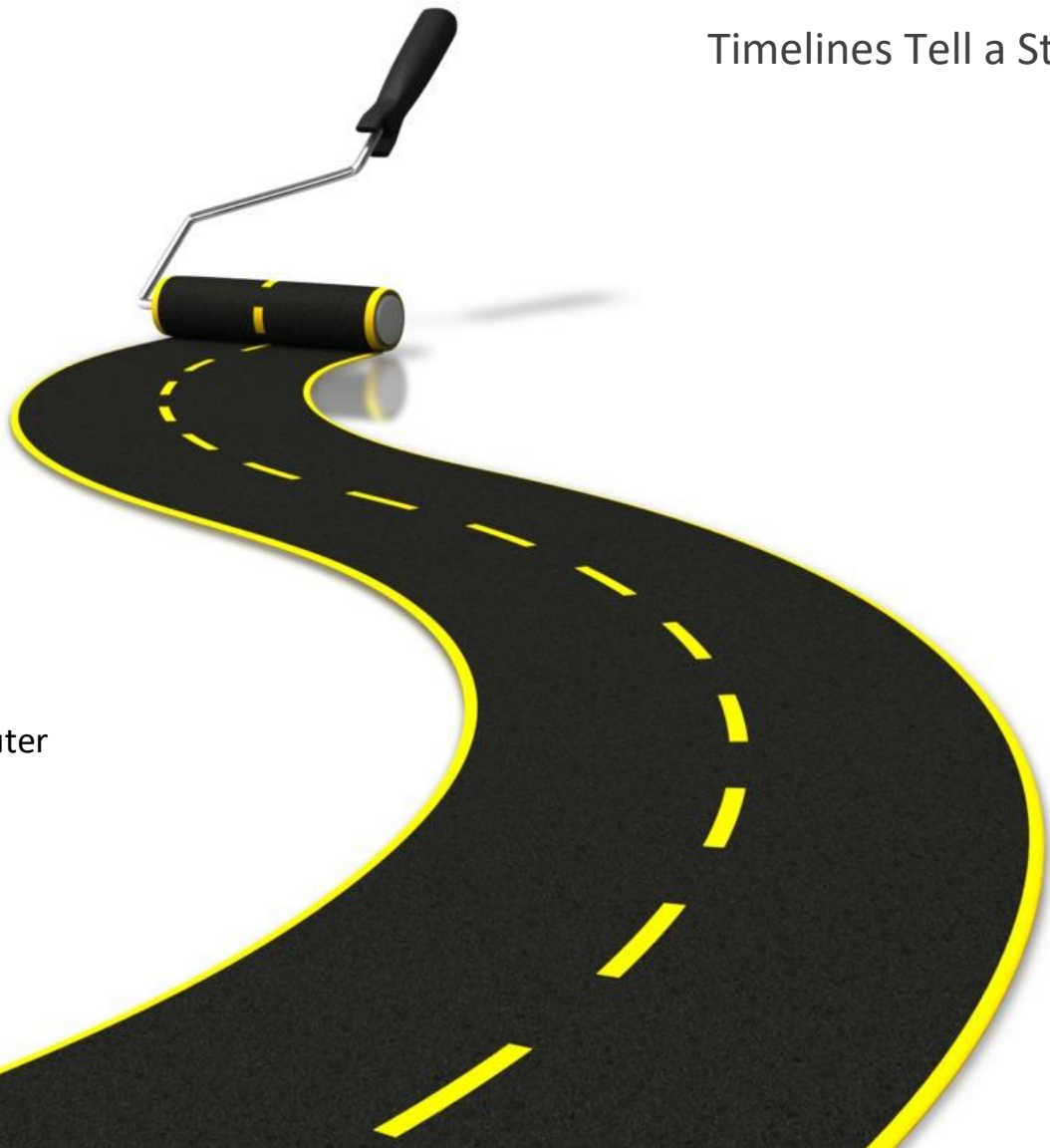


New Testament Chronology

Timelines Tell a Story



Tim Bouter

New Testament Chronology —

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INTRODUCTION

A chronology is more than a list of dates or timelines — it is a story told through an orderly sequence of events. This publication on New Testament Chronology is not meant to be an academic dissertation, for I am neither a scholar nor a historian. Being an Engineer, however, I do love to piece things together! As I read through the book of Acts several years ago, I realized that there are many references in Paul's Epistles to the historical account of his journeys. Linking these verses together helped me find out when and why Paul wrote his Epistles. Since then, my notes have grown to include all of the books in the New Testament. Understanding the context and theme of each book has made the New Testament come alive to me in a new way. My prayer and desire in sharing this chronological outline is that others may benefit in turn.

The dates provided in this booklet have been compiled from a variety of sources, including Scofield's reference notes, the Holman Bible Atlas and the Believer's Bible Commentary by William MacDonald, to mention a few. Some of the dates (particularly surrounding the birth and death of Christ) are uncertain. I don't pretend that the dates and timelines in this booklet are the final word on this subject, but rather a possible narrative based on the internal chronology of Scripture.

— Tim Bouter



CHRIST'S FIRST ADVENT

- Herod I (the Great) reigned from B.C. 37-4, and Jesus was born before his death. Herod the Great killed all the male children from two years old and under when he saw that he was deceived by the wise men (Matthew 2:16); therefore Jesus was likely born in **B.C. 5 or 6**.
- John the Baptist began his ministry in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius (Luke 3:1). Tiberius Caesar was the Roman Emperor from A.D. 14-37. However, two years before the death of Caesar Augustus, the Senate conferred upon Tiberius the same powers given to Augustus, making Tiberius a virtual coregent. The word used for “reign” in Luke 3:1 is different than the usual word, and reckons from Tiberius’ co-regency with Augustus in A.D. 12. John the Baptist therefore began his ministry in the year **A.D. 26**.
- Jesus began His public ministry in the fall of **A.D. 27**, when He was 31 or 32 years old¹ — Luke 3:23 says that **Jesus Himself began His ministry at about 30 years old**.
- John 2:13-22 describes the cleansing of the temple during the first Passover of Jesus’ ministry. When the Jews challenged His authority and demanded a sign from Him, Jesus told them, **“Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up”** (John 2:19). The Jews misinterpreted Jesus’ words (which he spoke about His own body) and responded by saying that the temple had been undergoing construction for 46 years already (John 2:20). The temple renovations began in B.C. 19 under Herod the Great and were not completed until A.D. 63. The first Passover of Jesus’ ministry can therefore be dated **A.D. 28**.¹
- John names three Passover feasts (John 2:13; 6:4; 11:55), implying a public ministry of around three years.
- Jesus was likely crucified in **A.D. 30**. This is supported by Daniel’s remarkable prophecy of 70 weeks:
 - **Seventy weeks are determined for your people and for your holy city... Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the command to restore and build Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince, there shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublesome times. And after the sixty-two weeks Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself.** (Daniel 9:24-26)
 - Daniel’s prophecy covers a time period of 490 years (literally seventy “sevens” or seventy weeks of years — compare with Genesis 29:27).
 - The starting point of Daniel’s 70 weeks is King Artaxerxes’ decree granting permission for Nehemiah to rebuild the city of Jerusalem and its walls. Nehemiah 2:1 specifically mentions that this decree was made in the month of Nissan during the 20th year of his rule. The 20th year of Artaxerxes can be dated B.C. 454 (reckoning from the time he began governing as coregent with his father Xerxes).²
 - Daniel prophesied that there would be 69 weeks³ (483 years) from the command to restore and build Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince, continuing from Nissan B.C. 454 to Nissan A.D. 30.¹

¹ Keep in mind that there is only one year from B.C. 1 to A.D. 1.

