of Genesis is reversed. What was lost in the garden is restored in the city. And the final words of Scripture are both an invitation and a prayer: “Come, Lord Jesus.”

You began this year with the Word who was in the beginning. You end it with the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, who says, “Behold, I am making all things new.”

Week 42. Joy and Faithfulness

Memory Verse: Philippians 4:6-7 (ESV)

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

The Big Picture

This week completes Philippians with its famous contentment passage, then moves to Colossians — Paul’s magnificent letter proclaiming Christ’s supremacy over all things, written to combat a syncretistic heresy threatening the Colossian church. The week closes with the shortest of Paul’s letters, Philemon — a personal appeal for a runaway slave that revolutionizes social relationships in Christ.

Philippians 4 is one of the most beloved chapters in all of Paul’s letters, containing the famous exhortations to “rejoice in the Lord always,” the promise that the “peace of God” will guard believers’ hearts, and Paul’s autobiographical testimony of learning contentment in every circumstance. His declaration “I can do all things through him who strengthens me” has become one of the most quoted (and sometimes most misapplied) verses in Scripture. Written from prison, these words carry extraordinary weight — this is not theoretical theology but hard-won wisdom forged in chains.

Colossians then takes us into the cosmic dimensions of Christology. The Christ Hymn of Colossians 1:15-20 stands as one of the highest declarations of Christ’s deity and supremacy in the entire New Testament. Paul wrote to the Colossians to combat a dangerous heresy that mixed Jewish legalism, Greek philosophy, and mystical angel worship into a system that diminished Christ’s sufficiency. His response is not merely to refute errors point by point but to present such an overwhelming vision of who Christ is that every lesser allegiance fades to insignificance. The letter to Philemon, tucked between these theological giants, demonstrates how the gospel transforms the most entrenched social structures from the inside out — not through political revolution but through the radical logic of brotherhood in Christ.

This Week’s Readings

Day	Reading	Focus
1	Philippians 4	Rejoice in the Lord Always, Peace of God, Contentment, “I Can Do All Things”
2	Colossians 1	Supremacy of Christ — Christ Hymn, Reconciliation, Paul’s Labor
3	Colossians 2	Fullness of Deity in Christ, Don’t Be Captive to Philosophy, Dead to Regulations
4	Colossians 3	Set Minds on Things Above, Put Off/Put On, Household Code
5	Colossians 4 + Philemon	Prayer, Wisdom with Outsiders, Greetings; Appeal for Onesimus

Key Characters

- **Paul** — Apostle, writing from Roman imprisonment (c. 60-62 AD)
- **Euodia and Syntyche** — Two women in the Philippian church experiencing conflict
- **Epaphras** — Founder of the Colossian church, currently with Paul in Rome
- **Tychicus** — Paul’s messenger carrying the letters to Colossae
- **Onesimus** — A runaway slave from Colossae who became a believer through Paul
- **Philemon** — Onesimus’s master, a Christian leader in the Colossian church
- **Archippus** — A ministry leader in Colossae, possibly Philemon’s son

Key Locations

- **Rome** — Paul’s location, under house arrest
- **Philippi** — Church in Macedonia, Paul’s first European church plant

- **Colossae** — Small city in the Lycus Valley (modern Turkey), near Laodicea and Hierapolis

Key Themes

- **Joy and contentment** — Not dependent on circumstances but rooted in Christ
- **Supremacy of Christ** — Over all creation, all powers, all philosophy, all religion
- **Reconciliation** — Both cosmic (all things reconciled through Christ) and personal (Onesimus and Philemon)
- **Sufficiency of Christ** — No need to add philosophy, legalism, or mysticism to the gospel
- **New identity in Christ** — “Put off” the old self, “put on” the new; master and slave become brothers

Week 43. Pastoral Guidance

Memory Verse: 1 Timothy 4:12 (ESV)

Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.

The Big Picture

Paul’s letters to Timothy and Titus — the Pastoral Epistles — shift from theology to practical church leadership. Timothy, Paul’s “true son in the faith,” faces false teachers in Ephesus. These letters provide the church’s earliest guidelines for worship, leadership qualifications, and congregational care. Written between Paul’s two Roman imprisonments (~62-67 AD).

The Pastoral Epistles occupy a unique place in the Pauline corpus. While letters like Romans and Galatians develop theology in sweeping argument, 1 Timothy reads more like a church manual — practical, specific, and deeply concerned with what healthy congregational life actually looks like on the ground. Timothy had been Paul’s companion since the second missionary journey, when Paul recruited the young man from Lystra (Acts 16:1-3). Now Timothy serves as Paul’s apostolic delegate in Ephesus, one of the largest and most strategically important cities in the Roman Empire. The challenges are immense: false teachers are promoting speculative myths and genealogies, the church needs organizational structure as it matures beyond its founding generation, and questions about worship practices, leadership qualifications, and care for vulnerable members demand authoritative guidance. Paul writes not as an academic theologian but as a spiritual father equipping his son for the hardest assignment of his life.

