

More Than Conquerors



**Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him
who loved us.
Romans 8:37**

**INTRODUCTORY BIBLE COURSE
FALL 2011 and 2012**

Nehemiah's Call
 New Testament Letters Study Outline

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Purpose: Give an overview of the letters

Goal: Gain appreciation of timelessness of truth found in the original text to
 apply to today's culture.

Reason: Developing churches and core group of likemindedness

Length: Read through and work on questions (several months)

Layout of Letters	Author	Theme or Type	
Matthew	Matthew	Gospel	
Mark	Mark	Gospel	
Luke	Luke	Gospel	
John	John	Gospel	Holy Spirit
Acts of the Apostles	Luke	Holy Spirit	
Romans	Paul	Rome	Roman
1 and 2 Corinthians	Paul	Corinth	Greece
Galatians	Paul	Galatia	Turk
Ephesians	Paul	Ephesus	Turk
Philippians	Paul	Philippi	Greece
Colossians	Paul	Colosse	Turk
1 an 2 Thessalonians	Paul	Thessalonica	Greece
1 and 2 Timothy	Paul	Christian Living and Discipleship	
Titus	Paul	Christian Living and Discipleship	
Philemon	Paul	Christian Living and Discipleship	
Hebrews		Christian Living and Discipleship	
James	James	Christian Living and Discipleship	
1 and 2 Peter	Peter	Christian Living and Discipleship	
1 2 3 John	John	Christian Living and Discipleship	
Jude	Jude	Christian Living and Discipleship	
Revelation	John	Historical and Preparatory	

Background

There is no more important foundation than knowing the New Testament letters. In today's world the importance and relevance of the truth found in Scripture is no longer taken for granted and accepted. The questions that are posed to the text are really reasoning, disagreements with requirements of Holy living and reluctance to grow in maturity in Christ when culture is unwilling to heed the call to salvation.

The timeless truth found in Scripture does not change. It is not re interpreted in light of a changing tide. Go down to the seashore and see. The waves, tide, oceans continue to come in and go out. The beach may change, the water level may change and the visitors may change however the mechanism never changes. It is predictable. It is delightful. It is peaceful. It is dependable. The ocean and beach is where man congregates not knowing really why yet to gain a much needed sense of normalcy in an ever changing world.

Such is Scripture. I must go out to the Sea again.

The Sea is a metaphor in the New Testament. It is the world system and its ways and purposes. It is dangerous to travel; then and now. It provides ingredients for livelihood and a way of life. It's surface is unpredictable.

The waves of the Sea will attempt to swamp you. Change you. Drown you. Keep you from where you need to go and be.

Then He arose and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Peace be still" and the wind ceased and there was a great calm. But He said to them, Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith? And they feared exceedingly and said to one another, "Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey Him!"

Mark 4:39-41

Approaching the study of the Bible requires faith. The Scripture is both Divine and human. It is reliable in every age. It is authoritative and final. It transforms. It exposes the lies in our lives. It separates our thoughts and intents.

This sounds like what Persons?

So those who reject its authority are really saying what?

Those who reject its human requirements of obedience are really saying what?

Questions

What do you notice about the authors?

What is the meaning of Gospel?

Who is the Holy Spirit?

Why is the Holy Spirit so important to understand today?

Acts is about what?

What do you notice about the cities and areas shown?

Is there a common theme to these places?

Why do you think Paul was converted and wrote so many letters?

Summarize each letter's primary purpose.

Questions

Christian Living and Discipleship

How is today's culture so different from what you read here?

Since truth is a Person and this Person does not change what does that say about culture and its purpose?

If someone holds a belief counter to Scripture ask yourself why does that person believe that and how did they arrive at that place.

What does that really say about what they believe to be true for them?

If a person let's go of the lie how would that change them going forward?

What adjustments would be necessary?

Questions

Revelation

This letter is one of a kind. Why is it so useful?

What is its primary purpose?

How is it to be applied today?

