

Introduction to Paul's Middle Letters

This week I was with Babu Rao in New Delhi with the orality cohort, originally introduced to me by Randy Kennedy at The Maclellan Foundation.

We spent time on the orality encyclical. This quote shook everyone.

“I am going to lay out the issues in this encyclical that are both not understood and misunderstood by Western theologians, parachurch discipleship organizations, ‘oral-learning parachurch materials providers’ and even Bible translation organizations and publishers.”

Introduction to Paul's Middle Letters

As you will see in this series, the core teaching of Paul, over a 2-year period while under house arrest in Rome, is also not understood by almost all Western parachurch, mission, and theological education organizations.

The Chinese house church movements understand it. This core understanding of the centrality of the church in Christ's grand strategy now becomes fully revealed in these small letters.



Paul's Middle Letters

The Church Comes into Full View

Introduction to Paul's Middle Letters

This year we are going to study Paul's middle letters and fully publish the previous series—6 booklets of Paul's Early Letters

The middle letters are: Ephesians, Colossians—Philemon, and Philippians.

We are officially beginning the series this morning.

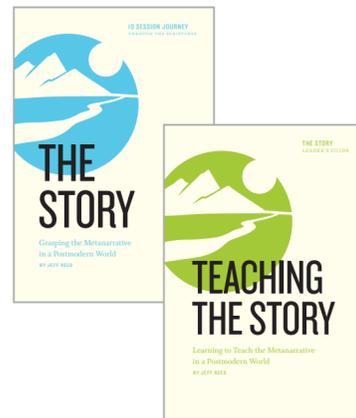
Introduction to Paul's Middle Letters

Issue: Significance of Paul's Middle Letters

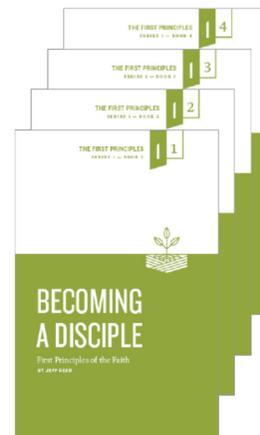
Questions:

1. In what way or ways are Paul's middle letters different from his early letters?
2. What new revelation is contained in them? How significant is that new revelation?
3. Paul had two experiences of solitude—3 years in the wilderness and 2 years in house arrest—why is this significant to the development of the kerygma and the didache for our churches today?
4. What is the main contribution of the middle letters to the theology of Paul and to our understanding of the centrality of the church in Christ's grand strategy?

Paul's Early Letters



Kerygma
Early Acts
Apostles' Teaching
6 months
Paul: 3 years "night and day"