This Week’s Readings

Day	Reading	Focus
1	1 Timothy 1	Charge Against False Teachers, Sound Doctrine, Paul’s Testimony, Fight the Good Fight
2	1 Timothy 2	Pray for All People Including Kings, One God / One Mediator, Instructions on Worship
3	1 Timothy 3	Qualifications for Overseers and Deacons, “Great Is the Mystery of Godliness”
4	1 Timothy 4	Warning Against Abandoning Faith, Train in Godliness, “Don’t Let Anyone Look Down on Your Youth”
5	1 Timothy 5	Treat Church as Family, Widows’ List, Elders Deserve Double Honor

Key Characters

- **Paul** — Apostle, writing between his first and second Roman imprisonments (~62-67 AD)
- **Timothy** — Paul’s “true son in the faith,” apostolic delegate in Ephesus, young leader with a Jewish mother and Greek father
- **Hymenaeus and Alexander** — False teachers Paul has “handed over to Satan” as discipline
- **Ephesian false teachers** — Promoting myths, genealogies, and speculative teachings

Key Locations

- **Ephesus** — Major port city in Asia Minor, home of the Temple of Artemis, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World
- **Macedonia** — Where Paul was when he wrote to Timothy (1 Timothy 1:3)

Key Themes

- **Sound doctrine vs. false teaching** — The healthy teaching of the gospel contrasted with myths, genealogies, and speculative theology
- **Church order and leadership** — Qualifications for overseers, deacons, and the care of widows and elders
- **Godliness as a way of life** — Not mere intellectual belief but a disciplined, Christ-shaped pattern of living that touches every area of congregational and personal life

Week 44. Guarding the Faith

Memory Verse: Titus 2:11-12 (ESV)

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in this present age.

The Big Picture

We complete 1 Timothy with its warning about the love of money, then move to Titus — Paul’s letter to his associate organizing churches on the island of Crete. The grace passage in Titus 2:11-14 is one of the most beautiful summaries of salvation in the NT. The week closes with the opening of 2 Timothy — Paul’s final letter, written from his second Roman imprisonment as he faces execution.

This week traverses an extraordinary range of pastoral territory. First Timothy 6 confronts the seductive power of wealth with one of the Bible’s most quoted (and most misquoted) statements: “The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.” Paul then establishes the radical alternative: “Godliness with contentment is great gain.” Moving to Titus, we encounter Paul’s letter to another apostolic delegate — this time on the Mediterranean island of Crete, where the cultural challenges are distinct and the churches are younger. Titus must appoint elders, silence false teachers, and teach sound doctrine to diverse groups within the congregation. The letter to Titus contains what many scholars regard as the most theologically compressed summary of grace in the entire New Testament (2:11-14), alongside the striking rebirth passage of 3:4-7. The week closes with the emotionally charged opening of 2 Timothy — Paul’s last surviving letter, written from a Roman dungeon as he faces execution. The shift from the relatively calm tone of 1 Timothy and Titus to the deeply personal urgency of 2 Timothy is palpable. Paul is lonely, cold, and abandoned by many — yet utterly unashamed and fully confident in the gospel he has guarded his entire life.

This Week’s Readings

Day	Reading	Focus
1	1 Timothy 6	Godliness with Contentment, Love of Money, Fight the Good Fight, Guard the Deposit
2	Titus 1	Set Things in Order in Crete, Elder Qualifications, Rebuke False Teachers
3	Titus 2	Sound Teaching for Each Group, Grace Has Appeared, Blessed Hope
4	Titus 3	Good Works, Saved by Mercy Through Rebirth, Avoid Foolish Controversies
5	2 Timothy 1	Fan Into Flame, Spirit of Power/Love/Self-Discipline, Guard the Good Deposit

Key Characters

- **Paul** — Apostle, moving from relative freedom (1 Timothy, Titus) to his final imprisonment (2 Timothy)
- **Timothy** — Paul's delegate in Ephesus, recipient of Paul's final letter
- **Titus** — Paul's delegate in Crete, a Gentile convert and trusted co-worker
- **Onesiphorus** — A faithful friend who searched for Paul in Rome and was not ashamed of his chains
- **Lois and Eunice** — Timothy's grandmother and mother, who nurtured his faith from childhood

Key Locations

- **Ephesus** — Timothy's assignment, major city in Asia Minor
- **Crete** — Large Mediterranean island where Titus is organizing churches
- **Rome** — Paul's location during the writing of 2 Timothy, imprisoned for the second and final time

Key Themes

- **Contentment vs. the love of money** — True wealth is godliness with contentment; the pursuit of riches leads to ruin and spiritual destruction
- **Grace as teacher** — The grace that saves also instructs, teaching believers to reject ungodliness and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives while awaiting Christ's return
- **Courage and faithfulness under pressure** — Paul's call to Timothy to "fan into flame" his gift and not be ashamed of the gospel is issued against the backdrop of abandonment and approaching death

Week 45. Paul's Final Words

Memory Verse: 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Timothy 4:7 (ESV)

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

The Big Picture

Paul's final letter is a tearful, urgent charge to Timothy — the last words of a dying apostle to his spiritual son. Writing from the cold, damp confines of what tradition identifies as the Mamertine Prison in Rome, Paul knows his execution is near. He pours out his heart to Timothy with a mix of fatherly tenderness, apostolic authority, and unflinching courage. Every line throbs with urgency: guard the gospel, endure hardship, remain faithful even when others desert. The metaphors pile up — soldier, athlete, farmer, workman, vessel — each one pressing the same point: the Christian life demands discipline, perseverance, and wholehearted devotion. And then comes the magnificent declaration that crowns Paul's entire ministry: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."

