

## **INTERESTING FACTS ABOUT THE BIBLE (7)**

### **THE LETTERS OF PAUL IN THE NEW TESTAMENT**

His letters are summarized below in the order of his writing them. They are arranged in a different order in the Bible.

#### **FIRST AND SECOND THESSALONIANS (51-52 A.D.)**

These two letters were written within a few months of each other near the end of Paul's second preaching trip (51-52 A.D.). They are named after the city of Thessalonica (a city in northern Greece). You can read about how Paul started this church in the book of Acts, chapter 17. He had preached the gospel in that city and had to leave due to the persecution that followed that was started by people from the nation of Israel who rejected Jesus as being the Christ. After his hasty departure, he wrote the letters from southern Greece (the city of Corinth). These two letters were therefore written to Christians who had only been children of God for a few months.

#### **ROMANS (56-57 A.D.)**

Paul had never been to Rome before he wrote this letter to that church. The group was made up of people both from the nation of Israel and Gentiles. The book of Romans is a well-outlined document that explains the logic and the need for the gospel in a world full of sinners. He emphasizes that sinners are saved by grace through their faith, not because they are perfect law keepers. Romans 1:16-17 is the key verse in this book.

#### **FIRST AND SECOND CORINTHIANS (56-57 A.D.)**

Like Romans, these two books were written on the third preaching journey of Paul. Corinth was in southern Greece. He had started this church on his second preaching trip but after his departure it had many problems. Even though they were Christians, many were not acting like it. The first letter is an open rebuke to their sin and a call to repent (REPENT means to change your mind or heart). He also answers some questions they had written to him while he was staying in Ephesus (an ancient city in what is now the country of Turkey). The second letter talks about his happiness because they had changed their heart and repented. In a large part of the second letter he had to defend the good news he taught because false teachers were attacking him and his message.

#### **GALATIANS (57 A.D.)**

The letter of Galatians was written to a number of churches scattered throughout the Roman province called Galatia. This region is also in modern day Turkey. Paul had started these churches on his first preaching trip that is recorded in Acts 13-14. Paul wrote to them because they had "so quickly turned away from the gospel" to a "changed or polluted gospel" (see Galatians 1:6-9). There were teachers saying that Christians are not saved by grace through faith, but by maintaining loyalty to the laws and traditions of the nation of Israel. It is a book whose central theme is the FREEDOM that we have in Christ.

#### **EPHESIANS (60-62 A.D.)**

The church at Ephesus was started on Paul's second preaching trip (Acts 18). On his next trip he spent over 3 years there and he used the city as a base to spread the gospel in surrounding areas

(Acts 19). The letter he wrote to them emphasized Christ and the importance of the church in God's eternal plan. You can not be a Christian and disregard the church. In the Bible, the church is simply the saved people. They are your family, and your relationship to other Christians is a very important part of your walk with God. The letter ends with some very practical teaching about right relationships with others, including our marriage partner. This letter is one of four that Paul wrote during his first imprisonment in Rome.

### **PHILIPPIANS (60-62 A.D.)**

Paul traveled to Philippi in northern Greece on his second preaching trip (see Acts 16). This book is remarkable in that Paul writes a very joyful letter to them even though his circumstances in prison are not very good. You can learn much about true joy in Christ if you study this letter. Circumstances don't dictate your happiness in life.

### **COLOSSIANS (60-62 A.D.)**

This book was written from prison to Christians in the city of Colossae (again in modern day Turkey). This book emphasizes the greatness of Christ: he is superior to all man-made philosophies and religions.

### **PHILEMON (60-62 A.D.)**

This book was written and delivered at the same time as Colossians. Philemon was a member of the church at Colossae who was also a slave owner (about 50% of the people in the Roman Empire were slaves). Philemon's slave, Onesimus, had run away to Rome where he came into contact with Paul who taught him about Jesus Christ. The slave had become a great help to Paul, but Paul sent him back to his master with the one page letter we now have in the Bible. The slave also carried to Colossae Paul's letter to that church.

### **1 TIMOTHY AND TITUS (63-64 A.D.)**

While still in prison Paul wrote these two letters to two young teachers who had worked with him before he was put into prison. Timothy worked in Ephesus, a city where Paul had started a church and Titus worked on the Island of Crete. These letters serve to help young preachers do their work. Both books list the qualifications of the elders or shepherds (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9) of the church and helped these young men to organize and strengthen the churches they were with. As in most books there is much warning about false teachers.

### **2 TIMOTHY (65 A.D.)**

Paul was released from prison in Rome but was arrested again. This letter was written to his faithful son in the Christian faith and fellow worker, Timothy. It is a very emotional book as Paul realizes his work in this life is over, and he is aware of the dangers everywhere that work to keep Christians from achieving their goal of heaven. However, notice Paul's wonderful confidence as he faces the end of his life (2 Timothy 4:1-8).

### **QUESTIONS:**

1. Give the date and name of the earliest letter in the Bible that is written by Paul.
2. Which letter was written to a church whose members needed to change their hearts?
3. What book was written to a group of churches "who had quickly turned away from the good news Paul had taught them?"

4. Name the book that especially emphasizes the joy a Christian can have even though his circumstances are not great?
5. Can you name at least two books that Paul wrote while in prison?