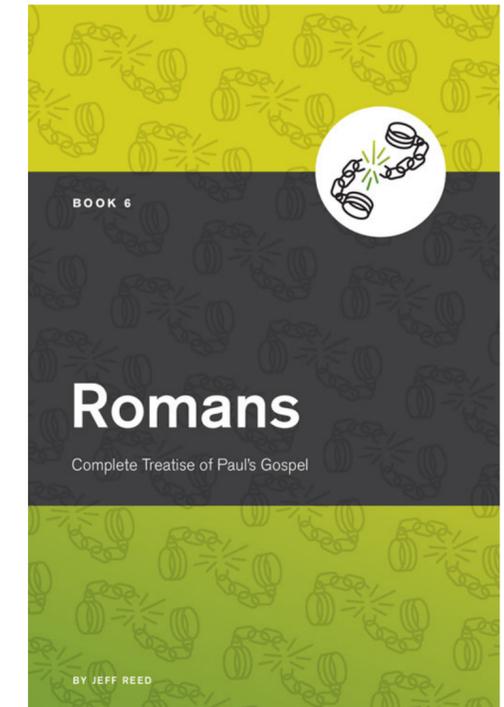
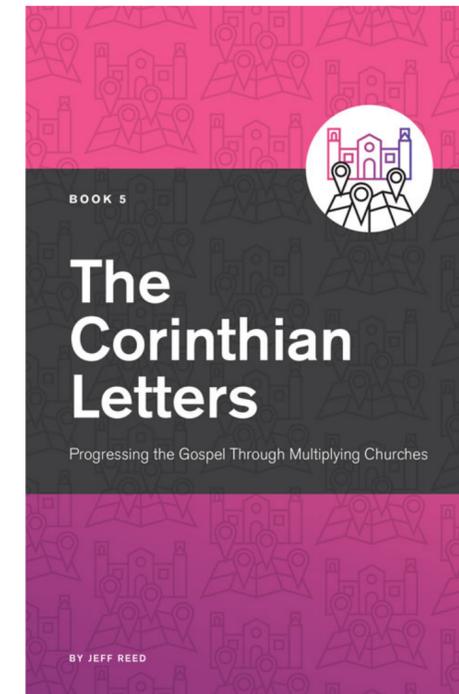
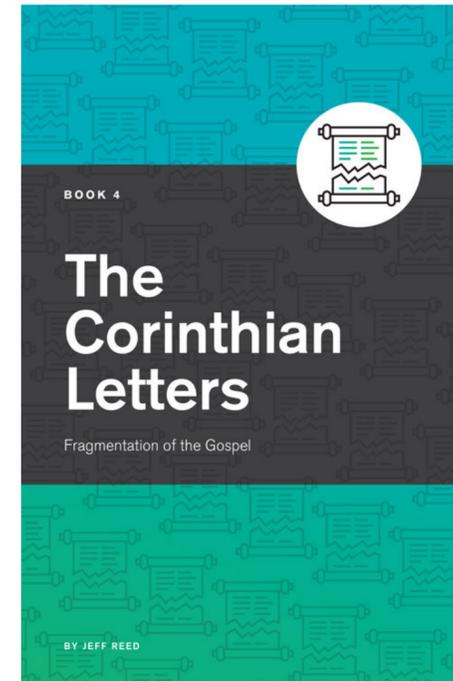
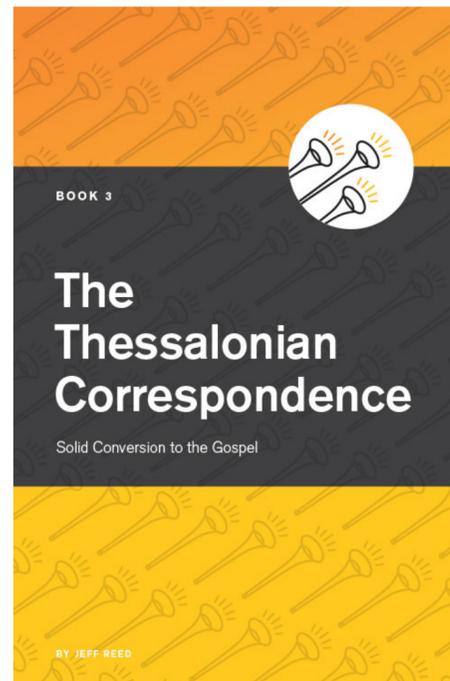
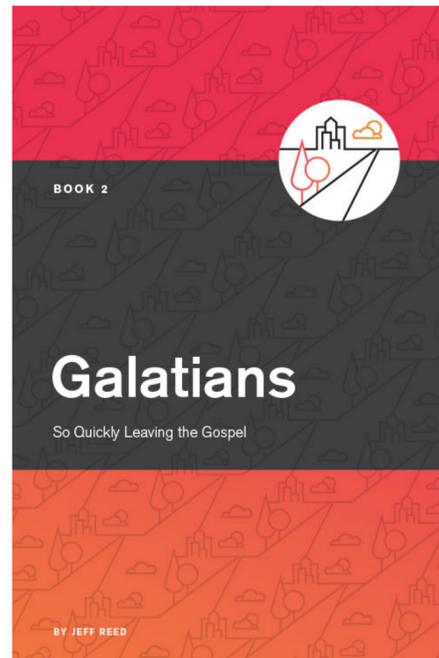
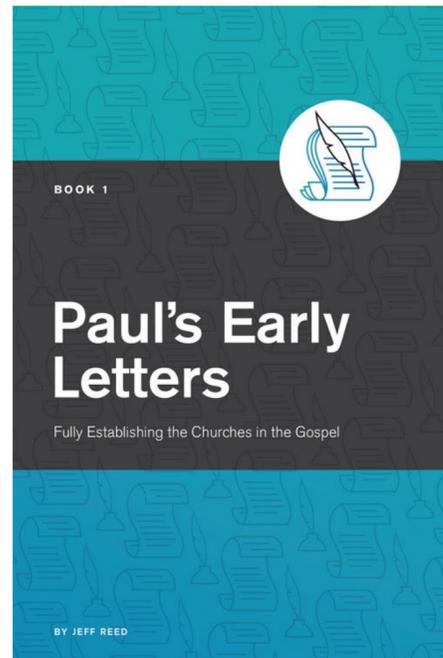