Then we cross into the majestic world of Hebrews, the New Testament's great theological treatise on how Jesus is the fulfillment and surpassing of everything in the Old Testament. Written to Jewish Christians who were tempted to abandon their faith and return to the familiar rituals of Judaism under the pressure of persecution, Hebrews systematically demonstrates that Jesus is greater than angels, greater than Moses, a better high priest, and the mediator of a better covenant. The opening verses are among the most exalted Christological statements in all of Scripture: God, who spoke through the prophets in many ways, has now spoken definitively through His Son, the exact representation of His being. From that towering prologue, the author moves to show that the Son is superior even to the angels — the very beings through whom the old covenant was mediated.

These five days take us from Paul's deathbed to the theological heights of Hebrews, from the deeply personal to the cosmically grand. Together they remind us that the gospel is worth dying for and that the One at its center is supreme over all creation.

This Week's Readings

Day	Reading	Title
1	2 Timothy 2	Soldier, Athlete, Farmer — Endure Hardship, Approved Workman, Flee Youthful Passions
2	2 Timothy 3	Terrible Times in Last Days, Evil People, All Scripture Is God-Breathed
3	2 Timothy 4	Preach the Word, "I Have Fought the Good Fight", Paul's Farewell
4	Hebrews 1	God Has Spoken Through His Son, Son Superior to Angels
5	Hebrews 2	Don't Drift Away, Jesus Made Lower Than Angels, Pioneer of Salvation

Key Characters

- **Paul** — Apostle writing his final letter from Roman imprisonment
- **Timothy** — Paul's spiritual son and ministry partner, pastor at Ephesus
- **Demas** — Former companion who deserted Paul, "having loved this present world"
- **Luke** — The only companion remaining with Paul
- **Mark** — Restored to Paul's good graces after the earlier rift with Barnabas
- **Jesus Christ** — The Son through whom God has spoken, superior to angels

Key Locations

- **Rome** — Paul's second imprisonment, likely the Mamertine Prison
- **Ephesus** — Where Timothy was serving as pastor
- **Troas** — Where Paul left his cloak and scrolls with Carpus

Key Themes

- **Perseverance in suffering** — The Christian life demands endurance through hardship
- **The authority and sufficiency of Scripture** — All Scripture is God-breathed and profitable
- **The supremacy of Christ** — Jesus is superior to angels and all created things
- **Faithfulness to the end** — Paul models finishing well and charges Timothy to do the same
- **Warning against apostasy** — Both 2 Timothy and Hebrews warn of falling away

Week 46. A Better Covenant

Memory Verse: Hebrews 4:12; Hebrews 4:15-16 (ESV)

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

The Big Picture

The author of Hebrews builds an extraordinary argument: Jesus is greater than Moses (the lawgiver), greater than Joshua (who could not give true rest), and a high priest of an entirely different and superior order — the order of Melchizedek. Interwoven are passionate warnings against spiritual drift and encouragement to press on to maturity. The Sabbath rest passage (ch 4) and the Melchizedek argument (ch 7) are among the most theologically dense passages in the NT.

Having established Christ's superiority over the angels in chapters 1-2, the author now moves to an even more audacious claim: Jesus is greater than Moses himself. For a Jewish audience, this was a more provocative assertion than the angel argument. Moses was the supreme figure of the Hebrew Scriptures — the liberator, the lawgiver, the covenant mediator, the one with whom God spoke "face to face, as a man speaks with his friend" (Exodus 33:11). Yet the author argues that Jesus surpasses Moses as the builder

surpasses the house he built. From there, the argument escalates through the failure of Joshua to provide lasting rest (chapter 4), the nature of true high priesthood (chapter 5), the danger of falling away versus the certainty of God’s oath (chapter 6), and the stunning revelation that Jesus belongs to an entirely different priestly order — Melchizedek’s — which preceded, transcended, and rendered obsolete the entire Levitical system (chapter 7).

These five chapters are not merely academic theology. They are pastoral pleading. The warnings are real because the danger is real: a community of Jewish Christians under pressure to abandon their confession and return to the familiar structures of Judaism. The author’s strategy is to show that going back is not returning to safety but to shadows, not to substance but to the inferior copy. The reality — the true rest, the true priesthood, the true covenant — is found only in Christ.

