

THE
ANALYSIS OF EPISTLES

Analyzing the Epistles by
Understanding
Their Literary Structure

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>CHAPTER</u>	<u>TITLE</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
1	INTRODUCTION: THE BIBLICAL STORY AND EPISTLES	3
2	A NEW HEART: THE FULFILLMENT OF PROPHECY	10
3	APOSTLES	15
4	FALSE TEACHERS	23
5	DETERMINING THE LITERARY MESSAGE OF AN EPISTLE	32
A	THE LITERARY FLOW OF AN EPISTLE: THE SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM	32
B	DETERMINING THE PROBLEM AND THE SOLUTION	37
C	OBJECTIVELY DETERMINING THE MEANING AND APPLICATION	42
D	SUMMARIZING THE PROBLEM AND THE SOLUTION (GOAL)	53
E	THE SYNTHETIC CHART SHOWING THE ARGUMENT	56
F	DETERMINING APPLICATION FROM THE HISTORICAL EPISTLE	58

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: THE BIBLICAL STORY AND EPISTLES

Biblical epistles are letters written by an apostle (or inspired author) to a believing church or an individual. Their purpose is to inspire them in endurance in proper belief and behavior. The motivation is that these people live in a period of time following the full redemption in Christ Jesus and are awaiting His return to deliver their resurrected bodies into the physical kingdom of God's Son on this earth.

The Message of an Epistle: The Place of the Church/Individual in the Biblical Plot

Probably the most important thing to understand in the interpretation of an epistle is that it is written to solve a problem. This problem is typically a lack of understanding of where the church/individual is in the Biblical plot. However, this must be proved to the reader(s). It cannot be just said. Even though the writer may be an apostle, the fact that he says so is of no concern to a disobedient audience. He must prove it to them. And the proof of the place in the Biblical plot is the same as the proof of himself as an apostle . . . the Old Testament as fulfilled by Jesus.

The problem of most of the Pauline Epistles is, beside the question of the authority of the apostle, that the reader(s) consider themselves errantly to still be under the Law to some degree. Paul must convince them that the age of the Law has gone and that there is now fulfillment in Christ, and it is according to that place in the Biblical story that one must live.

Paul will point out that the purpose of Christ (in whom they have believed) was to fulfill the Law and remove them from bondage of slavery to it. The way he will do this is to go to the Old Testament and show them that it was always the purpose. His references to Abraham in Genesis 15:6 in Galatians 3 and Romans 4 are both to show that the gaining of righteousness was always in Messiah (or the promise of Messiah), and this is what Abraham trusted in. Thus, now that Christ has come, the potential to demonstrate one's own righteousness through the Law is over.

John has a similar difficulty in 1 John where the antagonist is claiming that the Christ is not needed, that the Law is adequate to bring one to the Father and gain eternal life. Yet again John shows that "from the beginning" the Christ was always to be the way to the Father. And thus he goes back to Genesis 3 and 4 to show them that the prophecy of Messiah was always the hope, and that Satan's purpose was always to thwart it by deceit, as in Cain and Abel.¹

¹ See the commentary on 1 John, particularly the Introduction to 1 John. Also see the commentary on Genesis for the explanation of the prophecy of Genesis 3:15.

The Old Testament anticipated the Righteous Earthly King

Everything prior to the cross was waiting and anticipating the appearance of the King who would dominate the earth for God and return it from the rule of Satan (Genesis 1:26, 28; 3:15).

The Appearance of the King to Announce the Kingdom (First Coming)

The location of the cross on the chart labels the appearance of the King and the announcement of His Kingdom established through His own righteousness. It was followed by His death on the cross to enable hopeless, rebellious sinners to be in His Kingdom with Him, fully righteous due to imputation. His bodily resurrection guaranteed His return to judge the earth and rule. It also guaranteed that those who accepted His sacrifice for their sins would have a place in the Kingdom when He returned, as He would resurrect their bodies (John 11, Daniel 12:1-2).

The Age of Delay

Following His ascension into heaven to sit at the Right Hand of the Father He waits until He returns for the final judgment on the earth. This period is an age of delay (of judgment).

The Bodily Return of the King to Establish His Eternal Kingdom on Earth

Following the delay, the King will return in His resurrected physical body to rule this present earth and take it away from Satan. He will destroy all those who are opposed to Him (have not accepted His sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins) and begin an earthly reign of 1000 years followed by an eternal rule on a new earth.

The Point of this Unique Period of Time

Looking at the chart again, one can see the period of time called “the delay of judgment.” It is this period of time in which the church finds itself. It is not anything like the period of time that preceded it in which they longed to see the righteous King and only saw unrighteousness. It is not like the period of time to follow where the King will be present and the world will visibly belong to Him. It is a unique period of time in which the judgment and the kingdom is imminent; that is, it is the next thing in the program of God. In the meantime, however, the believer is unique. He is equipped fully with the righteousness of Christ through imputation and guaranteed his resurrection into the kingdom based on the resurrection of Christ. In no period of time has a child of God experienced what he experiences today; full righteousness imputed, guaranteed a citizen of the kingdom, validated by the resurrection, with the kingdom imminent.