Didache
Body of Acts
Theology of Paul
1½ years

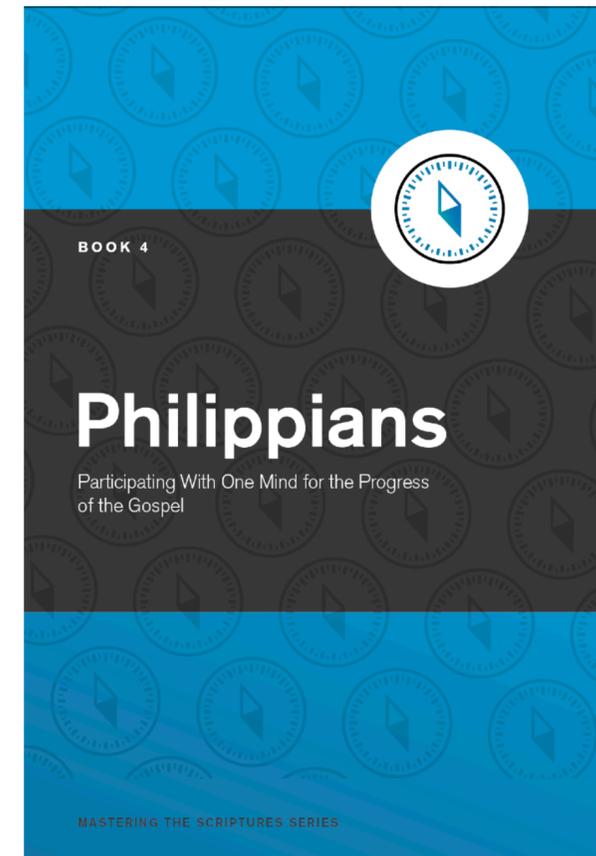
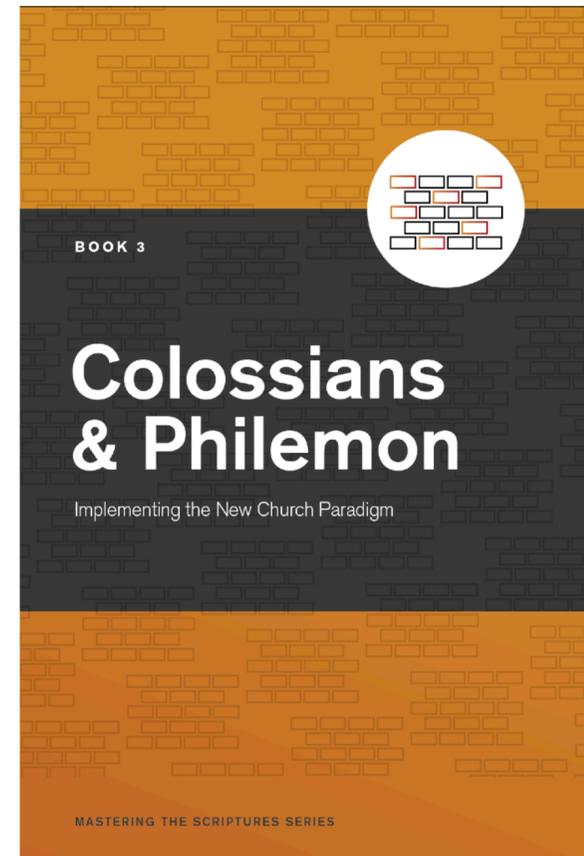
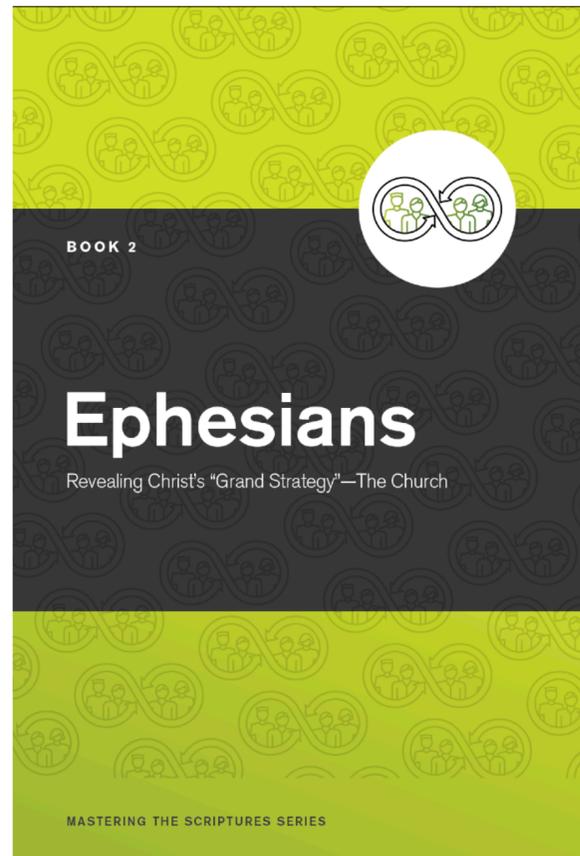
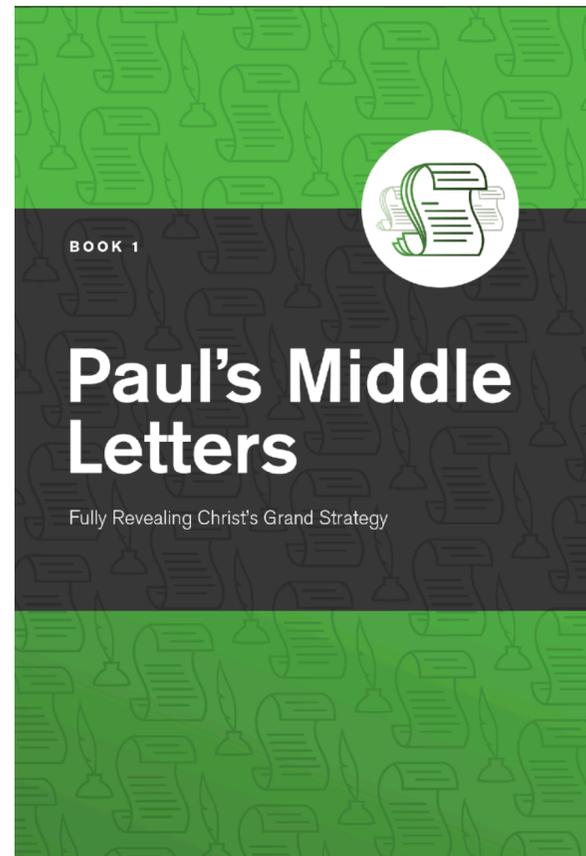