This Week’s Readings

Day	Reading	Title
1	Hebrews 3	Jesus Greater Than Moses — Don’t Harden Your Hearts
2	Hebrews 4	The Sabbath Rest and the Living Word
3	Hebrews 5	Called by God — The Order of Melchizedek
4	Hebrews 6	Press On to Maturity — Hope as an Anchor
5	Hebrews 7	Melchizedek and the Permanent Priesthood

Key Characters

- **Jesus** — Greater than Moses, greater than Joshua, high priest after the order of Melchizedek, source of eternal salvation
- **Moses** — The faithful servant in God’s house, surpassed by the Son who built the house
- **Joshua** — The successor to Moses who led Israel into Canaan but could not provide true rest
- **Aaron** — The first Levitical high priest, representing the priesthood Jesus supersedes
- **Melchizedek** — The mysterious priest-king of Salem from Genesis 14, prototype of Christ’s eternal priesthood
- **Abraham** — The patriarch who received God’s oath and paid tithes to Melchizedek

Key Locations

- **The wilderness** — Israel’s forty years of wandering, used as a warning against unbelief
- **Canaan** — The promised land that proved to be only a shadow of the true rest God offers
- **Salem** — Ancient name for Jerusalem, where Melchizedek served as both king and priest

Key Themes

- **Greater than Moses** — Jesus surpasses the greatest figure of the old covenant as builder surpasses building
- **Sabbath rest** — A deeper rest remains for God’s people, entered by faith rather than by conquest
- **The living word** — Scripture is living, active, and penetrating, discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart
- **High priest who sympathizes** — Jesus understands human weakness from the inside because He was tempted in every way
- **Melchizedek’s superior order** — A priesthood that precedes, transcends, and renders obsolete the Levitical system
- **Warning and encouragement** — Stern warnings against falling away are balanced by assurances of God’s faithfulness

Week 47. The New and Living Way

Memory Verse: Hebrews 11:1 (ESV)

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

The Big Picture

The argument of Hebrews reaches its magnificent climax. The new covenant replaces the old (ch 8), Christ's blood opens the heavenly sanctuary (ch 9), his once-for-all sacrifice makes all other sacrifices obsolete (ch 10). Then comes the faith chapter — the great "Hall of Heroes" survey from Abel to the prophets (ch 11) — leading to the call to run our race with endurance, eyes fixed on Jesus (ch 12).

These five chapters form the theological and rhetorical summit of the entire letter. In chapters 8-10, the author completes the comparison between the old and new covenants that has been building since chapter 1. The argument moves from sanctuary (where Christ ministers) to sacrifice (what Christ offered) to access (what Christ's work achieves for believers). The old system was never designed to be permanent — it was a shadow cast by the coming reality, a sketch pointing toward the masterpiece. Now that the reality has arrived in Christ, the shadow has served its purpose.

But the author of Hebrews is not content with theological argument alone. Chapter 11 functions as the great turning point, shifting from exposition to narrative, from doctrine to story. By surveying the entire sweep of Israel's history through the lens of faith, the author demonstrates that the principle of trusting God's unseen promises has always been the heartbeat of the people of God. Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Moses, Rahab — all lived by faith in what they could not yet see. They died without receiving the fullness of what was promised, yet they were commended for their faith. The implication is stunning: if they could trust God when the promises were still distant shadows, how much more should we trust now that the reality has come in Christ?

Chapter 12 then draws the practical conclusion. With such a "great cloud of witnesses" surrounding us — not as spectators in an arena but as those whose completed testimony encourages us — we are called to run the race set before us. The race metaphor is not about speed but about endurance, about stripping away every weight and entangling sin, about fixing our eyes on Jesus, who is both the author (pioneer, originator) and perfecter (completer, finisher) of faith. The chapter closes with one of the most awe-inspiring contrasts in Scripture: Mount Sinai, where the old covenant was given in terror, versus Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, where believers have come through Christ. We have received an unshakeable kingdom — therefore, let us worship God with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.

This Week's Readings

Day	Reading	Focus
1	Hebrews 8	Jesus Ministers in True Heavenly Tabernacle, New Covenant Replaces Old
2	Hebrews 9	Christ Enters the Greater Tabernacle with His Own Blood
3	Hebrews 10	Once-for-All Sacrifice, Draw Near, Hold Fast, Spur One Another
4	Hebrews 11	The Hall of Faith Heroes from Abel to the Prophets
5	Hebrews 12	Run the Race, Fix Eyes on Jesus, Mount Sinai vs Mount Zion

Key Characters

- **Jesus Christ** — The mediator of the new covenant, the great High Priest who entered the heavenly sanctuary with his own blood
- **Abel, Enoch, Noah** — The earliest faith heroes, each demonstrating a different dimension of trust in God
- **Abraham and Sarah** — The paradigmatic couple of faith, who obeyed God's call into the unknown and believed in impossible promises
- **Moses** — The deliverer who chose suffering with God's people over the treasures of Egypt
- **Rahab** — The Canaanite prostitute whose faith saved her family and placed her in Israel's story

Key Locations

- **The Heavenly Tabernacle** — The true sanctuary where Christ ministers, of which the earthly tabernacle was merely a copy and shadow
- **Mount Sinai** — Where the old covenant was given in thunder, fire, and terror
- **Mount Zion** — The heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God, to which believers have already come through Christ