The Doctrine of the Imminent Judgment and Kingdom

Now what should an apostle write about, knowing that the massive judgment of God on unbelievers was right around the corner and the eternal kingdom was about to begin? Could he ever write anything without thinking of the intense imminence of the eschaton?²

Thus, the epistles should be full of eschatology. The believer should long for his resurrection and the rule of the King since he is under the rule of Satan but knows Satan is judicially defeated at the cross. He thus desires to see righteousness finally come to this earth. It is the motivation for everything the believer does.

And that is what one finds. Unfortunately, many interpreters miss the point of the verses that reference the eschaton, and use them otherwise.

Romans 8:28-29 ⁸ And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose. ²⁹ For whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to become* conformed³ to the image of His Son, ***that He might be the first-born among many brethren***⁴

1 Corinthians 2:9 ⁹ but just as it is written, "Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, And *which* have not entered the heart of man, All that God has prepared for those who love Him." (a quotation from Isaiah 64:4 indicating the future kingdom).⁵

1 Corinthians 15:12-19 ¹² Now if Christ is preached, that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³ But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; ¹⁴ and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain. ¹⁵ Moreover we are even found *to be* false witnesses of God, because

² The "eschaton" is the future or the end of time. "Eschatology" is the doctrine of future things related to the end of time.

³ The words here "to become" are added and not present in the Greek. The word "conformed" should be translated "just like". Thus the verse indicates the time when one becomes "just like" the image of the Son. That is at the bodily resurrection when the believer is resurrected following the "Firstborn among many brethren," that is the Christ.

⁴ This is indicating that Jesus' resurrection is the guarantee that those who believe in Him will be resurrected following Him as the Firstborn. It is His resurrection that guarantees that we will be in His image and seen as such at our resurrection.

⁵ One should note that this is a quotation from Isaiah 64:4 referencing the Israelite Kingdom on earth.

we witnessed against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised. ¹⁶ For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; ¹⁷ and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. ¹⁸ Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. ¹⁹ If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied. (indicating the hope of the bodily resurrection into the earthly kingdom).

1 Thessalonians 1:9 - 10 And how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, ¹⁰ **and to wait for His Son from heaven**, whom He raised from the dead, *that is* Jesus, **who delivers us from the wrath to come**.

1 Thessalonians 4:15 - 18 ¹⁵ For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, and remain until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of *the* archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord. ¹⁸ Therefore comfort one another with these words.

2 Thessalonians 1:6-10 ⁶ For after all it is *only* just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, ⁷ and *to give* relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, ⁸ dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. ⁹ And these will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, ¹⁰ when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed -- for our testimony to you was believed.

Christ the Bridegroom and the Church as the Bride

Now looking at the chart, one can see that the righteous King has appeared and died so that the church could be His bride. The church lives in the squalor of a world ruled by Satan and his followers.

¹⁷ This I say therefore, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, ¹⁸ being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; ¹⁹ and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality, for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness.

Ephesians 4:17-19

³ For this is the will of God, your sanctification; *that is*, that you abstain from sexual immorality; ⁴ that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, ⁵ not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God;

1 Thessalonians 4:3-5

But knowing of His righteousness and His righteous Kingdom to come, the believer would live in light of that coming and act accordingly.

¹⁷ Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us. ¹⁸ For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, *that they are* enemies of the cross of Christ, ¹⁹ whose end is destruction, whose god is *their* appetite, and *whose* glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things. ²⁰ For our citizenship is in heaven, ***from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior***, the Lord Jesus Christ; ²¹ who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.

Philippians 3:17-21

His Name is to be on the believer's lips. One is to tell all of the promise that He has given the believer as the reason for their avoidance of behaviors common to this world or their practice of behaviors not common to this world.

¹⁵ but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always *being* ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence;

1Pe 3:15

Summary of the Biblical Theology of this Unique Period of Time

The simple motivation of the epistles thus will be to teach

Theology: The basis of the believer's stand will be:

- **Past & Present:** The full atonement for sin and the imputation of righteousness to ones account giving one full position as a son and the right to the kingdom.
- **Future:** The fact of the imminent return of the King to judge the world and reward the believers by placing them into His kingdom.

Imperatives: This theology will motivate the believer to⁶:

⁶ Frequently Christians mistake morality for obedience to the King. They are not the same! Moral behavior not done for the sake of the King, the Christ, Jesus of Nazareth are simply secular good works and will go to hell along with the unbeliever who does

- **Positive:** Represent the King in everything since He is the only life that the believer now has and will have.
- **Negative:** Reject the things of the old life in Adam that have been paid for by the King and represent a love of a dead, worthless life.

them. The measure of true morality is all that is done for the sake of the King; i.e., loyalty. Thus, two people can go to an orphanage, but only the believer is doing a righteous deed if he is doing it for His Christ. The unbeliever is serving Satan, glorifying himself through his good works. Thus they are evil.

Note also on the negative side, that the believer is not just to reject of immorality, but the rejection of doing of good works for ones own credit; i.e., self-righteousness.