Full Kerygma
After Acts
Apostles' Gospels
1 year

Paul's Early Letters



Paul's Middle Letters



Introduction to Paul's Middle Letters

In the middle letters, we get a full revelation of Christ's grand strategy after He inaugurated the Kingdom—that is the Church.

We will also look at the letters from the viewpoint of Paul building his global apostolic network, as we began to do in his early letters.

I will try to be here 20 Sundays to teach the series. Between those times, the apostolic team, under Michael, will mix in other teaching from these letters.

Introduction to Paul's Middle Letters

These letters were all written close together (at the end of Acts—20:30), during the 2 years Paul was under house arrest—from February, 60, to March, 62. Most likely...

Ephesians was written Autumn, 60

Colossians and Philemon—Autumn, 61

Philippians—early Spring, 62

These letters give us the full revelation of the church. But think of the battles that were fought before this.

Introduction to Paul's Early Letters

The battle for the gospel went from Autumn, 47 AD, until the writing of Romans in the middle of November, 56 AD—10 years

Paul's first confrontation with Peter—Autumn, 47 AD (Gal. 2:1–10)

Peter in Antioch—Autumn, 49 AD (Gal. 2:11–16)

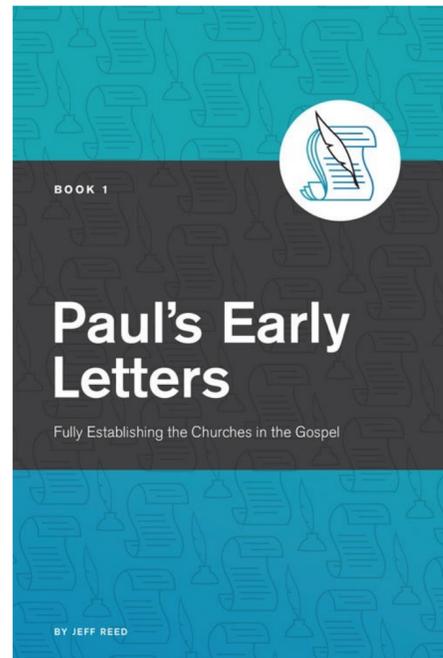
Jerusalem Council—Autumn, 49 AD

Then the early letters of Paul—Autumn, 49 AD to Romans in 56 AD

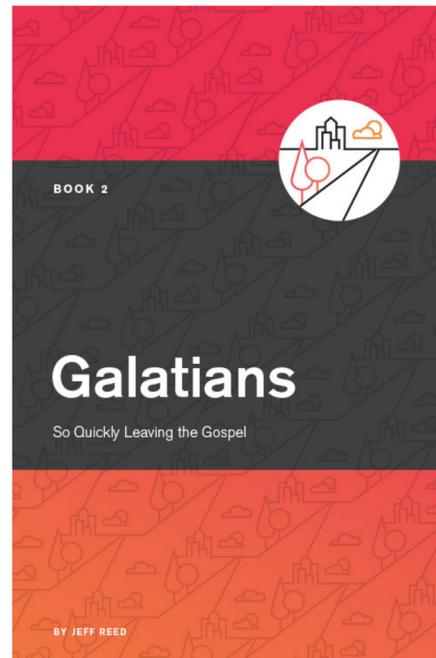
It took Paul a decade to win that argument, which he completed with his Romans manifesto on the gospel.