Key Themes

- **New covenant superiority** — The new covenant, prophesied by Jeremiah, replaces the old with internal transformation rather than external regulation
- **Once-for-all sacrifice** — Christ's single offering accomplishes what endless animal sacrifices never could: the permanent removal of sin
- **Faith as substance** — Faith is not wishful thinking but the substantive reality of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen
- **Endurance through witness** — The testimony of those who have gone before provides both encouragement and accountability for the present race
- **The consuming fire** — God's holiness is not softened in the new covenant but met through the mediator Jesus, whose blood speaks a better word than Abel's

Week 48. Living Faith

Memory Verse: 1 Peter 1:3-4 (ESV)

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you.

The Big Picture

Hebrews concludes with practical exhortations, then we enter the General Epistles. 1 Peter was written to scattered believers facing persecution — perhaps the Neronian persecution beginning in Rome. Peter, the fisherman who once denied Christ, now writes with pastoral tenderness about living hope, suffering with grace, and the privilege of being God's royal priesthood.

Peter's first letter is one of the most practically relevant documents in the New Testament for Christians living as minorities in a hostile culture. Writing around 62-64 AD from Rome (referred to cryptically as "Babylon" in 5:13), Peter addresses believers scattered across five Roman provinces in Asia Minor — Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. These were not predominantly Jewish-Christian churches but largely Gentile converts who had formerly participated in the pagan social life of their communities. Their conversion had severed them from the social networks, trade guilds, and civic religious observances that structured Greco-Roman society, making them "foreigners and exiles" in a very real social sense. Peter does not promise that their suffering will end; instead, he reframes it within the larger story of Christ's own suffering, death, and vindication, giving them a theology of hope that can sustain them through the fire.

The transition from Hebrews 13 to 1 Peter is thematically seamless. Hebrews closes with exhortations about mutual love, contentment, and going to Jesus "outside the camp" — willingly accepting the social shame of identifying with Christ. First Peter picks up exactly this theme and develops it across five chapters of sustained pastoral encouragement. Together, these readings paint a portrait of living faith: faith that endures hardship, faith that transforms character, faith that sustains communities under pressure, and faith that looks forward to an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade.

This Week's Readings

Day	Reading	Focus
1	Hebrews 13	Mutual Love, Marriage Honored, Contentment, Jesus Outside the Gate, Benediction

Day	Reading	Focus
2	1 Peter 1	Living Hope Through Resurrection, Tested Faith, Be Holy, Born Again
3	1 Peter 2	Living Stones, Royal Priesthood, Submit to Authority, Christ's Example of Suffering
4	1 Peter 3	Wives and Husbands, Suffering for Doing Good, Christ Preached to Spirits
5	1 Peter 4	Live for God Not Human Desires, Suffering as a Christian, Fiery Ordeal

Key Characters

- **Peter** — Apostle, eyewitness of Christ, writing from Rome near the end of his life (c. 62-64 AD)
- **Silvanus (Silas)** — Peter's amanuensis (secretary), who helped compose the letter (1 Peter 5:12)
- **Mark** — John Mark, whom Peter calls "my son," likely present in Rome (1 Peter 5:13)
- **The author of Hebrews** — Unknown writer concluding with pastoral exhortations and greetings mentioning Timothy

Key Locations

- **Rome ("Babylon")** — Peter's location, the imperial capital increasingly hostile to Christians
- **Asia Minor** — The five Roman provinces whose scattered believers receive Peter's letter
- **Jerusalem** — The "outside the camp" imagery of Hebrews 13 evokes Christ's crucifixion outside the city walls

Key Themes

- **Living hope** — A hope grounded in Christ's resurrection, not in earthly circumstances
- **Suffering and glory** — The pattern of Christ's path (suffering then glory) becomes the pattern for believers
- **Holy living as witness** — Moral distinctiveness in a pagan culture as both obedience and testimony
- **Royal priesthood** — The corporate identity of God's people, fulfilling Israel's original calling
- **Jesus outside the gate** — Willingness to bear social reproach for identifying with Christ

Week 49. Stand Firm

Memory Verse: 1 Peter 5:7 (ESV)

Casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.

The Big Picture

Peter concludes his first letter with a charge to elders and a call to humility, then his second letter confronts false teachers and the scoffers who mock Christ's return. Jude — likely Jesus' half-brother — writes a fiery letter defending the faith against infiltrators. Both 2 Peter and Jude end with extraordinary promises: new heavens and earth (2 Peter) and the magnificent doxology "to him who is able to keep you from stumbling" (Jude).

This week's readings bring together some of the most practical pastoral instruction in the New Testament (1 Peter 5) with some of the most urgent polemical writing (2 Peter 2, Jude). The contrast is striking: Peter closes his first letter with the gentle image of a shepherd caring for the flock and the tender invitation to "cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you." But when false teachers threaten that same flock, both Peter and Jude shift into fierce prophetic denunciation, drawing on examples of divine judgment from across the Old Testament to warn that God takes the corruption of his people seriously.