² The Annals of the World, James Ussher.

³ The first 69 weeks of Daniel’s prophecy are further broken into 7 and 62 since the city of Jerusalem would take 49 years (7 weeks) to be restored.

New Testament Chronology — Christ's First Advent

- On the 10th of Nissan, A.D. 30, the Lord Jesus was manifested as the Prince of Israel when He descended the Mount of Olives on a donkey's colt in fulfillment of Messianic prophecy (Zechariah 9:9).⁴
- This was exactly 483 years to the day from the command to restore and build Jerusalem: **"Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it, saying, 'If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes...and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation' "** (Luke 19:41-42, 44).
- The 10th of Nissan was also the day that the Passover lambs were selected and set apart for examination (Exodus 12:3-6). From His public presentation at the Triumphal Entry until the Day of Passover on the 14th of Nissan, Jesus was scrutinized, questioned, and interrogated by both the Jewish leaders and Roman authority. He was found to be the true Lamb of God, without spot or blemish.
- At the very time that the Passover lambs were killed at twilight (3:00p.m.) on the 14th of Nissan, Messiah was cut off in death on Calvary's Cross.⁵
- The timeline of the week of Christ's death and resurrection is admittedly difficult to piece together. There are many differing views on which day of the week the Lord Jesus was crucified, ranging from Wednesday to Friday (Friday, being of course, the traditional view). Without being dogmatic, the author suggests that the Gospel accounts taken together seem to indicate that Jesus was crucified on a Thursday:
 - Many scriptures indicate that Jesus would rise on the third day (Matthew 16:21; 17:23; 20:19; 27:64; Luke 9:22; 18:33; 24:7, 46; John 2:19). Sunday is three days from Thursday.
 - On Resurrection Sunday, the two on the road to Emmaus spoke to Jesus about the events of the past week culminating in His crucifixion. They said, **"Indeed, besides all this, today is the third day since these things happened"** (Luke 24:21).
 - John 19:31 specifically qualifies the Sabbath after the crucifixion date as a high day; it was not just a normal Sabbath. Exodus 12:16 and Leviticus 23:7 say that the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (which followed the Passover Day) was a holy convocation, and that no work could be completed on that day.
 - There were therefore two consecutive Sabbaths during the Passover week of Christ's crucifixion. This is supported by Matthew 28:1, which should be literally translated, **"Now after the Sabbaths [plural], as the first week began to dawn, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb."**⁶
 - In order for Palm Sunday to have fallen on the 10th of Nissan in fulfillment of the Passover type, the Lord Jesus must have been crucified on Thursday.
 - The detailed record of the last week of the life of Christ occupies about 1/3 of the Gospels. Yet a Friday crucifixion would call for an entire day of silence in the midst of this very busy week (usually designated as Wednesday).

⁴ The Triumphal Entry took place 5 days before the Passover, counting inclusively: **"Then, six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany... The next day a great multitude that had come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, took branches of palm trees and went out to meet Him, and cried out, 'Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!' The King of Israel!"** (John 12:1, 12-13).

⁵ Compare with Isaiah 53:7; 1st Corinthians 5:7.

⁶ A similar expression is found in Luke 6:1 — **Now it happened on the second Sabbath after the first;** i.e. the Saturday after the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

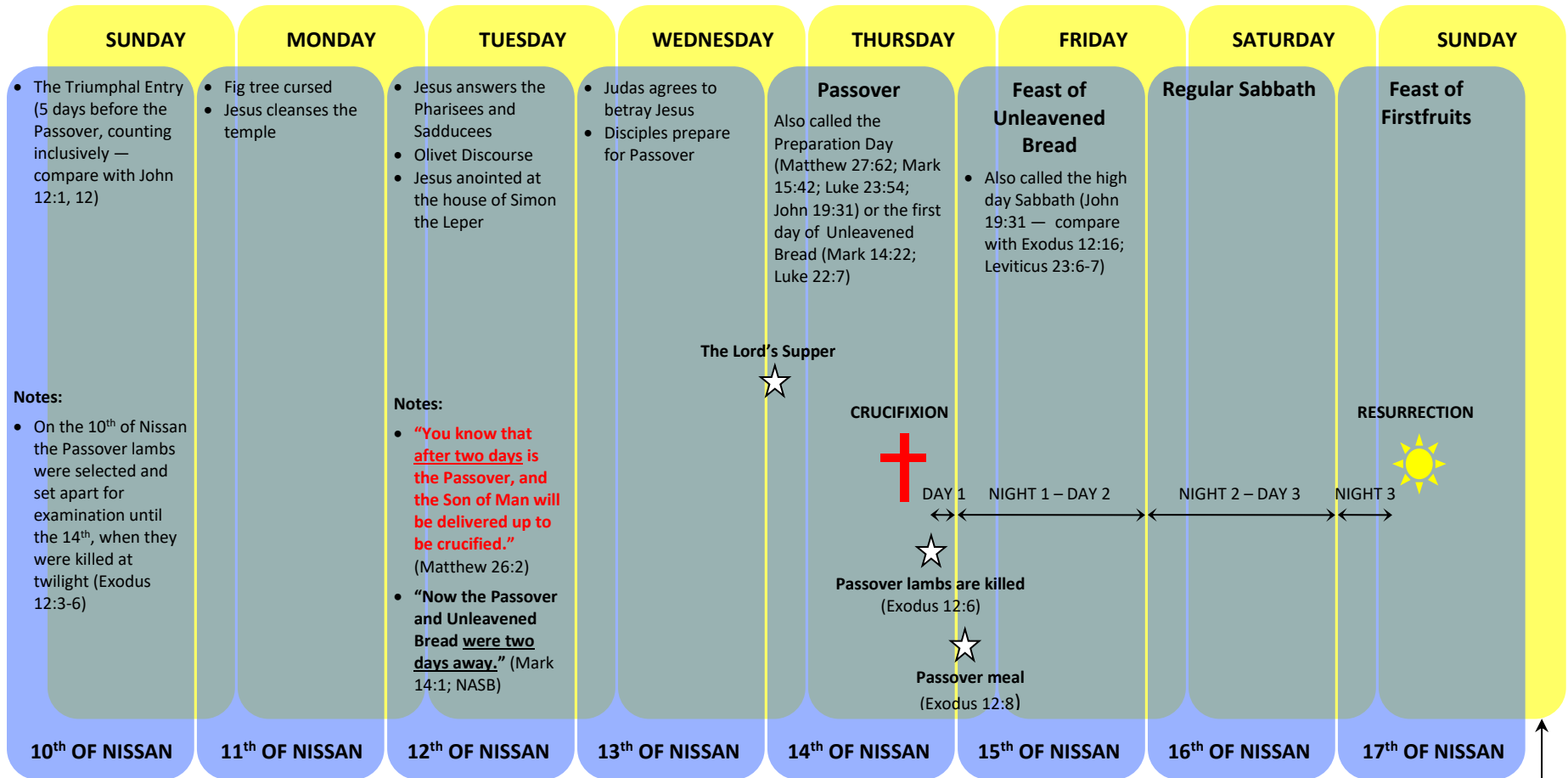
New Testament Chronology — Christ's First Advent