Now on to his rather compact, full unveiling of the church.

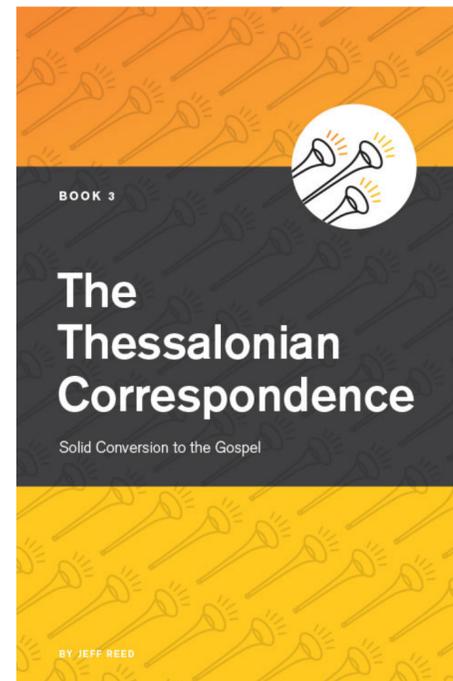
Paul's Early Letters



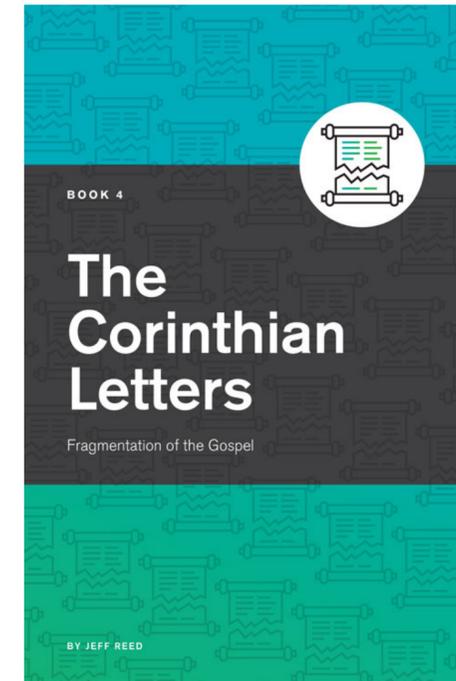
49–56 AD



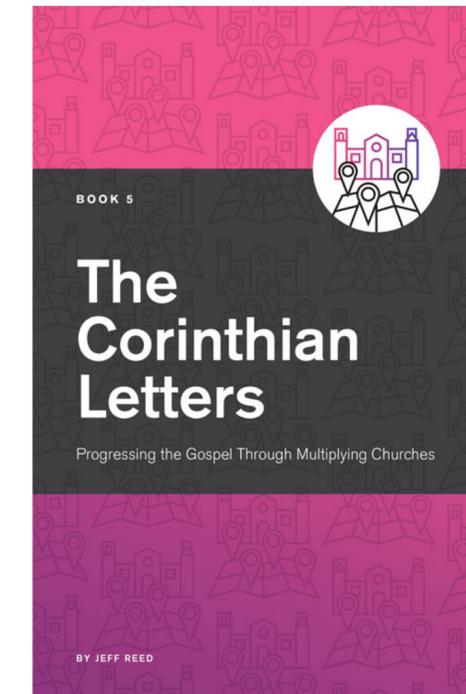
Autumn, 49



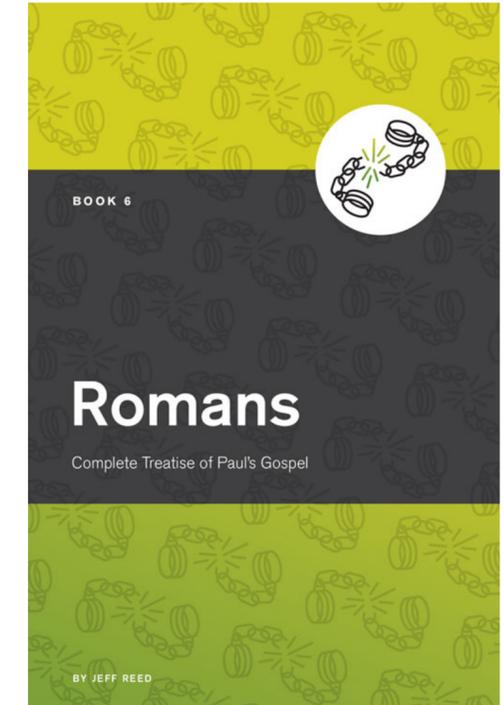
Winter/Sum, 51 AD



Sept, 53

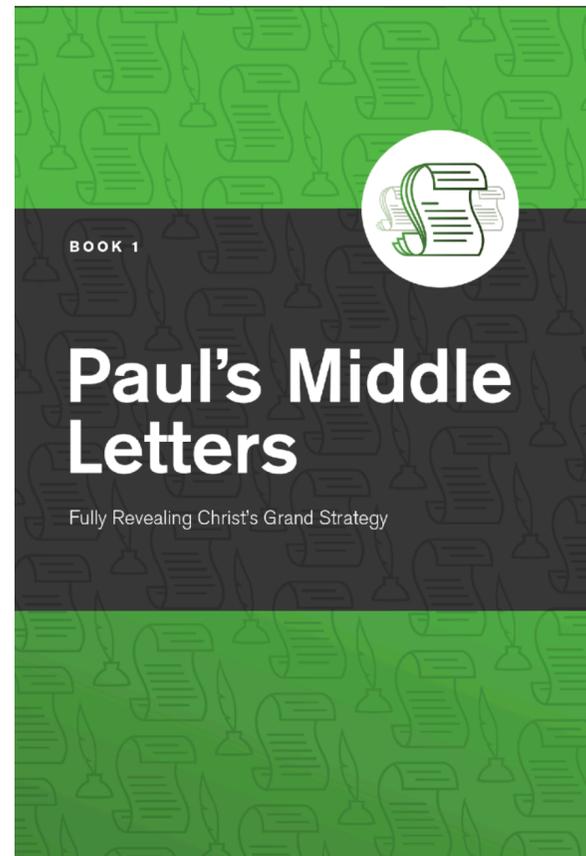


June, 56

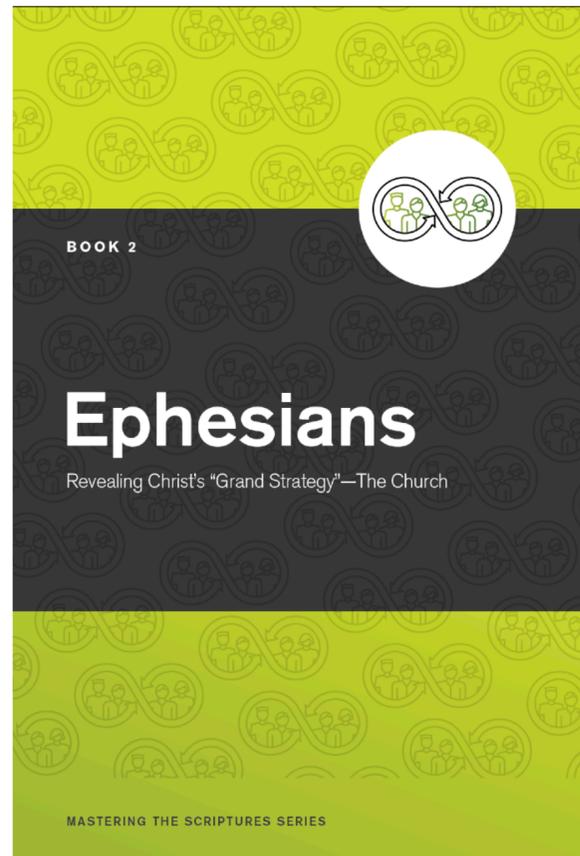


Nov. 56

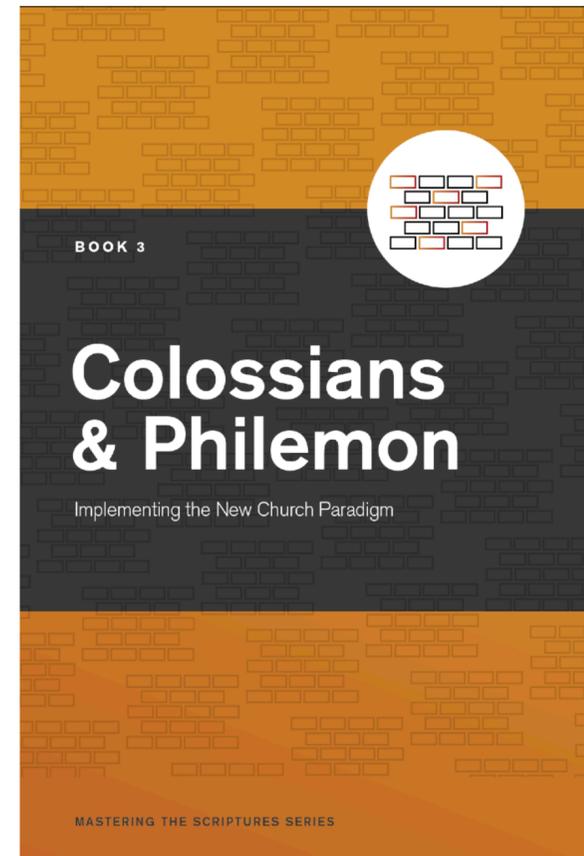
Paul's Middle Letters



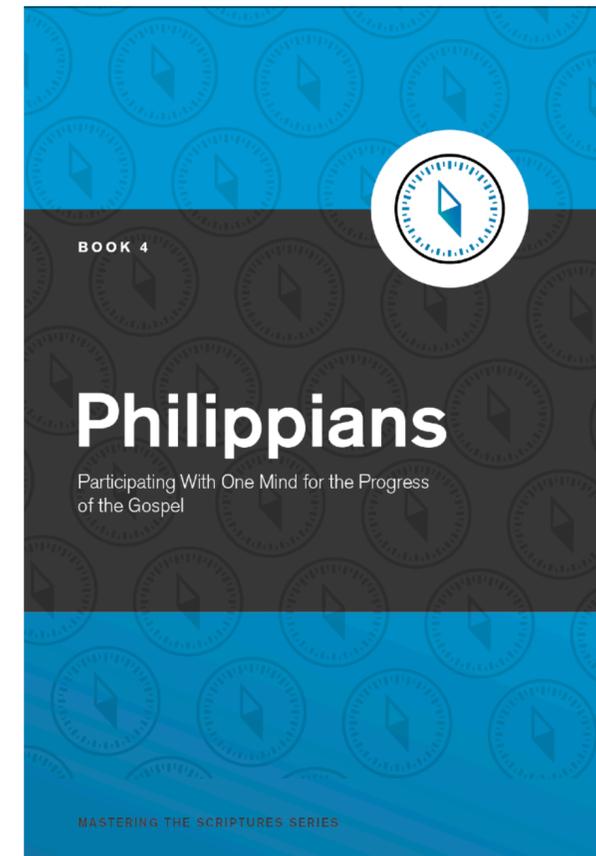
Feb., 60 to Ma., 62



Autumn, 60



Autumn, 61



Spring, 62

Introduction to Paul's Early Letters

As we learned in Paul's early letters, the gospel is not fully understood in Western Christianity today.

Some build legalistic systems, and others build a social gospel. But most importantly, the gospel is to be lined up with a set of teachings for the churches. Those teachings are not understood and often not practiced by our churches today.

In this series, we will now get a fuller picture of the church as Christ's grand strategy. And we will see that the Western church, which is in decline everywhere in the West, is even further from Christ's strategy.

Introduction to Paul's Middle Letters

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Colossians and Philemon—Autumn, 61

Philippians—early Spring, 62