Second Peter and Jude share extensive material, with most scholars recognizing a literary relationship between the two letters — either Jude drew on 2 Peter, 2 Peter drew on Jude, or both drew on a common

source. Regardless of the direction of dependence, the shared material reveals the urgency of the problem: false teachers were infiltrating churches, distorting the grace of God into a license for immorality, and denying the authority of Jesus Christ. These were not outsiders attacking the church but insiders corrupting it from within — “hidden reefs at your love feasts” as Jude memorably describes them (Jude 12).

Yet these letters do not end in despair. Second Peter closes with the breathtaking vision of “new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness dwells” (2 Peter 3:13), and Jude concludes with one of the most glorious doxologies in Scripture: “To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy — to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen” (Jude 24-25). The message is clear: stand firm, because the God who keeps you is stronger than every threat against you, and the future he promises is worth every present struggle.

This Week’s Readings

Day	Reading	Focus
1	1 Peter 5	Elders as Shepherds, Humility, Casting Anxiety on God, Resisting the Devil
2	2 Peter 1	Growing in Virtue, Peter’s Eyewitness of the Transfiguration, Scripture’s Origin
3	2 Peter 2	False Teachers, Divine Judgment on Angels/Flood/Sodom, Balaam’s Error
4	2 Peter 3	Scoffers and the Second Coming, New Heavens and New Earth
5	Jude	Contending for the Faith, False Teachers Condemned, The Great Doxology

Key Characters

- **Peter** — Apostle, eyewitness of Christ’s transfiguration, writing near the end of his life (c. 64-67 AD)
- **Jude** — Brother of James and half-brother of Jesus, a leader in the early church who identifies himself humbly as “a servant of Jesus Christ”
- **Balaam** — The Old Testament prophet-for-hire, cited in both letters as a type of the false teacher who corrupts God’s people for profit
- **Michael the Archangel** — Referenced in Jude’s account of the dispute over Moses’ body, modeling restraint even against the devil

Key Locations

- **Rome (“Babylon”)** — Peter’s location, where the growing hostility of the Roman state looms over his pastoral instruction
- **The churches of Asia Minor** — The scattered communities receiving Peter’s letters, under both social pressure and internal doctrinal threat
- **New heavens and new earth** — The ultimate destination, the renewed creation where righteousness dwells

Key Themes

- **Faithful shepherding** — Elders are called to lead by example rather than compulsion, serving willingly and looking forward to the Chief Shepherd’s reward
- **Growth in virtue** — Genuine faith expresses itself in progressive character development, adding virtue, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, affection, and love
- **Confronting false teaching** — Both Peter and Jude demonstrate that defending the faith sometimes requires naming error and warning the community in the strongest terms
- **The certainty of Christ’s return** — Against scoffers who mock the delay, Peter reframes divine patience as salvation opportunity and promises the ultimate renewal of all creation
- **Kept by God** — Jude’s doxology declares that perseverance is ultimately God’s work: he is able to keep believers from stumbling and present them faultless before his glory

Week 50. Walking in the Light

Memory Verse: 1 John 1:9 (ESV)

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

The Big Picture

The Johannine Epistles — 1, 2, and 3 John — bring us full circle to the voice of the “beloved disciple,” the apostle who leaned on Jesus’ chest at the Last Supper and who stood at the foot of the cross. Written likely in the 90s AD from Ephesus, these letters address a community in crisis. A group of teachers has departed from the congregation, denying that Jesus Christ came in the flesh and claiming a spiritual enlightenment that transcended ordinary moral obligations. John writes to reassure the faithful, to provide clear tests for distinguishing true faith from counterfeit, and to ground the community once again in the fundamental realities: God is light, God is love, and authentic faith shows itself in both right belief and right living.

First John is one of the most intimate documents in the New Testament. It reads less like a formal letter and more like a pastoral meditation, circling again and again around three interlocking themes: light versus darkness, love versus hatred, and truth versus falsehood. The vocabulary is deliberately simple — John uses fewer than three hundred unique Greek words — but the theology is profound. The Elder (as John identifies himself in 2 and 3 John) writes as an eyewitness who heard, saw, and touched the Word of life (1:1-3), and he writes so that his readers’ joy may be complete. The crisis of false teaching has shaken the community’s confidence, and John’s purpose is to rebuild assurance on the twin foundations of confessed sin and demonstrated love.

Second and Third John are the two shortest books in the New Testament — each could fit on a single sheet of papyrus, reflecting the standard length of a private letter in the ancient world. Second John warns a “chosen lady and her children” (likely a house church) against welcoming the same false teachers who have troubled the larger community. Third John commends a faithful believer named Gaius, condemns an authoritarian leader named Diotrephes who has refused to receive traveling missionaries, and holds up Demetrius as a model of goodness. Together, these brief letters reveal the messy, human reality of first-century church life: hospitality debates, power struggles, and the constant challenge of discerning truth from error.