- The following timeline of the week of Christ's death and resurrection is suggested based on a careful comparison of Scripture verses:
 - Thursday was the crucifixion day.⁷
 - Friday was the high day Sabbath (the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread).
 - Saturday was the regular Sabbath.
 - Sunday was the resurrection day.
- In Matthew 12:40 Jesus says that He would be in the grave for 3 days and 3 nights. The suggested sequence of events harmonizes with this time-frame, as shown by the chart on Page 5:



⁷ The Passover began on the first full moon following the spring vernal equinox. According to the US Naval Observatory, the first full moon following the spring vernal equinox in the year A.D. 30 fell on Thursday, April 6.

TIMELINE OF THE WEEK OF CHRIST'S DEATH AND RESURRECTION



Notes:

- Domestic preparation for the Passover, including the removal of all leaven from houses, normally took place on the 14th of Nisan (compare with Exodus 12:15 — “on the first day you shall remove leaven from your houses”). The Jews began to eat unleavened bread on the evening of this day (Exodus 12:18). The Passover Day is therefore termed the first day of Unleavened Bread in Mark 14:12 and Luke 22:7 (not to be confused with the first day of *the Feast of Unleavened Bread*, which was the 15th of Nisan).
- The disciples prepared the final Passover before Christ's death on the 13th of Nisan. Since the evening of this day belonged by the Jews' manner to the day following, it is called the first day of Unleavened Bread in Matthew 26:17, Mark 14:12 and Luke 22:7.
- John 18:28 seems to indicate that the actual Passover meal was on the night of the crucifixion. The Lord's Supper may have been an earlier festive meal, in which case Luke 22:15 could be read as an unfulfilled wish; Jesus truly longed to eat that coming Passover with His disciples, but His desire could not be realized since He would die as the Passover Lamb before the next evening. Alternatively (but for the same reason), Jesus and His disciples may have celebrated the final Passover meal before His death one night earlier than usual.

The blue coloured days represent the Jewish calendar day which is measured from sunset to sunset.

The light coloured days represent a conventional calendar day measured from midnight to midnight.

THE GOSPELS

Matthew:
(before A.D. 60)

The first Gospel was written by the Apostle Matthew (sometimes called Levi). The Gospel of Matthew was written originally *for the Jews* and is rightfully placed at the beginning of the New Testament, for it is the connecting link between the prophets of old and the new dispensation of grace.⁸ We have no means of knowing just when this Gospel was written, although Luke in the opening of his Gospel says, **“Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of these things which have been fulfilled among us...it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto you an orderly account”** (Luke 1:1, 3). It is probable that Matthew and Mark were both written before the Gospel of Luke.

The Book of Matthew begins with the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy concerning Immanuel⁹ (chapter 1:23), and ends with the Lord’s promise that **“I, I am with you always, even to the end of the age”** (chapter 28:20).

Theme:

Christ, the King of Israel:

The genealogy in Matthew outlines Jesus’ kingly heritage as the Son of David¹⁰ through his earthly father Joseph, tracing the royal line through Solomon. This genealogy goes back to Abraham, the father of the Jews. Twice Jesus limits his ministry to the Jews in Matthew’s gospel, saying, **“I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel”** (Matthew 10:6; 15:24). Matthew is also the only gospel that refers to the Kingdom of Heaven, describing the rule of God over the earth which was promised to Israel as a literal kingdom with the Messiah as their sovereign King. After Jesus’ birth, the wise men inquired of Him, saying, **“Where is He who has been born King of the Jews?”** (Matthew 2:2). The accusation they put up over Jesus’ head when they crucified Him said, **“THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS”** (Matthew 27:37).

Mark:
(before A.D. 60)

The second Gospel was written by John Mark, the son of Mary of Jerusalem (Acts 12:12) and the nephew of Barnabas (Colossians 4:10). John was his Jewish name and Mark was his Roman name. Mark’s Gospel *was aimed at the Romans*; his Jewish terminology is translated and the geography of Israel is explained. In fact, Mark twice gives a Latin explanation for a Greek word (Mark 12:42; 15:16). The Gospels of Mark and John are both written in chronological order, while Matthew and Luke follow a moral order that is consistent with their themes. Mark was a companion of Peter (1 Peter 5:13) and tradition says that Mark’s

⁸ Commentary on Matthew, H.A. Ironside.

⁹ Immanuel means, “God with us.”

¹⁰ Christ is spoken of as the Son of David seven times in Matthew’s Gospel (chapter 1:1; 9:27; 12:23; 15:22; 20:30; 21:9; 22:42).

New Testament Chronology — The Gospels

Gospel is essentially Peter's reminiscences. Most Bible scholars teach that Mark was the first Gospel to be written.

Mark's Gospel begins with the heavens opening upon the Lord Jesus at His baptism (chapter 1:10), and closes with heaven receiving Him (chapter 16:19). Between the two is His life of service and self-sacrifice.

Theme: *Christ, the Servant:*

Mark is a book of deeds¹¹ more than words, evidenced by the fact that he records nineteen miracles, but only four parables. Since Christ is presented as the humble servant in the Book of Mark, no genealogy is given. This Gospel is summed up by chapter 10:45 — **For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.**

Luke:
(~A.D. 60)

The third Gospel was written by Luke, the beloved physician (Colossians 4:14). Luke was a Greek citizen and the only Gentile writer of the New Testament. Luke is the Gospel *for the Greeks*. The Gospel of Luke must have been written before Acts, since his **former account of all that Jesus began both to do and teach** is mentioned in Acts 1:1.

Luke opens with people praying at the temple (chapter 1:10), and closes with people praising God at the temple (chapter 24:53). The intervening chapters tell us how their prayers were answered in the person and work of the perfect Man.

Theme: *Christ, the Son of Man:*

Luke presents the genealogy of the Lord through his mother Mary, and therefore traces His ancestry through David's son Nathan. Luke's genealogy goes all the way back to the first man, Adam. In Luke's Gospel we see the Son of Man among men, reaching their need, touching their hearts and bringing them to the knowledge of God in delivering grace. This Gospel emphasises Jesus' *humanity*; His birth, development and human attributes are described in great detail. Jesus' prayer life¹² as the dependant Man is referred to more often in Luke than any of the other Gospels.

John:
(A.D. 85-95)

The fourth Gospel was written by the Apostle John, the disciple whom Jesus loved,¹³ and is also the last of the four Gospels to be written chronologically. John is *the universal Gospel*.

