

The True Story of the Whole World, pp 147-154
The Churches of the NT
Colossians 2:1- 3:17

Promised Land	Exile and Return	Jesus of Nazareth	The early church
Joshua	Samaria falls	Birth	The Great Commission
Judges	Judah falls	The Kingdom of God	The Holy Spirit
Kings	Exile in Babylon	Suffering and crucifixion	The church together
Saul	Return to Judah	Resurrection and ascension	The church scattered
David	Intertestamental period		Inclusion of Gentiles
Solomon			"Into all the world"
Divided Kingdom			

In a nutshell....

Eugene Peterson's introductions to each book of the Bible, found in *The Message*, are excellent! Here are some excerpts from Peterson's introductions, for each of the letters Paul wrote to the various churches, pointing to the unique issues for each church.

Rome *The letter to the Romans is a piece of exuberant and passionate thinking....Paul takes the well-witnessed and devoutly believed fact of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth and think thorough its implications....What does it mean that Jesus 'saves'? What's behind all this, and where is it going?*

Corinth (the first letter). *When people become Christians, they don't at the same moment become nice....Conversion to Christ and his ways doesn't automatically furnish a person with impeccable manners and sutiable morals....Paul spent a year and a half with them as their pastor....showing them how to live out this new life of salvation and holiness as a community of believers....Sometime later Paul received a report from one of the Corinthian families that in his absence things had more or less fallen apart....He also received a letter from Corinth asking for help....Paul's first letter to the Corinthians is a classic pastoral response.*

Corinth (the second letter). *The Corinthian Christians gave their founding pastor, Paul, more trouble than all his other churches put together....the provocation for Paul's second letter to the Christians in Corinth was an attack on his leadership....they bucked his authority ---accused him of inconsistencies, impugned his motives, questioned his credential. They didn't argue with what he had written; they simply denied his right to tell them what to do....Paul confronted the challenge, and in the process probed the very nature of leadership in a community of believers.*

Galatia. *Paul learned that God was not an impersonal force to be used to make people behave in certain prescribed ways, but a personal Savior who set us free to live a free life....A few years later Paul learned that religious leaders of the old school had come into those churches [like Galatia]....were reintroducing the old ways, herding all these freedom-loving Christians back into the corral of religious rules and regulations. Paul was, of course, furious....his letter to the Galatian churches helps them, and us, recover the original freedom.*

Ephesus *Paul's letter the the Ephesians jons together what has been torn apart in our sin-wrecked world....Like a surgeon skillfully setting a compound fracture 'sets' [his] belief in God into our behavior before God so that the bones ---belief and behavior – knit together and heal.....we notice these fractures all over the place....there is much work to be done....And so Paul goes to work. He ranges widely, from heaven to earth and backa gain, showing how Jesus....is eternally and tirelessly bringing everything and everyone together...He also shows....how we are participants in this most urgent work....the energy of reconciliation is the dynamo at the heart of the universe.*

Continued back side.....

Philippi *This is Paul's happiest letter....Paul doesn't tell us that we can be happy, or how to be happy. He simply and unmistakably is happy. None of his circumstances contribute to his joy: he wrote from a jail cell, his work was under attack by competitors....he was tired and would have welcome some relief...But circumstances are incidental to the life of Jesus, the Messiah, that Paul experiences from the inside.*

Colossae *Hardly anyone who hears the full story of Jesus and learns the true facts of his life and teaching, crucifixion and resurrection, walks away with a shrug of the shoulders, dismissing him as unimportant....But it is quite common for those who consider him truly important to include others who seem to be equally important in his company---Buddha, Moses, Socrates, and Muhammad for a historical start, along with some personal favorites...Paul writes to [the Christians in Colossae] in an attempt to restore Jesus the Messiah to the center of their lives.*

Thessalonika (first and second letters) *The way we conceive the future sculpts the present....The Christian faith has always been characterized by a strong and focused sense of future, with belief in the Second Coming of Jesus as the most distinctive detail. From the day Jesus ascended into heaven, his followers lived in expectancy of his return.....All the same, the belief can be misconceived so that it results in paralyzing fear for some, shiftless indolence in others. Paul's two letters to the Christians in Thessalonica correct such debilitating misconceptions, prodding us to continue to live forward in taut and joyful expectancy for what God will do next in Jesus.*

To ponder....

1. Which of these churches would have appealed to you? Why?
2. How do you experience the messages of these letters? Surprise? Dismissal? Welcome challenge? Good news? And what do you learn about yourself and your faith, and you ponder your answers?
3. How do these letters align with previous parts of the True Story narrative? Or, in what ways do they break new ground, seem perhaps to be in tension?
4. What might Paul write to Mennonite Church of Normal?