This Week’s Readings

Day	Reading	Focus
1	1 John 1	Light, Confession — “From the Beginning,” God Is Light, Walk in the Light, Faithful to Forgive
2	1 John 2	Advocate, Love, Antichrist — Jesus Our Advocate, Test of Obedience, Do Not Love the World, Antichrists
3	1 John 3	Children of God, Love One Another — Lavished Love, We Shall Be Like Him, Love in Action and Truth
4	1 John 4	Test the Spirits, God Is Love — Every Spirit Tested, Perfect Love Casts Out Fear, We Love Because He First Loved Us
5	1 John 5 + 2 John + 3 John	Overcoming Faith, Eternal Life, Walking in Truth, Hospitality and Leadership

Key Characters

- **John (“the Elder”)** — The beloved disciple, last surviving apostle, writing from Ephesus near the end of his life (c. 85-95 AD)
- **The secessionists** — Former members of the community who denied the incarnation and departed, prompting John’s letters
- **Gaius** — A faithful believer commended by John for his hospitality to traveling missionaries (3 John)
- **Diotrephes** — A church leader who loves to be first and refuses to acknowledge John’s authority (3 John)

- **Demetrius** — A man well spoken of by everyone and by the truth itself (3 John)

Key Locations

- **Ephesus** — The probable base of John's ministry and the center of the Johannine community
- **Asia Minor** — The broader region of house churches addressed by John's circular letters
- **The house church of "the chosen lady"** — The specific congregation warned in 2 John about false teachers

Key Themes

- **God is light** — The fundamental character of God as pure, radiant holiness with no darkness at all, establishing the moral framework for authentic Christian living
- **God is love** — The definitive Johannine declaration, grounding ethics in God's own nature and his initiative in sending his Son as an atoning sacrifice
- **Tests of authentic faith** — Right belief (confessing Jesus came in the flesh), right behavior (obeying God's commands), and right love (loving brothers and sisters sacrificially)
- **Assurance and confidence** — John writes so that believers may know they have eternal life, countering the destabilizing claims of the false teachers
- **The incarnation as non-negotiable** — The insistence that Jesus Christ came "in the flesh" stands as the watershed doctrine separating truth from error

Week 51. Revelation: Visions of Glory

Memory Verse: Revelation 1:8 (ESV)

"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."

The Big Picture

We arrive at the final book of the Bible — and the final two weeks of our year-long journey. Revelation opens with John in exile on Patmos receiving a staggering vision of the risen Christ, followed by seven letters to real churches in Asia Minor. Then the scene shifts to heaven's throne room where the central drama of all reality unfolds: Who is worthy to open the sealed scroll? The answer — "the Lion who is also the Lamb" — sets the stage for everything that follows.

Revelation is the most misunderstood and most debated book in the New Testament, yet its central message is profoundly simple: Jesus wins. Written in the apocalyptic genre — a form of literature that uses vivid imagery, numbers, and cosmic symbolism to reveal hidden spiritual realities — Revelation draws on hundreds of Old Testament allusions (by some counts, over 500 references to the Hebrew Scriptures) to paint its picture of the climactic victory of God over evil. The seven letters to the churches in chapters 2-3 ground the book in the real struggles of real congregations, while the throne room vision of chapters 4-5 lifts the reader's gaze to the ultimate reality: the crucified and risen Lamb standing at the center of heaven's worship, holding the destiny of the world in his hands.

This week we read slowly through these opening five chapters, savoring the rich imagery and letting the vision reshape our understanding of who Christ is, what the church is called to be, and what reality looks like from heaven's perspective. The seven letters confront us with uncomfortable questions about our own faithfulness, while the throne room vision invites us into the worship that sustains us through whatever trials we face.

This Week's Readings

Day	Reading	Focus
1	Revelation 1	John's Vision of the Risen Christ on Patmos — Son of Man Among Lampstands
2	Revelation 2	Letters to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira

Day	Reading	Focus
3	Revelation 3	Letters to Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea
4	Revelation 4	The Throne Room of Heaven — Twenty-Four Elders, Four Living Creatures
5	Revelation 5	The Scroll and the Lamb — “Worthy Is the Lamb”

Key Characters

- **John** — The “beloved disciple,” now elderly, exiled to Patmos under Emperor Domitian (c. 95 AD)
- **The Risen Christ** — Appearing as the Son of Man among the lampstands, eyes like blazing fire, voice like rushing waters
- **The Seven Churches** — Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea — real congregations in Roman Asia Minor
- **The Twenty-Four Elders** — Heavenly figures representing the fullness of God’s people (12 tribes + 12 apostles)
- **The Four Living Creatures** — Angelic beings surrounding the throne, echoing Isaiah’s seraphim and Ezekiel’s cherubim
- **The Lamb** — The central figure of Revelation: the Lion of Judah who conquers by being slain

Key Locations

- **Patmos** — Small, rocky island in the Aegean Sea, used by Rome for political exile
- **The Seven Cities of Asia Minor** — Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea, forming a circuit in western modern-day Turkey
- **The Throne Room of Heaven** — The cosmic center of all reality, from which God governs the universe

Key Themes

- **The sovereignty of God** — The throne is the central image; God reigns over all history and all powers
- **The paradox of the Lamb** — Victory comes through suffering; the Lion conquers by being slain
- **The call to faithfulness** — Each church is summoned to endure, repent, or persevere amid specific pressures
- **Worship as reality** — Heaven’s ceaseless worship reveals what is most real and most true about the universe
- **Christ among the churches** — The risen Lord walks among his congregations, knowing them intimately

Week 52. Revelation: All Things New

Memory Verse: Revelation 21:4-5 (ESV)

He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away. And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.”