¹¹ The Greek word *eutheōs*, translated most often as "immediately" or "at once," occurs often in Mark, showing the continuous activities of the Servant.

¹² Luke 3:21; 5:16; 6:12; 9:18, 28-29; 11:1; 22:41-45.

¹³ John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2, 7; 21:20.

New Testament Chronology — The Gospels

The Gospel of John begins with Christ presented as the Word¹⁴ (chapter 1:1), and ends with the supposition that the entire world could not contain the books describing Him (chapter 21:25)!

Theme:

Christ, the Son of God:

John presents Jesus as the eternal Son of God¹⁵ who was sent from heaven by His Father to reveal God to mankind, and to offer eternal life to those who believe on Him. As the only begotten of the Father, Jesus had no beginning and therefore there is no genealogy given in the Book of John. In John's Gospel Jesus' *deity* is prominent. In John 19:7, when Pilate could not find any fault with Jesus, **the Jews answered him, "We have a law, and according to our law He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God."** John's purpose for writing the fourth Gospel was **that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name — John 20:31.**



¹⁴ Christ is God's living Word to man, the expression of God's thoughts.

¹⁵ This title occurs more than ten times in John's Gospel.

FOURFOLD MOTIFS

There are many fourfold motifs in the Bible that harmonise beautifully with the themes of the Gospels:

Authors of the Gospels:

- Matthew: The Gospel of the kingdom was written by Matthew, a Jew who was employed as a tax collector for the Roman Empire, to whom Israel was in bondage.
- Mark: This record of the perfect Servant was entrusted to the one who so conspicuously failed in service, but who later was profitable for the ministry: **“Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry”** (2 Timothy 4:11).
- Luke: The Gospel focussing on the humanity of the Lord Jesus was written by Luke, who was a physician; Luke carefully describes the perfect Man in the third Gospel.
- John: John was the closest disciple to the Lord Jesus (John 13:23), and could therefore write about the special relationship between the Father and the Son. This Gospel emphasises the Godhead glory of the Lord Jesus; John (a humble fisherman by trade) never refers to himself by name, but only as the disciple whom Jesus loved.

Four readerships of the Gospels:

- Matthew: written for the Jews — nation waiting for the Messiah.
- Mark: written for the Romans — nation respecting action, power, and orderliness.
- Luke: written for the Greeks — nation of culture who tried to perfect humanity.
- John: written for the world — **“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life”** (John 3:16).

Four colours of materials in the Tabernacle:¹⁶

- Matthew: scarlet — colour of luxury and earthly grandeur (2 Samuel 1:24; Jeremiah 4:30), usually spoken of in Scriptures in connection with Israel. Only in Matthew’s Gospel is the colour of the robe put on the Lord Jesus by the soldiers described as scarlet.
- Mark: white — white speaks of purity and righteousness in service (Revelation 19:8).
- Luke: purple — colour of royalty and universal dominion, usually connected in the Scriptures with lands outside of Israel. Psalm 8 describes that as Son of Man the Lord Jesus will have dominion over the world, and all things will be put under his feet.
- John: blue — blue is the heavenly colour, and pictures the Lord Jesus as the One **“who came down from heaven”** (John 3:13).

¹⁶ The garments worn by the high priest (who was a picture of the Lord Jesus) were made of fine woven linen with blue, purple and scarlet thread. Moreover, golden threads were woven into all the other colours, symbolizing the deity of Christ which shined through all His other attributes.

New Testament Chronology — Fourfold Motifs

Four sacrificial (blood) offerings of the Levitical Priesthood:

- Matthew: trespass (guilt) offering — atonement¹⁷ for *sins*, in view of God's righteous government. The guilt of the Jewish nation is specifically emphasized in Matthew 27:25.
- Mark: sin offering — atonement¹⁷ for *sin*, in consideration of God's holy nature.
- Luke: peace offering — peace, reconciliation and fellowship are common themes of Luke's gospel.
- John: burnt offering — John emphasizes Christ's devotion to the Father, obediently accomplishing His will and glorifying Him on the earth.

Four symbols of Ezekiel and Revelation:

- Matthew: lion — royal animal; pictures Christ as the Lion of the tribe of Judah.
- Mark: ox/calf — beast of burden; symbolizes Christ as the servant.
- Luke: man — Luke is the Gospel of the Son of Man.
- John: eagle — heavenly creature; describes Christ as the Son of God.

The themes of the four Gospels are also summarised by four Old Testament descriptions of the Lord Jesus as the "Branch," and four Old Testament verses introducing the Lord Jesus with the exclamation "Behold":

The Branch:

- Matthew: **"Behold, the days are coming," says the LORD, "That I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; a King shall reign and prosper..."** (Jeremiah 23:5)
- Mark: **For behold, I am bringing forth My Servant the BRANCH.** (Zechariah 3:8)
- Luke: **"Behold, the Man whose name is the BRANCH!"** (Zechariah 6:12)
- John: **In that day the Branch of the LORD shall be beautiful and glorious...** (Isaiah 4:2)

¹⁷ Matthew and Mark are the only gospels that report Christ's cry on the cross, **"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"**

New Testament Chronology — Fourfold Motifs

Behold:

Matthew: “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you...” (Zechariah 9:9)

Mark: “Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights!” (Isaiah 42:1)

Luke: “Behold, the Man whose name is the **BRANCH!**” (Zechariah 6:12)

John: Say to the cities of Judah, “Behold your God!” (Isaiah 40:9)



New Testament Chronology —

Paul's Travels

PAUL'S TRAVELS

- Paul was converted in **A.D. 32**, on his journey to Damascus (Acts 9:9).
- After his conversion, Paul went to Arabia for an unspecified time and then returned to Damascus. Paul's first visit to Jerusalem as a believer was 3 years after his conversion, after he was let down through the wall in a large basket (Acts 9:23-28; Galatians 1:17-19).
- This initial visit lasted only 15 days (Galatians 1:18), after which the brethren sent Paul to Tarsus for his safety (Acts 9:29-30).
- After some time Barnabas recruited Paul from Tarsus to Antioch, to help teach and establish the believers there (Acts 11:25).
- Paul and Barnabas made a trip to Jerusalem around **A.D. 46** to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea (Acts 11:27-30). This trip was 14 years after his conversion (Galatians 2:1).
- Paul's first Missionary Journey (described in Acts 13-14) took place from approximately **A.D. 46-48**.
- In **A.D. 49**, Paul travelled to Jerusalem to attend the Jerusalem Council, a conference resolving the dispute over circumcision (Acts 15).
- Paul returned to Antioch and from there he went on his second Missionary Journey (described in Acts 15:36 to Acts 18:22), which lasted from approximately **A.D. 50-52**. Corinth was one of Paul's last stops on this trip. Acts 18:2 mentions that Aquilla and Priscilla had recently come there from Italy, because Claudius commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome; this happened in A.D. 50. After Paul had been teaching in Corinth for a year and six months, the Jews brought him to Gallio, the proconsul of Achaia (Acts 18:11-12). Gallio held this position from A.D. 51-52.
- Paul's third Missionary Journey (described in Acts 18:23 to Acts 21:14) took place from approximately **A.D. 53-57**. Paul spent 3 of these years at Ephesus (Acts 20:31).



