

***LB 102: INTRODUCTION TO THE  
NEW TESTAMENT***



**Certificate and Diploma Levels**

**Teacher Handbook  
Nazarene Theological Institute  
Africa Region**

Nazarene Theological Institute  
Church of the Nazarene  
Africa Region

## ***Syllabus***

### **LB 102: Introduction the New Testament**

#### ***Course Contributors:***

Extensive use was made of the  
RIIE Module, *Telling the New Testament Story of God*

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**Note to teacher:** If you discover any typing or factual errors in this  
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#### ***Course Description***

This course is an introduction to the content, history and personalities of the New Testament. The different genres will be studied in their cultural and theological contexts.

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#### ***Program outcomes***

The following program outcomes assigned to this course are identifiable competencies required of the student in this course.

- CN 2 The history and content of the New Testament
- CN 3 The principles of Biblical interpretation
- CN 4 The theological foundations of the Christian faith from the Biblical point-of-view when read from a Wesleyan perspective
- CN 6 The theological foundations of the Christian faith from the Biblical point-of-view when read from a Wesleyan perspective
- CN 12 The application of Christian morality in daily life
  
- CP 4 The ability to teach the Word of God and make disciples that can make other disciples
- CP 7 The ability to evangelize in public and private
- CP 10 The ability to interpret and apply the Bible according to the best principles of Biblical interpretation
  
- CR 1 Ability to give value to Christian morality and how to apply this ethic to life
- CR 3 Ability to worship God by using personal and public means of grace

- CR 4 ability to allow Christ's character to form the attitudes and actions of one's daily life
- CR 11 ability to allow Christ's character to form the attitudes and actions of one's daily life
- CX 2 Ability to understand the context within which he or she lives with objectivity
- CX 3 Ability to understand the principles of trans-cultural ministry
- CX 4 Ability to understand the differences between the worldviews of the Western world, that of Africa, and that of the Bible

### ***Course outcomes for this module***

For achieving the competencies listed above, this course organizes several learning activities and requirements around the following intended learning outcomes for this course.

At the end of the course, the student will be able to:

1. Know the basic elements of the life and person of Jesus Christ and the life and mission of Paul (CN 2, CN 6)
2. Know the chronological or thematic order of the New Testament books, including principal personalities, events and their roles in the history of the New Testament period. (CN 2, CN 4; CP 10)
3. Explain the different perspectives of the four Gospels in the life of Jesus Christ. (CN 2, CN 3; CP 10)
4. Describe the cross-cultural ministry led by Paul in his travels (CN 2; CX 2, CX 3)
5. Know the introductory elements of each book of the New Testament (outline, author, date, themes, etc.) (CN 2, CN 6; CX 4)
6. Practice interpersonal relationships according to the life and teachings of Jesus Christ and the apostle Paul, including forgiveness, honesty, and respect for others. (CN 12; CP 4; CR 1, CR 4)
7. Explain the literary structure of the New Testament and the differences between the genres of the various books of the New Testament and what this means for interpreting these texts (CN 3; CP 10)
8. Be prepared to describe certain aspects of one's worldview in light of the worldview of the New Testament and reflect on what it means for evangelizing and being a witness for the Gospel in daily life (CN 4; CP 7, CX 2, CX 4)
9. Use the reading and memorization of the New Testament texts as sources of continual spiritual formation (CN 12; CR 3, CR 11)
10. Explain briefly the historical period before and during the historical background of the New Testament, including the cultural changes that took place during the inter-testamental period as well as the later acceptance by the Church of the canon (standard) of certain books and letters as inspired Holy Scriptures. (CN 2)
11. Compare and contrast the similarities and differences between the Old and New Testaments. (CN 2, CN 4).
12. Note briefly the steps involved in historical, literary, and theological analysis of a passage in the New Testament. (CN 3)

The following sessions and exercises of this course offer the following percentages of the four Cs:

Content	33%
Competence	20%
Character	27%
Context	20%

### ***Course recommended reading and resources***

#### *The Bible*

Bruce, F.F. Paul., *Apostle of the Heart Set Free*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977.

Drane, John, *Introducing the New Testament*. New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, San Francisco, 1986.

Elwell, Walter A. and Yarbrough, Robert W., *Encountering the New Testament*. Grand Rapids†: Baker Books, 1994.

Gundry, Robert H., *A Survey of the New Testament, 3<sup>d</sup> ed.* Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994.

Harrison, Everett F., *Introduction to the New Testament. New Revised edition*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964.

Mears, Henrietta. *What the Bible Is All About*.

Perkins, Pheme. *Reading the New Testament. Second Edition*. New York: Paulist Press, 1988.

*Telling the New Testament Story of God*. RIIIE Course Module. Kansas City: Clergy Services, 2005.

Tenney, Merrill C. *New Testament Survey*. Revised by Walter M. Dunnett. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992.

*Tracing the Story of the Bible*. RIIIE Course Module. Kansas City: Clergy Services, 2005.

Varughese, Alex, Editor. *Discovering the Bible: Story and Faith of the Biblical Communities*. Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 2005.

Varughese, Alex, Editor. *Discovering the New Testament: Community and Faith*. Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 2005.