Here we are looking into the heart of Paul's network

Ephesians—hub churches

Colossians and Philemon—cluster churches

Philippians—node churches

Introduction to Paul's Middle Letters

In these 2 compact years and 4 small letters we get a full revelation of Christ's Church, which had never before been fully revealed.

The organizing center of these letters:

⁷ Of this gospel I have become a servant according to the gift of God's grace that was given me by the working of his power. ⁸ Although I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to me to bring to the Gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ, ⁹ and to make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; ¹⁰ so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

Ephesians 3:7–10

Introduction to Paul's Middle Letters

Paul lays out his job description very clearly

Paul's 2-fold job description:

1. Preach the gospel to the Gentiles (a 10-year battle for the gospel)
2. Fully reveal the heart of Christ's grand strategy—the church

Introduction to Paul's Middle Letters

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Introduction to Paul's Middle Letters

Ephesians—Hub Churches

Ephesians: A manifesto revealing Christ's "grand strategy"—the Church—to his key "hub" churches in Ephesus, with special attention to training the elders of this strategic city for an entire 3-year period in the whole plan.

Networking Insights from Paul's Middle Letters

Complex Apostolic Networking Insights from Ephesus

²⁰ I did not shrink from doing anything helpful, proclaiming the message to you and teaching you publicly and from house to house.... ³¹ Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to warn everyone with tears.

Acts 20:20, 31

⁸ He entered the synagogue and for three months spoke out boldly, and argued persuasively about the kingdom of God. ⁹ When some stubbornly refused to believe and spoke evil of the Way before the congregation, he left them, taking the disciples with him, and argued daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. ¹⁰ This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia, both Jews and Greeks, heard the word of the Lord.

Acts 19:8–10

Networking Insights from Paul's Middle Letters

Complex Apostolic Networking Insights from Ephesus

We know that Ephesus was strategic for many reasons. The biggest reason was Paul's own investment of time.

1. He taught out of the hall of Tyrannus for 2 years and established many churches in the surrounding area: 11 churches were started to the east, north, and west of Ephesus.
2. He spent night and day for a period of 3 years teaching the elders "the whole plan of God."