Next Areas of Study

Faith and Soil

Mark 4:13-33

Mark 4:34-41

Hebrews 4:1-2

Spiritual realms and evangelism

Mark 5:1-20

What do you notice in these sections of Mark?

Pray as you study. Look for patterns.

Journal your thoughts of the text and any revelations

Pay particular attention to other verses of the Bible that come to your mind.

Scripture interprets Scripture for deeper understanding.

The next section is a chapter from the book I See the Lord. Read through the chapter and Acts 11:35 to 15:35.

THE WAY BEGINS

Servanthood to Separation

In Acts 11:25-26 Barnabas (encouragement) goes and finds Saul (desire) in Tarsus. Saul was from Tarsus, this region was well known at the time. Tarsus was in the Gulf of Cilicia in Asia, an area that produced many thinkers of its time (Harvard- Yale). The Gulf of Cilicia produced many of the Stoic thinkers. Apostle Paul would have been acquainted with Stoicism. He finds Saul and brought him to Antioch. The local church prepared Saul through one year of preparation. Here he taught many people.

During this time prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch (Acts 11:27). In Acts 11:28-29 Agabus a prophet declares a famine coming forth throughout the world. After hearing this prophetic announcement the church decided to prepare an offering to those dwelling in Judea. Acts 11:30 shows us the collection sent to the brethren dwelling in Judea was taken by Saul and Barnabas

This was not any ordinary trip to Jerusalem. There was risk involved because about this time Herod the king was on the prowl for Christian leaders. In Acts 12 we read Herod killed James. Later Peter he puts Peter in prison. However, seeing what happened to James, the church prays for Peter's release fervently. So with great risk in traveling the Lord answers His church and is Peter released. Also an angel of the Lord struck down the arrogant Herod. All of this happened while Saul and Barnabas were in town. In fact it is likely that Saul and Barnabas were with the church in praying for Peter's release or at the very least heard of this prayer miracle because Luke mentions the return trip chronologically after

Herod's death. Soon after this we read in Acts 12:25 Saul and Barnabas return from Jerusalem with John Mark.

In Acts 13:1-3 the ministry of the Holy Spirit is present at Antioch. At Antioch there were prophets and teachers. And the Holy Spirit said, "Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul." So after fasting, prayer and laying on of hands the local church at Antioch sent them out. All of this preceded the first missionary journey of Paul. Evidently preparation was important even for Saul, as the local church base is the key ingredient. The Holy Spirit separates and thrusts out. Prophets and teachers are important in the sending function as well. And most importantly little things first lead to more opportunity later.

From this short description in Acts we can prepare a framework for empowered ministry. Relationships and preparation time lead to an opportunity to minister. We see from the words of Agabus the importance of prophetic words. True prophetic ministry builds others up by the teaching of the correct set of Scriptures at the right timing and in the correct application. The prophet does not alter the meaning just applies it to the people being separated and sent. This all takes place within the local church body. A fully functional framework of four:

1. Relationships (Acts 13:1)
2. Prophets and teachers applying Scripture (Acts 13:1)
3. Local church sends forth (Acts 13:3)
4. Holy Spirit empowered (Acts 13:4)

Cyprus and into Asia Minor

The first missionary trip (Acts 13 and 14) of Paul and Barnabas unfolds in Cyprus. The team was to sail to Cyprus and preach the Word of God. Remember, at this time, there was no New Testament canon so the team used the Old Testament Scriptures and spoke as moved by the Holy Spirit. This is the meaning of the "Word of God" in the book of Acts. They walked through the island of Cyprus. Cyprus, was a strategic land, full of raw materials and haunting grounds for ancient civilizations, a key area to go to first.

The team soon encountered Elymas, the Jewish sorcerer. Actually the name *magos* means magician. He is one who practiced black magic, a specialist in astrology, interpretation of dreams and occult arts. Apparently Elymas, had Sergius (the governmental official) in his back pocket. This is made evident as Elymas opposes Paul and Barnabas. The Spirit with faith then moved Sergius. Elymas, being full of demons, was an instrument used to blind the proconsul away from faith through unbelief.

