

# Bible Basics: Letters

December 15th, 2020

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Zoom Host: Stephanie Broussard

# Introduction



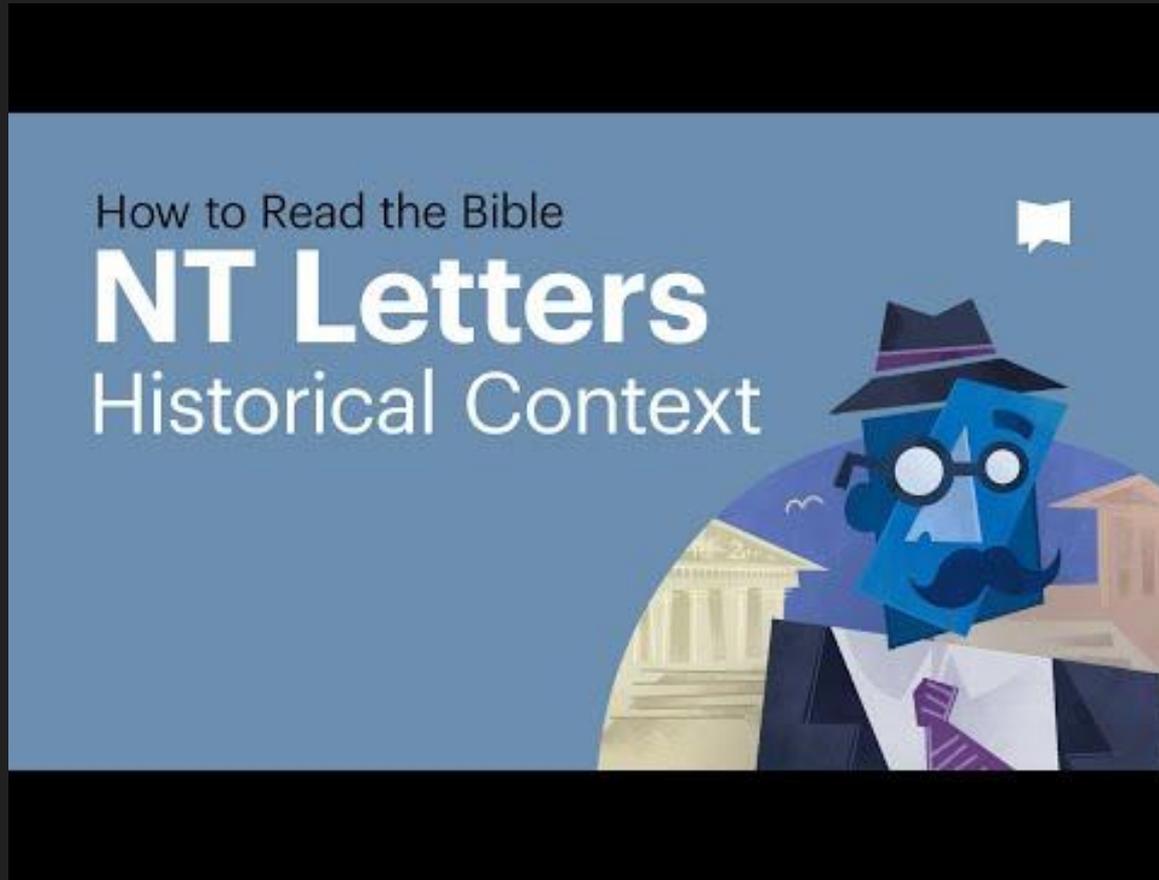
# Letter or Epistle

A **letter** is written to a particular individual and can be on any topic. ... The only **difference between** the two is that an **epistle** technically is a literary work **in the** form of a **letter**, but aimed at a broad audience, while a **letter** is generally intended for a specific individual or small group.