Why would he do this?

Introduction to Paul's Middle Letters

Colossians—Cluster Churches

Colossians: Almost identical letter to Ephesians (along with Philemon), written to the house churches scattered throughout the Lycus Valley (Colossae, Laodecia, and Hierapolis) one year after writing his “manifesto” to the Ephesian churches, to help them at a very practical level to implement the new church paradigm in their network of churches—a model as a framework for the entire history of church clusters down through the centuries.

Philemon: To practically illustrate to the network of churches in the Lycus Valley the importance of Christ's grand strategy of the kingdom through the church, to restructure all their social relationships—including slavery—around the church as a family of families, the household social structure of the church, which was evident in the Greek “republic” ideal of the day, but fully realized in the emerging kingdom of Jesus Christ.

Networking Insights from Paul's Middle Letters

Complex Apostolic Networking Insights from Colossians-Philemon

Colossians was key because it was part of a cluster of churches in the Lycus Valley; it was evidently the most strategic of the 3—which included Laodicea and Heropolis.

¹⁵ Give my greetings to the brothers and sisters in Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house. ¹⁶ And when this letter has been read among you, have it read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you read also the letter from Laodicea.

Colossians 4:15–16

Introduction to Paul's Middle Letters

Philippi—A Strategic Partner Church

Philippi: a strategic network of churches in Philippi, that participated with Paul from its inception. After Paul's full and mature presentation of the centrality of the Church as the heart of Christ's grand strategy for bringing in the kingdom in his letter to the Ephesians, Philippians illustrates the importance of churches participating with one mind in the progress of the gospel through his grand strategy—the Church.

Networking Insights from Paul's Middle Letters

Complex Apostolic Networking Insights from Philippians

³ I thank my God every time I remember you, ⁴ constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, ⁵ because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. ⁶ I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ. ⁷ It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because you hold me in your heart, for all of you share in God's grace with me, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel.

Philippians 1:3-7

Networking Insights from Paul's Middle Letters

Complex Apostolic Networking Insights from Philippians

Philippi was a church that participated in a model way with Paul as he focused on his mission of taking the gospel to the Gentiles, building his network of churches.

1. They sent him financial gifts on many occasions.
2. They sent Epaphroditus as a personal assistant to Paul.
3. Euodia and Syntyche served as coworkers on Paul's team.

These churches were all part of the network Paul was building. We will learn more about his networking as we study each letter in this series.

Significance of Paul's Middle Letters

Issue: Significance of Paul's Middle Letters for us today

Questions:

1. Why are Paul's middle letters so significant for our churches today?
2. In what way do they establish the centrality of the church in Christ's grand strategy?
3. What are some of the implications of failing to understand the fullness of this strategy?
4. Why are these letters so misunderstood today?

Implications for BILD Complex Apostolic Network

Battles Key to the Global South

This series is key to what we are building in the Global C-BTE Complex Apostolic Network—day in and day out internationally.

This week, with the orality network cohort in Delhi, was a good example.

One of the key orality network leaders said, “We have been told by the “scribal-literate” to separate out the oral learners from the literate church people and train them differently. I can see now, how that would destroy the churches as Christ designed them—they need to learn together and become one family.”

Implications for ADSMCC Network

Central Iowa Antioch Initiative and ADSMCC

This is a strategic initiative designed, along with our 30-city urban strategy, to get a small number of churches (6–8 at first, followed by 20–30 the 3rd year) to participate with us in rethinking the church and building a model around the full revelation of these 4 letters.

See: South City Church Little Rock—Dee and Drew “Re-Think Church.” It’s awesome!

Listen to RE:THINK CHURCH—“Defining Church”—Video from South City Church of Little Rock—Sermons in Podcasts. https://itunes.apple.com/us/podcast/south-city-church-of-little-rock-sermons/id286695798?mt=2#episodeGuid=http%3A%2F%2Fsouthcitychurchlr.sermon.net%2F21315146%2Fcontroller%2Flink%2Faction%2Fpodcast%2Ftype%2Fvideo_rethinkchurchdefiningchurch%2Fid%2F855763.mp4

Implications for BILD Complex Apostolic Network

Implications for Our Individual House Churches

Each church in our Ames–Des Moines CityChurch Network has to work out this full understanding of the Church in its own situation, church by church and cluster by cluster.

We cannot have any churches not maturing and fully understanding Christ's plan for the Church.

Implications for BILD Complex Apostolic Network

Implications for Our Individual Families and Own Lives

Parents are to bring their children up in the “discipline and instruction of the Lord.” This is key. You must master these letters as parents.

In Colossians, Paul talks about striving to see every man become mature in Christ. These letters are key!