Acts 13:9 then says Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, speaks to the demon. A dark mist falls upon Elymas thus being blinded. A prophetic declaration to those on the island, as it was Elymas who was blinding the people with black magic.

After this declaration, the spirit moving through Elymas was bound, and now Sergius could respond more accurately. A “greater than he” had arrived and revealed the spirits of darkness.

This trip moves to Antioch Pisidia and other places (Acts 13:13-52) as the team sails from Cyprus to Perga and Pamphylia in Asia Minor. The team arrives in Antioch Pisidia and promptly goes to the synagogue. Paul preaches Jesus (Acts 13:16-41):

- Uses the Old Testament throughout his sermon
- The Gentiles and a few Jews were blessed by these words
- An opportunity to preach the next Sunday was given to the team

In Acts 13:44 we see the whole city comes to hear the Word of God. However, the unbelieving Jews were filled with envy and opposed Paul and Barnabas. Acts 13:46-49 the word of God spread quickly among the Gentiles. The Jews actually stir up the people. The word stir comes from *parotruncan* meaning “to arouse or urge beyond measure.” Why did they stir things up? The recipe found here was:

- Religious system of control
- Unbelief
- Presence of the Holy Spirit
- Evangelistic team moving unhindered

Asia Minor and Cybele

The team then goes to Iconium, just north of the ancient site known as Catal Huyuk (actually closer to Derbe). This area of the first missionary trip moves into the lair of Cybele, also known as the Phrygian earth goddess. This was her territory since about 1200 BC. The natural effects of the Anatolian Plain area had allowed the Hittite Empire to flourish. And to some measure the expanding Cretans and Greeks.

The influence of Cybele, as premier “earth mother goddess,” cannot be overstated. Over the years there have been many aspects of this “earth mother goddess” system. Some of the spellings of Cybele are actually Kybele that makes more sense as the Akkadian *ki* was “earth” and *bel* was “lord.” This links a strong chord of adaptation to this earth goddess system back through Mesopotamia and into the Anatolian plain.

Cybele is often portrayed as seated in an upright position. Most frequently her male consort, Attis, is the one standing, many times portrayed wearing a pointed cap. The Phrygian earth goddess (kybele) becomes known as magna mater. Attis was symbolic of dying and resurrecting. His cult had rites of rebirth and became

known as a symbol of death and resurrection. Each year a community ceremony was performed whereby the earth goddess would raise up her male consort into a state of rebirth. A May tree festival in March, sometimes with a pinia or pine trunk, was celebrated in remembrance of the burial and rebirth of Attis.ⁱ

The earth goddess was a prominent deity throughout Asia Minor and the Mediterranean Sea area. The presence of a strong goddess figure was common since the Bronze Age. The outlying areas of Crete, Greece and Egypt were connected by an earth based worship system centered on an aspect of this goddess. In Egypt a goddess emerged named Neit. She was a closely connected to Queen Neith-Hotep. The symbol of Neit was “two crossed arrows on a shield.” Two ebony labels excavated in the 1900’s AD, one at Abydos Egypt and the other at Hierakonopolis Egypt show this symbol.ⁱⁱ Neit was an earth goddess.

The Phrygian mother goddess was the first of all oriental deities accepted into Rome. The cult statue of this magna mater from Anatolia, a black meteorite, was brought to Rome in 204 BC to help defeat the Carthaginians in the second Punic war. Later during the emerging Carthaginian Empire (850-148 BC) the goddess Tanit was worshipped in its capital of Carthage (modern day Tunis, Tunisia). Tanit was displayed with upright hands, sometimes with a crescent moon attached, known as a caduceus. A symbol of Tanit would be later carried back to Rome after the Roman Empire conquered the capital city, Carthage, in 148 BC.