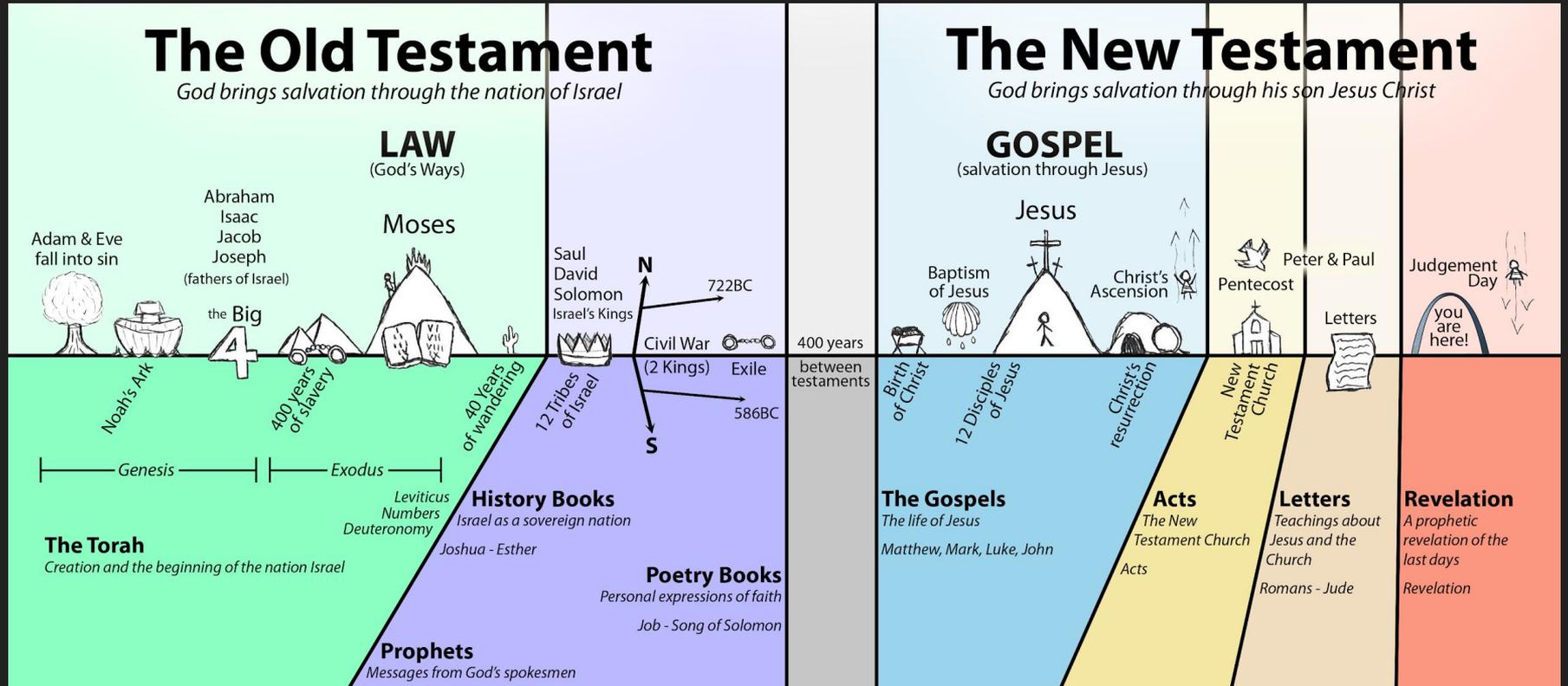
# BOOKS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT



# Video - Bible Project: Letters, Historical Context



# Historical Context: God's story



# Historical Context: Roman Empire

64BCE - Romans conquered Jerusalem. Use local governors - King Herod the Great & King Herod Antipas rule during Jesus' lifetime. Also Roman governors were used - Pontious Pilate.

66AD - Jewish revolt, defeated and Temple destroyed.

313AD - Romans "legalized" christianity; became official religion under Constantine



# Historical Context: Situation

Stop drinking only water, and use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses. (1 TIMOTHY 5:23)

Is wine the cure for stomach illnesses?

Greet one another with a kiss of love. (1 PETER 5:14)

Should we be kissing one another to have a proper greeting?

# Historical Context: Situation

Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says.... (1 CORINTHIANS 14:34)

But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head—it is the same as having her head shaved. (1 CORINTHIANS 11:5)

What about where Paul clearly assumes and approves of women leading a house church in praying and prophesying? And what about Priscilla, who was clearly a teacher in the churches of Corinth and Rome. And what about the women “speaking” in church in 1 Corinthians?

# Historical Context: Situation

Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to curry their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. (COLOSSIANS 3:22)

What about Galatians 3:28 and Philemon (who lives in Colosse!) where Paul says that slave and free are meaningless categories in Christ and that Christians are to recognize that slaves are actually siblings, not their slaves?

# Historical Context: Romans

Paul wrote his epistle to Rome to deal with division and explain to them how the work of Christ can be applied to fractured relationships between Jews and Gentiles. He wrote to churches that needed to be reminded of the justifying, and therefore unifying, work of Christ.