New Testament Chronology — Paul's Travels

- Paul was taken into custody in Jerusalem by the Romans in **A.D. 57**. He was held as a prisoner for two years in Caesarea until a new governor (Festus) reopened his case in **A.D. 59**.
- Paul appealed his case to Caesar, and arrived in Rome in **A.D. 60**.
- He was placed under house arrest for two years (Acts 28:30).
- It is generally believed that after his two years in Rome, Paul's case came before Nero and the verdict was acquittal. After his release he embarked on what has come to be known as his fourth missionary journey.¹⁸ Places which he probably visited on this trip are:
 - Crete (Titus 1:5)
 - Colosse (Philemon 22)
 - Troas (2 Timothy 4:13)
 - Macedonia (1 Timothy 1:3)
 - Philippi (Philippians 1:25; 2:24)
 - Nicopolis (Titus 3:12)
 - Corinth (2 Timothy 4:20)
 - Miletus (2 Timothy 4:20)
 - Paul may have also visited Spain, since his initial plan was to visit Rome on his way to Spain (Romans 15:24, 28).
- After a period of freedom, Paul was imprisoned a second time. Tradition says he was beheaded outside Rome in **A.D. 67 or 68**.

¹⁸ 2nd Timothy 4:20 is one proof that Paul had an interval of ministry and travel after his first imprisonment. Paul could not have left Trophimus sick during his last journey to Jerusalem, because Trophimus was not left in Miletus at that time (Acts 20:4; 21:29). Neither could have been on his journey to Rome to appear before Caesar, for then he did not touch at Miletus. To make this incident possible, Paul must have been released from his first imprisonment whereupon he embarked on another ministry voyage.

PAUL'S EPISTLES

PAUL'S 1ST MISSIONARY TRIP

Galatians:
(~A.D. 46-49)

Galatians is likely Paul's earliest Epistle, but it is the most difficult to date. Many scholars believe that Galatians 2:1-10 refers to the Jerusalem Council to resolve the dispute over circumcision, which is discussed in detail in Acts 15. According to this view, Galatians would have been written after A.D. 49. Another (more likely) view is that Galatians 2:1-10 refers to the visit of Acts 11:30. This theory implies that the Epistle was written before the Council convened, making it the earliest of Paul's Epistles. The events mentioned in Galatians 2:1-10 fit perfectly with this part of Acts:

- The revelation mentioned (2:2) corresponds with the prophecy of Agabus (Acts 11:27-28).
- The private speaking about the gospel shared among the Gentiles precludes the Acts 15 visit, but fits perfectly with Acts 11.
- The continuing to remember the poor fits with the purpose of the Acts 11 visit (but not Acts 15).

In addition, the exclusion of any mention of the letter of Acts 15 strongly indicates that such a letter did not yet exist, for Paul would have surely used it as one of his arguments against the legalism confronted in Galatians. Also, the incident mentioned in Galatians chapter 2, for which Paul rebuked Peter publicly, was not as likely to happen after such a large apostolic consensus of Acts 15. After the Jerusalem Council everybody agreed that circumcision of the Gentiles was unnecessary, including Peter.

Theme: *Salvation by grace, apart from law-keeping.*¹⁹

PAUL'S 2ND MISSIONARY TRIP

1 Thessalonians:
(A.D. 51)

1st Thessalonians was written from Corinth during Paul's second Missionary Journey. When the opposing Jews from Thessalonica followed Paul to Berea (where he had continued to preach the word), the brethren sent him away, to go to the sea for his protection. In his letter to the Thessalonians, Paul wrote that he had desired to return to them personally when he heard of the persecution they were suffering, but his plans were hindered by Satan. Instead, Paul went to Athens alone, and Silas and Timothy remained in Macedonia. Before he departed, Paul sent Timothy to Thessalonica to establish and encourage the believers. Those who conducted Paul to Athens returned to Macedonia with directions from Paul for Silas and Timothy to come to him with

¹⁹ It is striking that the believers had so quickly departed from this fundamental truth, and added their own works as a requirement for salvation.

all speed. From Athens, Paul travelled on to Corinth, and there Silas and Timothy reunited with him. Timothy brought Paul good news back from Thessalonica, as well as some questions they had, which prompted Paul to write them his 1st Epistle to the Thessalonians. The circumstances surrounding this Epistle are described in the following passages:

But when the Jews from Thessalonica learned that the word of God was preached by Paul at Berea, they came there also and stirred up the crowds. Then immediately the brethren sent Paul away, to go to the sea; but both Silas and Timothy remained there. So those who conducted Paul brought him to Athens; and receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him with all speed, they departed. (Acts 17:13-15)

When Silas and Timothy had come from Macedonia, Paul was compelled by the Spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ. (Acts 18:5)

But we, brethren, having been taken away from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavored more eagerly to see your face with great desire. Therefore we wanted to come to you—even I, Paul, time and again—but Satan hindered us. For what *is* our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? *Is it* not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? For you are our glory and joy. Therefore, when we could no longer endure it, we thought it good to be left in Athens alone, and sent Timothy, our brother and minister of God, and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith, that no one should be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this. For, in fact, we told you before when we were with you that we would suffer tribulation, just as it happened, and you know. For this reason, when I could no longer endure it, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter had tempted you, and our labor might be in vain. But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always have good remembrance of us, greatly desiring to see us, as we also to see you—therefore, brethren, in all our affliction and distress we were comforted concerning you by your faith. (1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:7)

Theme: *The Coming of the Lord.*

2 Thessalonians:
(A.D. 51)

2nd Thessalonians was also written from Corinth during Paul's second Missionary Journey, in response to further problems and also the misunderstanding of parts of 1st Thessalonians. A few months or weeks are all that are needed to pass between the writing of the two letters. 2nd Thessalonians 1:1 tells us that Paul, Silvanus and Timothy were still together (compare with 1 Thessalonians 1:1).

New Testament Chronology — Paul's Epistles

Theme: *The Day of the Lord.*²⁰

PAUL'S 3RD MISSIONARY TRIP

1 Corinthians: (A.D. 56)

1st Corinthians was written from Ephesus during Paul's third Missionary Journey, after he had sent Timothy to Corinth. Since Paul was planning to spend the upcoming winter in Corinth (1 Corinthians 16:6-7) after remaining at Ephesus until Pentecost, we can deduce that this Epistle was written in the spring or early summer of the year. He wrote this Epistle in response to questions the Corinthians had written to him (1 Corinthians 7:1) and concerns that were brought directly by visitors from Corinth (1 Corinthians 1:11; 16:17). The following passages provide the backdrop to this Epistle:

When these things were accomplished, Paul purposed in [his] spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, "After I have been there, I must also see Rome." So he sent into Macedonia two of those who ministered to him, Timothy and Erastus, but he himself stayed in Asia for a time. (Acts 19:21-22)

For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church. (1 Corinthians 4:17)

But I will tarry in Ephesus until Pentecost. For a great and effective door has opened to me, and there are many adversaries. And if Timothy comes, see that he may be with you without fear; for he does the work of the Lord, as I also do. Therefore let no one despise him. But send him on his journey in peace, that he may come to me; for I am waiting for him with the brethren. (1 Corinthians 16:8-11)

Theme: *Assembly order and discipline.*

After the 1st Epistle had been written and delivered to the Corinthians, Paul seemed to have been greatly troubled in his mind about how the Church in Corinth would receive and treat his inspired communication. The 1st Epistle had been written with many tears and deep soul-exercise (2 Corinthians 2:4). He knew it would make them sorry, yet he was in doubt and unrest about it all. Therefore, Titus was evidently sent by the apostle to Corinth to ascertain the truth about this matter and to find out what effect the 1st Epistle had upon the Corinthians.²¹

The exact travel sequence of Timothy and Titus to Corinth during this time period is difficult to piece together, but may have transpired as follows:

²⁰ See End Note #1 for a definition of the Day of the Lord.