As the team continues to preach the Word of God and the Lord bears witness and grants signs and wonders to be done by their hands. Luke, the writer on Acts tells us that in Iconium a great number of Jews and Greeks believed. Acts 14:2 says, “but the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned (*kakoo*) their minds against the brethren.” The word *kakoo* means, “to exasperate” or “to make feel like an evil doer or really feel bad.” Later a violent unrest begins (combination of religious with governmental leaders). The Holy Spirit notifies the team of Satan’s plans and they flee to Lystra and Derbe, south of Iconium.

As the teams flees into Lystra God positions them. Paul speaks to a lame man and he walks. What Satan meant for harm God positions the team for a miracle. It is interesting that the earth mother goddess was responsible for healing and protecting the womb in childbirth. Here this man was a cripple from the womb. Now in Cybele’s lair the Holy Spirit shows the glory of the Father in healing this cripple. The pagan people immediately attribute this healing to their gods. Healing was not new among the “people of Cybele/Attis” in Asia Minor. Even the priest of Zeus comes out of his temple and wants to sacrifice with the multitudes. Paul petitions the people to turn from idolatry.

Again the Jews come from Antioch Pisidia and Iconium and stir up the people again. This time they try to take Paul out. Jesus raises him up. The team departs for Derbe. They preached the gospel here and return to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch. The team has the boldness to go back to where the trouble came from. The team returns to Antioch Syria and they gathered the local church

together. They reported what God had done with them and testified that the door of faith was opened to the Gentiles.

Jerusalem Convention

An important issue arises as seen in (Acts 15:1-5). We see in verse one that teachers came down from Judea and taught, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.” Paul and Barnabas challenged them. The solution was to go up to Jerusalem about this question. These Jewish teachers wanted the new converts to be circumcised, to be like them and bring them under the Law of Moses. However, God’s desire all along was circumcision of the will for His glory.

So the apostles and elders begin to decide this matter (Acts 15:6-21). There was much dispute and Peter rose up. What did Peter say?

- God chose that by Peter’s mouth the Gentiles should hear the gospel and believe.
- God alone knows the heart
- Gentiles received the Holy Spirit as the Jews had
- Both Jew and Gentile had their hearts purified
- The forefathers of Jewish custom could not hold the Law
- Belief comes through faith in Jesus Christ alone

We read in Acts 15:12—Then the multitude was silent after the witness of Peter. Also Paul and Barnabas provided expert witness and testimony to the many miracles and wonders God had worked through them among the Gentiles. This testimony by Paul and Barnabas comes as a result of the first missionary journey into Asia Minor. God used this first missionary journey to provide convincing evidence to the major issues brought by the teachers of the Law in Acts 15:1. Also the first missionary journey came as a result of Paul and Barnabas taking the offering up to Judea, during the Agabus prophetically determined famine, and persecution by Herod. All with much risk. This demonstrates God’s willingness to use risk and preparation for future testimony and fulfillment of His work among unbelievers and believers alike.

After hearing testimony from Peter, Paul and Barnabas, James, the brother of Jesus, speaks. What does James say?

- Confirms what Peter had said
- Reveals the fulfillment of Amos 9:11-12
- The Gentiles are turning toward God
- Give Gentiles simple directive

The results from the Jerusalem convention were written in a letter. The apostles and elders wrote a letter to the church in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia. Paul, Barnabas, Judas and Silas take letter back. The letter was a witness of the Holy Spirit. What was the directive? To abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled and from blood. All of these things mentioned by the apostles pollute one's spiritual condition directly. The partaking of things offered to idols submits one's spirit (and eventually emotions and actions) with the evil spirit empowering an idol. Unlawful sexual intercourse allows one's spirit to develop unhealthy soul ties with the consenting person. It was determined that if the early church could keep their members pure, the sanctifying process could move more quickly. More freedom in Christ!