# Video - Bible Project: Letters, Literary Context

How to Read the Bible

## NT Letters

Literary Context

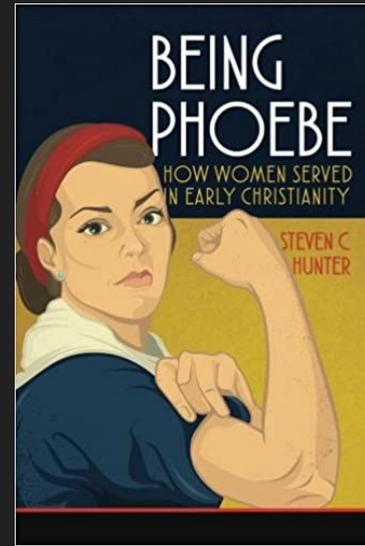


Team! Read 2 Timothy 4:9-13  
...bring the parchments



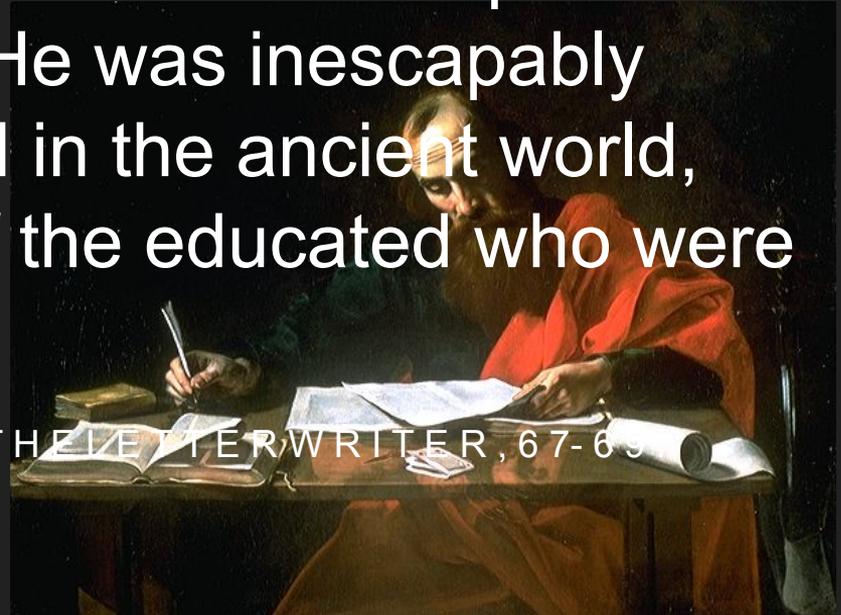
## Phoebe: Romans 16:1

Abraham Malherbe notes “the forthrightness of Paul’s commendation [of Phoebe] is striking. It has been frequently noted that this formula of recommendation implies that Phoebe was in fact **the bearer of the letter** to the Romans. The likelihood of this assertion is sustained and illustrated by Pseudo-Demetrius’s example of a typical letter of recommendation: *“The one who is conveying this letter to you, has been tested by us and is loved on account of his trustworthiness. You will do well if you deem him worthy of approval both for my sake and his, and indeed for your own. For you will not be sorry if you entrust to him, in any manner you wish, either confidential words or matters. Indeed, you will also praise him to others when you notice how useful he can be in everything.”* ABRAHAM MALHERBE, ANCIENT EPISTOLARY THEORISTS, 30-31



“Paul never put a pen to paper except when it was absolutely imperative. A letter for him always had a definite goal; he designed it to accomplish something. Lacking any mechanism to impose his will, he could not enforce. He was inescapably bound to persuasion... and in the ancient world, persuasion was a staple of the educated who were all trained in rhetoric.”

JEROME MURPHY O'CONNOR, PAUL THE LETTERWRITER, 67-69



# Letters: Basic Form

1. The Opening Address • Sender, receiver, greeting:
2. The Thanksgiving
3. The Body of the Letter
4. The Closing • Greetings to people; travel arrangements, prayer/ praise to God, final note

# Opening Address: Romans

## Romans 1:1-7

Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, **2** which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures, **3** the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh **4** and was declared to be Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, **5** through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for the sake of his name, **6** including yourselves who are called to belong to Jesus Christ, **To all God's beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints:** Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

# Thanksgiving: Rom. 1:8-10

**8** First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed throughout the world. **9** For God, whom I serve with my spirit by announcing the gospel[c] of his Son, is my witness that without ceasing I remember you always in my prayers, **10** asking that by God's will I may somehow at last succeed in coming to you

# Body: Romans/context

MAIN POINT: Romans 1:16-17

...expounding on this main point, Ch2-11

# Romans 12

“I appeal to you, therefore...”

12:1 what is meant by “a living sacrifice”?

12:2 What does it mean to “be transformed”?

12:3-8 one body, many members

# Romans 12

The racist, the misogynist, the misanthrope, the chauvinist in me I am not able to change. I need transforming, I need a “renewing of the mind.” And that is a matter that occurs by faith alone.

Faith, then, not love, is the primary Christian virtue. Love is formed by faith, not the other way around. From out of faith, arises love for the other.

- Roy Harrisville, Word & World article

# Romans 12

“Hymn of Love”

*It's all been said before.....*

- vs. 9; See 1 Cor. 13:1
- vs.11; see 1 Cor. 14:1
- vs.13; see Phil 2:3-4
- vs. 17; see 1 Thess 5:15

# Closing

The apostles use a standard series of conventions when closing their letters. There were four common elements in letter closings:

- The peace benediction
- Final exhortation
- Final greetings
- The autograph

**Look up: Romans 16:17-20**

# What's Next??

- |                                     |                 |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------|
| 1. The Wisdom Series                | 3 week session: |
| 2. Advent Word Studies              | Dates           |
| 3. Bad Word Studies                 |                 |
| 4. Shema Word Studies               | January 5       |
| 5. Character of God Word<br>Studies | January 12      |
| 6. The Torah                        | February 2      |