²¹ The Annotated Bible, A.C. Gaebelein.

New Testament Chronology —

Paul's Epistles

- After hearing about the assembly problems in Corinth, Paul sent Timothy and Erastus there via Macedonia (Acts 19:22).
- Shortly afterwards, Paul sent his 1st Epistle to the Corinthians, which he expected to reach them before Timothy did. (In 1st Corinthians 4:17 Paul writes that he had already sent Timothy, but in 1st Corinthians 16:10-11 he instructs the Corinthians how to treat Timothy upon his arrival.)
- At the close of his 1st Epistle, Paul asked the Corinthians to help Timothy on his journey back to him in peace, since he was waiting for him along with the brethren (1 Corinthians 16:11). Timothy must have reunited with Paul before 2nd Corinthians was written, because Paul mentions Timothy as a co-author.
- Titus was evidently sent to Corinth following Timothy's return, since Paul was anxious to discover how the Corinthians had reacted to his letter after Timothy departed from them.
- Titus reunited with Paul in Macedonia (2 Corinthians 7:5-6).
- After updating Paul about the assembly situation, Titus delivered the 2nd Epistle of the Corinthians to them ahead of Paul's arrival in Corinth (2 Corinthians 8:17; 9:5).

Paul *made plans* to visit Corinth three times in total (2 Corinthians 12:14; 13:1), although he only visited them in person *twice* before his first imprisonment. His first visit was during his second Missionary Journey (Acts 18). While Paul was in Ephesus during his third Missionary Journey, he made plans to visit Corinth after he heard of all the problems there. This initial plan, which is alluded to in 2nd Corinthians 1:15-16, was to travel to Corinth before he went into Macedonia, and then again on the return from Macedonia (the second benefit). Paul altered his travel plans, and instead he sent Timothy to Corinth and wrote the Corinthians a letter (his 1st Epistle to the Corinthians). 1st Corinthians 16:5 indicates that his original plans had already been changed at the time that he wrote his 1st Epistle to the Corinthians, because he told them that he would visit Corinth *after* passing through Macedonia (see also Acts 19:21-22).

In 2nd Corinthians 1:23-2:2 Paul gives the actual reason for his change in plans. He did not want his second visit to Corinth to be sorrowful, so he spared the Corinthians by postponing his visit. Instead of coming to them immediately with a rod (1 Corinthians 4:21) he exercised patience and waited for the gracious effect of the 1st Epistle he had sent to them.

2 Corinthians: 2nd Corinthians was written from Macedonia during Paul's third Missionary Journey, as he was travelling to Corinth (2 Corinthians 2:13; 7:6). It was likely written in the fall of the year, before Paul arrived in Corinth for the winter (compare with Acts 20:2-3; 1 Corinthians 16:6-7).
(A.D. 56)

Theme: *Defence of Paul's apostolic authority.*²²

Romans: Romans was written from the city of Corinth (Romans 16:1). From the context of Romans 15:22-33 we can deduce that it was during Paul's third Missionary Journey, while he was wintering there. In these verses Paul describes that he was ready to minister to the saints in Jerusalem, having already collected the

²² In the 1st Epistle, Paul is seen primarily as a *teacher*, but in the 2nd he occupies the role of a *pastor*.

New Testament Chronology — Paul's Epistles

contribution of the saints from Macedonia and Achaia. Paul took this collection during his third Missionary Journey.

Theme: *The Gospel of grace.*

PAUL'S 1ST IMPRISONMENT

Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon are called Paul's Prison Epistles, which were written during his first imprisonment in Rome:

Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him. (Acts 28:30-31)

Ephesians, Colossians and Philemon were each written in **A.D. 60** and were carried to their destination by Tychicus (Ephesians 6:21-22; Colossians 4:7-9). Their respective themes are:

Ephesians: *The Church, Christ's Body.*²³

Colossians: *The pre-eminence and glory of Christ, the risen Head.*²⁴

Philemon: *Forgiveness and reconciliation.*

Philippians:
(A.D. 61) Philippians was likely written near the end of Paul's first imprisonment in Rome. Philippians 1:12-18 would imply a certain length of time for preaching in Rome since Paul arrived. He seems to have known that his case was about to be decided in a positive way (compare with Philippians 1:19, 23-26), indicating that he was nearing the end of his first imprisonment. This letter of acknowledgement was carried back to Philippi by Epaphroditus, who had been commissioned to bring Paul a gift from his home assembly when they had heard he was in prison.

Theme: *Christ my all:*

1. Christ my life – chapter 1
2. Christ my example – chapter 2
3. Christ my object – chapter 3
4. Christ my resource – chapter 4

²³ See End Note #2 for a comparison of the different aspects in which the Church is presented between Ephesians and Colossians.

²⁴ This Epistle counteracts the errors of the Gnostic heresy by displaying the glories of the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. See End Note #3 for an exposition on Gnosticism.

New Testament Chronology — Paul's Epistles

BETWEEN PAUL'S IMPRISONMENTS

Paul's 1st Epistle to Timothy and his Epistle to Titus were written after he was released from his first imprisonment. The book of Hebrews was also likely written by Paul during this time:

**Hebrews:
(A.D. 62-64)** Hebrews was almost certainly written by the Apostle Paul, shortly after he was released from his first imprisonment. The believers had not yet resisted to bloodshed (Hebrews 12:4), indicating that the Epistle was written before Nero's bloody persecution in A.D. 64. Hebrews was written from Italy (Hebrews 13:24) and the writer was waiting for Timothy to reunite with him before he visited the Hebrew brethren (Hebrews 13:19, 23). The writer had been in prison (Hebrews 10:34) and made special mention for the believers to remember the prisoners as if chained with them (Hebrews 13:3). In addition to the writing style and close connection to Timothy, there are some other clues that Paul was the writer of this book:

1. The book ends with a benediction of grace, which was Paul's signature in every Epistle (compare with 2nd Thessalonians 3:17).
2. Peter indicated that Paul had written to the Hebrew brethren (2 Peter 3:15). All of Paul's other Epistles were written to Gentile assemblies or individuals.