Later in Antioch we read the Gentiles rejoice over the letter. Judas and Silas remain strengthening the believers. Judas returns and Silas stays Paul and Barnabas remain also teaching and preaching the word of the Lord. Later a dispute arises and Paul takes Silas on the second missionary journey. Had Silas gone back with Judas to Jerusalem he would not have been available to go with Paul. Here we see the divine positioning of God.

Cyrene

The glitter of ancient Libya with its Roman cities of Leptis Magna, Sabratha and Cyrene is now all but silent. Modern day Libya is far from this once powerful land. These ancient once thriving cities lay at important trade and shipping routes. Among the ruins in Cyrene stands the Temple of Zeus, built around the fifth century BC.ⁱⁱⁱ Nearby the temples of Apollo and Artemis once stood. Barry Fell describes a temple in Cyrene,

“The sacred waters of Apollo flow from a cave in the cliff-face behind the acropolis, first into a natural pool, then by natural runnels down the hillside, through the temple area of the acropolis to reach this man-made pool. From here further runnels lead the water into man-made fountains at successive lower levels. Voyagers to the New World must frequently have passed this way after paying their last respects to the gods of the city.”^{iv}

As the Roman world became “christianized” churches were built in Cyrene. The New Testament speaks of church planters coming from Cyrene. These buildings were built on top of the old pagan sites. Later as Islam emerges in 622 AD, the personal accompaniment of Mohammed named Ruwaifa, the Islamic apostle of the Libyan Moslems was buried among the hills to the west of Cyrene, a holy place of pilgrimage.^v

The city of Cyrene, over the years, becomes a strategic center as peoples roll through. The Persians were the first to stroll through, under Darius, inspiring the North Africans to belief in the “brotherhood of man,” under the light of the one

god Ahuramazda, Lord of the Sun, and his adjunct Mithras. The center of Mithraism becomes Babylon, the place of death for Alexander, like Darius inspired the common unity of mankind later to be called *homonía*.

Devotees of Mithras congregated in an area called a Mithraeum. These Mithraeum had a three-nave complex. Cave sanctuaries were common in this cult. The bull was venerated as the ancient practices continued. The beginning of spring was the constellation of the bull called Taurus. The beginning of the fall season was represented by the constellation Scorpio. The slaughtering of the bull meant the end of the Taurus and the beginning of the Scorpion.

In the Mithraeum at ancient Aquincum (Budapest Hungary), on the northern podium stood the founding stone of the sanctuary. Above it, deepened into the wall, the central cult picture, a relief representing the killing of the bull was placed. After the setting of the stones the scenes of the Mithras-legend were painted on the sanctuary wall.^{vi} Also in these sanctuaries a marble disc made representing the bull killing was placed in the depth of the cell. In these cult centers a marble base is carved as a rock with a snake around it. From this rock the body of Mithras is born. The head and hands are missing.

Mithras has a connection to the Phrygian system through the cap worn on his head. Mithras was the benefactor of mankind. A painted sanctuary wall of a Mithraeum in Budapest Hungary reveals the last scene of about thirteen as “kosmos neos” or a “renewed world.” Symbolic representation of the world order reestablished after the victory of Mithras. This Cult of Mithras would later run competition to the Christian faith as taught by the original apostles and early church. Throughout the 2nd through 5th centuries AD this concept of the “brotherhood of man” through the teachings of Mithras, the enlightened one, flourishes.

The cult of Mithras advanced through 300 AD and beyond. Major centers arose and include some of the following areas:

- Sarmizegetusa Romania
- Salona (Split Croatia)
- Poetovio (Ptuj Slovenia)
- Bologna Italy
- Ostia Italy
- Damascus Syria
- Carthage (Tunis Tunisia)

Alexandria and Corinth

The etymology of the word America brings about much debate. Today America is known as a “melting pot” a “land of opportunity” a “people.” A strong mixing of others or even ideologies can be seen. The Akkadians (ancient Semitic people) thrived between the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers in modern day Iraq. The Akkadian term for the land was *sumeru*. The Akkadian word *mersu* also means a “mixing or stirring.” The earliest inhabitants after Noah’s flood were called Sumerians.

