

The Attackers: The New Testament Epistles Introduce the Validity of Non Face-to-Face Teaching; the Canon Has Been Preserved in Tact for Two-Thousand Years; Broad Distribution of the Bible Began with the Publication of Gutenberg's 42-Line Bible

Examples of those who were the recipients of the Epistles are usually evident in the opening verses of each:

Romans: “to all who are beloved of God in Rome” (1:7). From Corinth.

1 Corinthians: To the church of God which is at Corinth (1:2). From Ephesus.

2 Corinthians: “To the church of God which is at Corinth with all the saints who are throughout Achaia (i.e., southern Greece)” (1:1*b*). (From Philippi)

Galatians: “To the churches of Galatia” (1:2*b*). Location debated among Macedonia, Corinth, Antioch, and Ephesus.

Ephesians: “To the saints who are at Ephesus” (1:1*b*).¹ From Rome; 1st Prison Epistle.

Philippians: “To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi” (1:1*b*). From Rome; a Prison Epistle.

Colossians: “To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are at Colossae” (1:2*a*). From Rome; a Prison Epistle.

1 & 2 Thessalonians: “To the church of the Thessalonians” (1:1*b*). From Corinth.

James: “To the twelve tribes” (1:1*b*). From Jerusalem.

1 Peter: “To those who reside as aliens, scattered through Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia” (1:1*b*). Peter uses Babylon metonymically for Rome in 5:13.

2 Peter: “To those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours” (1:1*b*). Unknown.

1 John: “Little children, I am writing these things to you” (2:1*a*).² From Ephesus.

2 John: “to the chosen lady and her children” (2 John 1:1*a*).³ From Ephesus.

3 John: “to the beloved Gaius” (1:1*a*).⁴ From Ephesus.

¹ “The epistle is really a circular letter to the churches either in Asia, or, perhaps better, in that part of Phrygia which lies near Colosse. The inscription was to be filled in by the bearer, or copies were to be made with the name of the local church written in, and then sent to or left with the different churches. It was from Ephesus, as the chief city of Asia in all probability, that copies of this circular letter reached the church in the world, and from this fact the letter came to be known in the church at large as that from Ephesus, and the title was written “to the Ephesians,” and the first verse was made to read to the “saints which are in Ephesus” (Charles Smith Lewis, “Ephesians, Epistle to the,” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* [Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1956], 2:958).

² John is the pastor-teacher of the church in Ephesus. He is also pastor of several churches in the Roman Province of Asia including Laodicea and Pergamum. This Epistle was probably circulated among the three.

³ Probably Nymphas whose home was the site of the church in Laodicea (cf. Colossians 4:15).

Jude: “to those who are the called” (1:1*b*). Somewhere in Palestine.

Revelation: “John to the seven churches in Asia: (1:4*a*). From Patmos Island.

From these introductions, it is evident that the distribution of the Word of God and its teachings is to utilize all available means to get doctrinal truths into the souls of those that hunger and thirst for the Word.

Grace Doctrine Church addresses this need through support and prayer for a long list of missionaries and supporting organizations that take the gospel and Bible teaching to the spiritually hungry around the world.

Joe Griffin Media Ministries is the local example of how media are used to communicate doctrine to those, who are for various reasons, unable to attend the live presentation of doctrine.

In summary, here are several principles that support the broad distribution of Bible teaching beyond the walls of the local church:

1. The use of media to teach doctrine to believers in locations without a pastor-teacher was established in the first century by the writers of the New Testament.
2. For example, we have noted that John was the local pastor at Ephesus, but he communicated doctrine to believers in Pergamum and Laodicea by means of at least three Epistles.
3. In addition to these three, we also note four other churches whose members were the recipients of the Book of Revelation: Smyrna, Thyatira, Sardis, and Philadelphia.
4. John was formally the pastor-teacher at Ephesus, but, when he wrote the Revelation, he was exiled on Patmos Island by Emperor Domitian c. A.D. 96.
5. The phrase in Revelation 2 and 3 that introduces the Lord’s message to each of these seven church reads, “To the angel of the church in” followed by its location.
6. “Angel” does not refer to literal angels but to the communicator of doctrine in these seven churches.
7. The word that is translated “angel” is **ἄγγελος (ángelos)**: “Messenger; one sent to announce, proclaim, or teach” and it refers to those leaders in these churches who are functioning as interim pastors in John’s absence.
8. The Apostle Paul wrote the two canonical books of First and Second Corinthians, but he also wrote other epistles to members of that church.

⁴ Believed to be a leader in the church in Pergamum. John’s letters to the church were being destroyed by Diotrephes. This Epistle is encouraging Gaius to reject this man’s behavior. John is sending Demetrius to the church to straighten things out.

9. We know from 1 Corinthians 5:9 that Paul wrote a previous letter to the church in Corinth: “I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people.” Had that letter been in the canon then 1 Corinthians would have become 2 Corinthians.
10. These letters are examples of communications that Paul and other apostles sent to various churches. Written communications were therefore a legitimate method of instructing a congregation when face-to-face teaching was not possible.
11. These set precedence for the use of this alternate means of teaching doctrine. The pastor could communicate with believers geographically separated from the local congregations by means of what are called Epistles – canonical – and letters – noncanonical.
12. Thankfully, the New Testament is primarily structured by this method of teaching. The preservation of these books has secured the integrity of the canon down to the twenty-first century.
13. Just as believers in the first century were benefitted by the availability of these Epistles, we likewise are benefitting from them some two-thousand years later.
14. As noted earlier in our study, Gutenberg’s press was not only an improvement over the laborious handwritten task, but it also provided the means of mass distribution of the biblical message.
15. The Gutenberg Bible was the initial effort in the mass distribution of the Word of God. Written in Latin, this Bible provided Scripture to the masses in the lingua franca of the West.