Theme: *The superiority of Christ.*

**1 Timothy:
(A.D. 64-66)** 1st Timothy was written in-between Paul's two imprisonments, after he went to Macedonia (1 Timothy 1:3).

Theme: *Assembly order amidst individual departure.*

**Titus:
(A.D. 64-66)** Titus was written from Nicopolis, in-between Paul's two imprisonments (Titus 3:12).

Theme: *Assembly order practised in godliness.*²⁵

²⁵ The Epistles to Timothy emphasise **the doctrine which accords with godliness** — 1 Timothy 6:3; a godly walk must be based on the teaching of the Word. Titus emphasises the other side of things: **truth which accords with godliness** — Titus 1:1; the truth must be accompanied by a consistent, godly walk. To Timothy the apostle stresses the importance of *sound doctrine*, whereas to Titus he dwells on *sound behaviour*.

New Testament Chronology — Paul's Epistles

PAUL'S 2ND IMPRISONMENT

2 Timothy: (A.D. 67)

Paul wrote 2nd Timothy from Rome around A.D. 67 during his second imprisonment, just before he was martyred. Paul's second imprisonment in Rome was much harsher than the first (2 Timothy 2:9). He was deserted by most of his friends (2 Timothy 4:9-11) and knew that the time of his death was at hand (2 Timothy 4:6-8).

Theme:

*Individual faithfulness amidst collective failure.*²⁶



²⁶ Notice the decline from 1st Timothy to 2nd Timothy.

OTHER NEW TESTAMENT BOOKS

Acts:
(~A.D. 62) The book of Acts was written by Luke, the author of the third Gospel. Luke was a physician and companion of Paul. Luke mentions his “former account” (the Gospel of Luke) in the first chapter of Acts, so it must have been written after his third Gospel. The book of Acts ends with Paul’s two-year imprisonment, which indicates that it was written around A.D. 62. Acts is the transitional link between Judaism and Christianity.

Theme: *Church history.*

James:
(A.D. 45-48) James was written by the half brother of the Lord Jesus, to the twelve tribes that were scattered abroad (James 1:1), that is, the Christian Jews dispersed throughout the Roman Empire. None of the decisions of the Jerusalem Council in A.D. 49 (over which James presided) are mentioned, making it possible that James was one of the earliest Epistles.

Theme: *Faith that works.²⁷*

1 Peter:
(A.D. 64-65) 1st Peter was written by the Apostle Peter from Babylon (1 Peter 5:13), to the Jewish pilgrims of the Dispersion (1 Peter 1:1). This Epistle was written during the time of Nero’s fierce persecution. Through this Epistle, which addresses suffering in the Christian life, Peter fulfilled the commission of the Lord that “**when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren**” (Luke 22:32).

Theme: *Suffering and glory.*

2 Peter:
(A.D. 67) The Apostle Peter wrote 2nd Peter to the same audience as his 1st Epistle (2 Peter 3:1). This letter was written after all of Paul’s Epistles were in circulation (2 Peter 3:15-16) and can therefore be dated around A.D. 67, shortly before they were both martyred in A.D. 67 or 68.

Theme: *Heeding the prophetic word in a day of apostasy.²⁸*

²⁷ Paul gives the *definition* of faith; James asks for a *demonstration* of faith. Both preached the same equation, rearranged according to their individual emphasis using simple algebra!

Paul: $\text{salvation} = \text{faith} - \text{works}$

James: $\text{faith} = \text{salvation} + \text{works}$

²⁸ 2nd Peter, like all 2nd Epistles, is corrective.

New Testament Chronology — Other New Testament Books

John's Epistles:

The great theme of the Gospel and the Epistles of John is *life*. There is, however, this difference: in the Gospel we see the *perfect manifestation of eternal life in Christ*, while the Epistles present the *fruits and the proofs of this life in believers*.²⁹ The three Epistles of John were written by the Apostle John from approximately **A.D. 80-95**. Their respective themes are:

1 John: *Christian fellowship*.³⁰

2 John: *Expressing love in accordance with the truth*.³¹

3 John: *Expressing the truth in accordance with love*.³²

Jude:
(A.D. 67-70) The Epistle of Jude was written by the brother of James (Jude 1) and half-brother of the Lord Jesus. There are many similarities between Jude and 2nd Peter. Jude was likely the later writer: Peter wrote in his 2nd Epistle that there “*will be*” false teachers and scoffers (2 Peter 2:1; 3:3); Jude says that such men “*have crept in*” (verse 4).

Theme: *Contending earnestly for the faith in the midst of apostasy*.

Revelation:
(A.D. 95) The Apostle John wrote the book of Revelation from the Island of Patmos, where he was being held as a prisoner (Revelation 1:9). This is the final book of the Bible and was also the last to be written.

Theme: *Prophetic events*.³³



²⁹ The Epistles of John, Hamilton Smith.

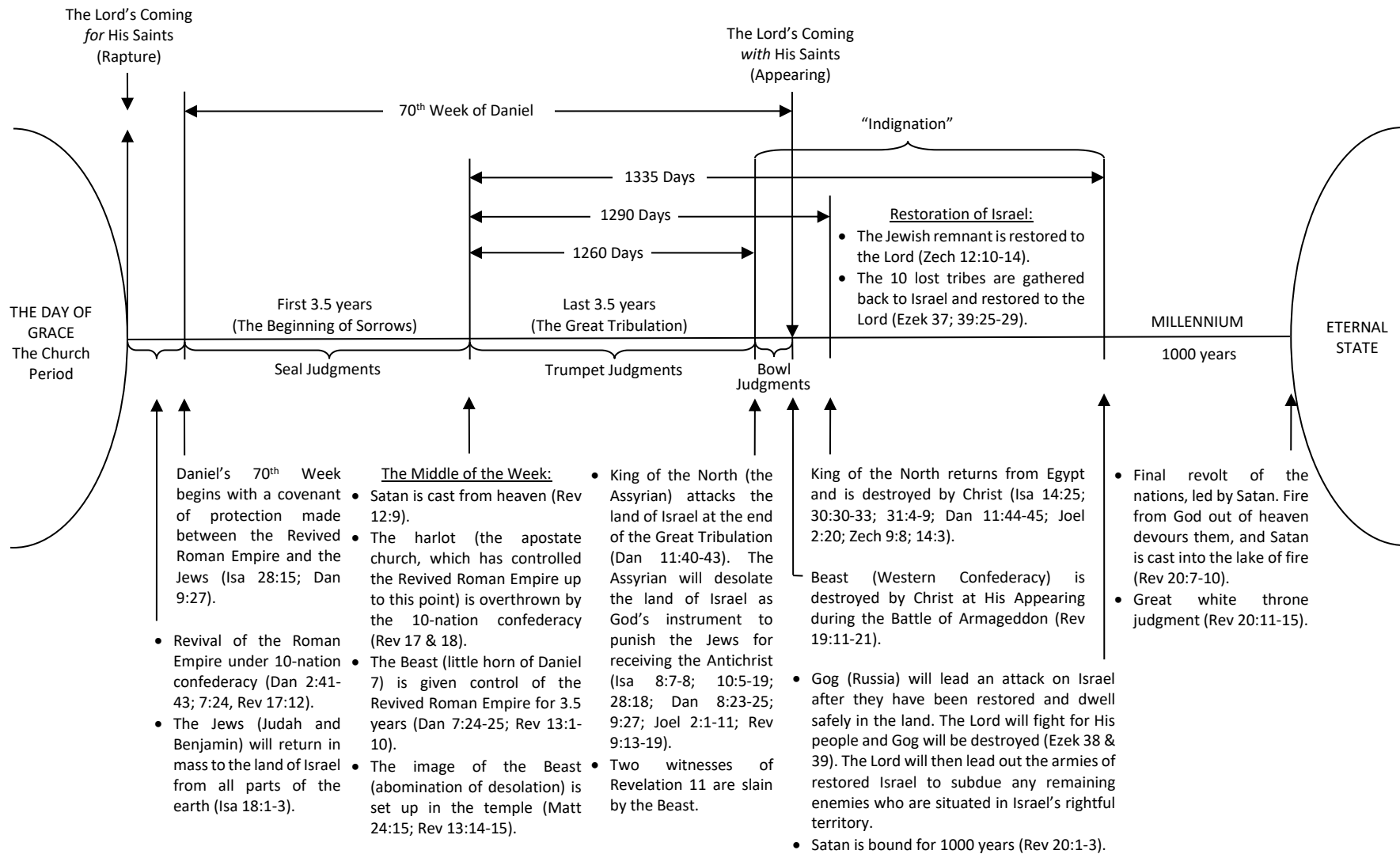
³⁰ John's 1st Epistle was written to refute the false teaching of the Gnostics, who did not have the characteristics of true children of God. See End Note #3 for an exposition on Gnosticism.