A simple breakdown of the word America leaves one with A-MERU-KI. MR in ancient text can mean ‘land across the sea.’ KI can mean, channels of water, lord of water or even life itself. This understanding of word meanings shows these things of America to be true today.

One of the more lesser known ideologies of ancient times surrounds the ideals of Alexander the Great in 331-323 BC. It has generally been determined that Alexander planned to unite Greeks and Persians together in some sort of grand vision. Alexander’s vision was called *homonoia*. In this vision he saw all men as fellow citizens (one people). He searched for a framework, a universal fraternity where peace and communion with all men could coexist. Along the lines of the Macedonian Alexander the Greeks and Romans believed:

- Happiness depends on virtue and internal harmony (*homonoia*)
- Citizens become free
- Sufficient to themselves
- Self-control
- Human equality

Despite Alexander’s impure motives the Lord God used the Macedonian and Roman expansion from 331 BC through 25 AD to prepare the Gospel. At this time in history Koine Greek was the lingua franca of the modern world (similar to English today). This plan to conquer and combine the peoples did serve God’s purpose as the New Testament was written in Koine Greek. And prophetically the Old Testament was later translated into Koine Greek in the very city deifying Alexander, Alexandria Egypt.

The church at Corinth had a mixing of different backgrounds. Strife and division was present. The Corinthians were a prosperous bunch. The pressure from dominant Greek and Roman Culture abounded. And most importantly Corinth was a strategic city for trade. In 2 Corinthians 10:12-18 we discover an important and sometimes overlooked passage from the Bible.

Throughout the epistles Paul stresses to the community of believers their common center in Jesus Christ. In this passage in verse 10 we read “for we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves.

But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.” Here in this verse the word commend becomes apparent. The Greek word *sunistemi* translated commend means, ‘place together with others.’ Or ‘introduce one another.’ This word is used in the following places:

- Romans 3:5, 5:8 and 16:1
- 2 Corinthians 3:1, 4:2, 5:12, 6:4, 7:11, 10:12, 10:18 and 12:11
- Colossians 1:17
- Luke 9:32 “Mt transfiguration”

Later in 2 Corinthians 10:18 we read, “ for not he who commends himself is approved but whom the Lord commends.” What does this mean? It means precisely what it says. Those who place themselves with people like themselves are not ever tested or approved. Testing can only take place when ‘whom the Lord commends.’

This word tested or approved comes from the Greek word *dokimos* . Throughout Scripture this is an important word picture. For *dokimos* describes the art of testing genuineness of ancient metals. In ancient days an artificer of metals would heat or reheat according to the metal. After the metal was molten hot it would be tested. Some metals had to be melted down to take away the tarnish. Some did not. Over time gold, silver and other metals would tarnish, or lose their luster. An artificer would test the genuineness of each type of metal and put it through a purifying process if necessary. The outcome would be purity like as gold.

Some important conclusions from this short little passage are:

- We are put in relationships to be tested
- Relationships are important
- Differences test us as servants

Questions to ponder and pray through

Evaluate ministry relationships

1. Personal call
2. Recent geographical moves
3. New vision or ideas flowing
4. Recent stirrings

Examine current relationships

- Are they healthy or strained?
- Are there new people you are relating to?
- Who are they?
- How did they connect?

Praying for relationships:

- Emerge
- Heal
- Blossom

Notes

ⁱSzekesfehervar. *Religions and Cults in Pannonia*. Szekesfehervar, Hungary 1998. 38.

ⁱⁱFarley, Gloria. *In Plain Sight*. Columbus, Georgia: ISAC Press, 1994. 190.

ⁱⁱⁱ Fell, Barry. *Saga America*. New York: Times Books, 1980. 391.

^{iv} Fell. 391.

^v Fell. 395.

^{vi} Szek 103.