The Big Picture

The final week of our year-long journey. The three cycles of judgment (seals, trumpets, bowls) intensify as God’s wrath falls on a rebellious world. The cosmic battle between the Lamb and the dragon reaches its climax. Babylon falls. Christ returns. Death itself is destroyed. And then — the vision that has sustained Christian hope for two millennia — a new heaven, a new earth, the holy city descending, God dwelling with his people, every tear wiped away. “Behold, I am making all things new.” The Bible’s story ends where it began — with God and humanity together in a garden-city, the tree of life bearing fruit forever.

This week we read the most sustained stretch of apocalyptic literature in the New Testament. John's Revelation does not provide a chronological timeline of future events so much as a kaleidoscopic vision of the same fundamental reality viewed from multiple angles. The seals, trumpets, and bowls are not necessarily sequential but overlapping cycles that reveal with increasing intensity the truth about God's judgment on evil and his vindication of the faithful. The imagery is drawn overwhelmingly from the Old Testament — Daniel, Ezekiel, Isaiah, Zechariah, Exodus, and Genesis provide the symbolic vocabulary that John uses to describe what he has seen. To read Revelation well, we must resist the temptation to decode it as a puzzle and instead receive it as a worship experience, a prophetic drama that draws us into the throne room of God and assures us that the Lamb who was slain is now and forever the ruler of all.

The book's final chapters (21-22) bring the entire biblical narrative to its breathtaking conclusion. The new Jerusalem descends from heaven as a bride adorned for her husband. God himself will dwell with his people. There will be no more death, mourning, crying, or pain, "for the old order of things has passed away." The river of life flows from the throne. The tree of life bears twelve kinds of fruit, and its leaves are for the healing of the nations. The curse of Genesis 3 is reversed. What was lost in the garden is restored in the city. And the final words of Scripture are an invitation and a prayer: "The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' ... Amen. Come, Lord Jesus."

This Week's Readings

Day	Reading	Focus
1	Revelation 6-7	The Six Seals, Four Horsemen, Martyrs' Cry, 144,000 and the Great Multitude
2	Revelation 8-9	The Seventh Seal, Silence in Heaven, Trumpets 1-6, Locusts, No Repentance
3	Revelation 10-11	Little Scroll, Two Witnesses, Seventh Trumpet: "The Kingdom Has Come"
4	Revelation 12-14	The Woman, the Dragon, the Beasts, 666, Lamb on Mount Zion, Harvest
5	Revelation 15-22	Seven Bowls, Babylon Falls, Christ Returns, New Heaven, New Earth, Come Lord Jesus

Key Characters

- **The Lamb** — Jesus Christ, slain yet standing, the central figure of Revelation whose blood purchased people from every tribe, language, people, and nation
- **The Dragon** — Satan, the ancient serpent, thrown from heaven and waging war against the woman's offspring
- **The Two Beasts** — The beast from the sea (political/imperial power) and the beast from the earth (false prophet/religious deception), together forming an unholy parody of divine authority
- **The Two Witnesses** — Prophetic figures who testify during the tribulation, modeled on Moses and Elijah
- **The Great Multitude** — An innumerable throng from every nation, standing before the throne in white robes, washed in the Lamb's blood
- **The Bride** — The New Jerusalem, the holy city, the people of God prepared for eternal union with the Lamb

Key Locations

- **Heaven's Throne Room** — The cosmic center from which all judgment and salvation flow
- **Babylon the Great** — The symbolic city representing human civilization organized in rebellion against God
- **Armageddon (Har-Magedon)** — The symbolic battlefield of the final confrontation
- **The New Jerusalem** — The holy city descending from heaven, God's eternal dwelling with his people

Key Themes

- **The Lamb's victory** — The central message of Revelation is that the slain Lamb has already won the decisive victory, and all the judgments and battles flow from his accomplished work
- **Intensifying judgment** — The three cycles of seals, trumpets, and bowls reveal God's righteous judgment on evil with increasing severity, calling the world to repentance
- **The cosmic battle** — Behind human history lies a spiritual conflict between the Lamb and the dragon, between the city of God and Babylon, between truth and deception
- **All things new** — The goal of history is not the destruction of creation but its renewal; God will make all things new, reversing the curse and restoring the intimacy of Eden in the grandeur of the New Jerusalem
- **Come, Lord Jesus** — Revelation ends not with a period but with a prayer, an invitation, an eager longing for the return of the King