³¹ John wrote his 2nd Epistle to encourage believers to walk according to Christ's commandments and warn them against deceivers.

³² 2nd John was written to *warn* the faithful against those who *denied* the truth as to Christ; 3rd John encourages us to *receive* and help those who *do* teach the truth.

³³ See Page 20 for a chart of Daniel's Seventieth Week, based on "Outline of Prophetic Events" by Bruce Anstey.

DANIEL'S SEVENTIETH WEEK



Note: The duration of the 3.5 year-long Great Tribulation is described in different ways:

- Time and times and half a time = 3.5 years
- 42 months = 3.5 years
- 1260 days = 3.5 years

END NOTES

1 THE DAY OF THE LORD

The Day of the Lord is the period of time commencing with the Second Advent of Christ in glory, extending throughout the 1000-year reign of Christ and ending with the cleansing of the heavens and the earth by fire. The Day of the Lord is the day of His visible manifestation to deal with the earth in judgment. It is the time when the Lord will publically assert His universal power and authority. Apocalyptic judgments precede and introduce the Day of the Lord (Revelation 6:1-19:5).

Some references to the Day of the Lord are Isaiah 2:10-22; Jeremiah 46:10; Joel 1:15; Zephaniah 1:14-18; Zechariah 14:1; Malachi 4:5; 1 Thessalonians 5:2; 2 Thessalonians 2:2; 2 Peter 3:10.

2 EPHESIANS AND COLOSSIANS

Although Ephesians and Colossians are similar, they present the “mystery” (the union of the Church with Christ) from different perspectives, perfectly complementing each other:

Ephesians: The Church’s relation to Christ (the privileges of the body)
Colossians: Christ’s relation to the Church (the glories of the Head)

Ephesians: **I in Christ** — the Church as represented in Christ *in heaven*.
God’s purpose that there should be a company of saints in heaven (the body of Christ) who share the exaltation and acceptance of Christ (the Head).

Colossians: **Christ in me** — Christ as represented in the Church *on earth*.
God’s purpose that the character and moral beauty of Christ (the Head) should be displayed in the church (His body) now on earth, as well as in the coming glory.

Gnosticism was one of the most dangerous heresies of the first two centuries of the church, and was primarily concerned with the origin of the universe and the existence of evil. The Gnostic philosophy was based on the notion that spirit is inherently good and matter is inherently evil. The Gnostics postulated a series of emanations, aeons, spirits and angels that came between God and matter, and watered down the gospel to a mere philosophy. Their main goal was to acquire knowledge — on that they put their emphasis instead of faith. They taught that salvation is the escape from the body achieved by special knowledge, rather than faith in Christ. In fact, the word *Gnostic* comes from the Greek word *gnōsis*,² which simply means “knowledge.” The Gnostics claimed that their knowledge was superior to that of the apostles, and could only be revealed to those who were initiated into their secrets. The common people could think whatever they wished; only those who had been initiated could find the real truth.

The Gnostics denied the atoning value of Christ’s death, and taught that salvation could be attained only through the knowledge revealed to those who were initiated into their secrets. They claimed to have fellowship with God, and that as His children through the bestowal of the Spirit they had no sin or further need for cleansing (compare with 1 John 1:5-10). In the book of Colossians and in the Epistles of John, the apostles masterfully refute the Gnostic heresy which was in its beginning stages. By the second century, it had fully developed into an intricate system that was professed in every part of the civilized world.

The Gnostics were divided when it came to the person of Christ. Some of them embraced a philosophy known as *Docetism*, derived from the Greek word *dokeo* (“to seem”). Despite the clear teaching of the New Testament, they taught that Christ could not possibly be associated with a human body, because matter was evil. The man, Jesus, only *seemed* to have a human body. He was not born, He did not die; His body was an illusion. This form of Gnosticism denied the *humanity* of Jesus. There was another form of Gnosticism known as *Cerentianism*³, after its most prominent spokesman, Cerinthus. These Gnostics taught that “the Christ” came upon the human body of Jesus in the form of a dove at His baptism and that it left Him at the beginning of His suffering at Calvary. According to them, this explains why Jesus cried, “My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?” This form of Gnosticism denied the *deity* of Jesus.

Gnostic ideas regarding the evil nature of matter gave rise to divergent [paradoxical] forms of Gnostic teaching regarding the human body. One school of Gnostic thought advocated *asceticism*. Since the body was considered evil, it was to be treated harshly. The desires of the body were to be stringently denied.⁴ The body needed to be starved and scourged and made to suffer. Getting married was forbidden; eating meat was forbidden. A different school of Gnostic thought went off in the opposite direction. This Gnostic brand embraced what came to be known as *antinomianism* (literally “against law”⁵). They reasoned that since matter (and not the breaking of God’s law) was considered evil, breaking His law was of no moral consequence. Those who followed this path lived licentiously, indulging all the appetites of the body.

¹ The following exposition has been taken largely from “Exploring Colossians and Philemon” by John Philips.

² This use of the word *gnōsis* inspired T.H. Huxley to coin the word *agnostic*. A Gnostic is a man who says that he knows; an agnostic is a man who says that he doesn’t know.

³ The first view was addressed by the apostle John in his three Epistles. The second view seems to have been on the mind of the apostle Paul as he wrote Colossians.

⁴ Compare with Colossians 2:20-23; 1 Timothy 4:1-5.

⁵ Compare with John’s use of “lawlessness” in 1 John 3:4.