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### ***Course requirements/assignments***

- 1. Regular attendance** to all course sessions and preparation of all assignments prior to their deadlines are vitally important to the successful completion of this course. The following minimum attendance standards should be adhered to: Courses should have a minimum of 30 hours of class time and include close to 10 hours of outside work.

Students who miss an entire day of class will receive a minimum of a 10% reduction in their final course grade, with further reductions for additional missed class time. Course credit will not be given to students who miss over a day and a half of class, or more than 10 instructional hours.

## 2. **Journaling.**

Diploma Level: You will complete journal entries throughout the course. The journal is not a diary. It should be guided thought about what is speaking to you in relation to what you are learning.

Certificate Level: You will complete journal activities throughout the course by sharing with a partner. Find a partner and verbally complete the journal assignments as given by the instructor. Your partner will tell the class leader throughout the week if you have completed these journal activities. This sharing time should be telling about what is speaking to you in relation to what you are learning in the class.

## 3. **Group Activities.** These group work activities are critical in this class. There will be one of these group activities each day of class (marked with \*\*), in which you will form groups to discuss the following:

- a. Ten advantages of studying the New Testament presented in class (Course outcomes 6, 9, 11).
- b. The religious context of the New Testament period (Course outcomes 7, 8, 10).
- c. The meaning of two of Jesus' teachings (Course outcomes 3, 6, 9, 12).
- d. Five ways to improve our ministry that pastors can learn from Jesus' lifestyle. (Course outcomes 1, 3, 5, 6)
- e. New Testament teaching on family and community responsibilities of a pastor (Course outcomes 1, 7).

## 4. **Memorize NT Books** – Memorize all the New Testament Books in their correct chronological order, and know who was the author (writer) of each book. (Course outcomes 2, 5, 6, 9)

Diploma Level: This will be written as part of the final exam – last day.

Certificate Level: This will be oral presentation as part of the final exam.

## 5. **Drama or role play** – choose one of the following to present in a group before the class. Due 3rd day (Wednesday)

- a. Three events or three important people found in the New Testament (Course outcomes 4, 6).
- b. Convince an unbeliever to understand that Jesus is truly the son of God. (Course outcomes 1, 3, 5, 6).

## 6. **Chronology of Paul's Life:** Using the Scriptures below as well as a map and timeline, construct a **chronology** (events in their proper sequence order) of Paul's ministry. (Course outcomes 4, 6) Due 4th day

Diploma Level: This will be presented as a written assignment.

Certificate Level: Be prepared to present this orally before the class.

- Acts 9:1-31, 11:19-30, 13:1-28:31
- Gal 1:11-2:21
- Rom 15:22-29
- 1 Cor 16:1-9

## 7. **Book Study:** Choose **one** of the following studies (a or b) of a book of the New Testament. (Course outcomes 5, 7, 8, 12) Due 5<sup>th</sup> day (Friday)

- a. **The Book of Acts:**

Diploma Level: Read the Book of Acts (5-6 chapters each day). As you read, make notes in your exercise book. For each entry in your lists, include the reference (chapter and verse(s)).

Certificate Level: Read (or have someone read to you) the Book of Acts (5-6 chapters each day). As you read, prepare to share with the teacher (or his/her designated assistant) the following:

- i. Background study of the book:
  - a. Who is the author?
  - b. To whom is this book addressed?
  - c. What is the approximate date it was written?
  - d. What genre of literature is this book?
- ii. List the important:
  1. People involved (at least 10)
  2. Places Paul traveled to on his missionary journeys.
- iii. List the events that show the operations or the ministries of the Holy Spirit as they issued into:
  1. Redemption or salvation.
  2. Church planting.
- iv. Think about how the Book of Acts relates to the Old Testament – write one paragraph about this (7-9) lines in your exercise book).
- v. Think about how the Book of Acts can be applied to church planting and development in your context today – write one paragraph about this (7-9) lines in your exercise book).

**b. Presentation of a Study of an Epistle:** Select **one** of the following epistles of the New Testament: Romans, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, or 1 Peter.

This study will provide the following information and address the following issues. Answer all questions in your presentation.

**Background preparation:**

Diploma Level: Read the text of the passage several times (at least 10). Listen to the text. Meditate on the book. Ponder it and soak it into your mind and heart. Presented as a written assignment to the instructor.

Certificate Level: Read (or have someone read to you) the text of the passage several times (at least 10). Listen to the text. Meditate on the book. Ponder it and soak it into your mind and heart. This will be an oral presentation before the class.

**Questions:**

- i. Background study of this epistle:
  1. Who is the author?
  2. To whom is this epistle addressed?
  3. What is the approximate date it was written?
- ii. What are the specific genres of literature **within** this epistle, such as poetry or hymns, prayers, OT quotations or passages of a certain type, historical facts or references, etc? List the

- type(s) of genre found in this epistle, and the verses where they are found.
- iii. Analyze the structure of the text. Consider:
    - 1. What is the flow of thought of the author—the major moves or points?
    - 2. Present an outline of the structure of the text.
  - iv. What are the major theological themes in this epistle?
  - v. Of these major theological themes, what are the timeless truths that relate in some way to redemption, salvation, holiness (the way of salvation) to be communicated to a contemporary audience (class or congregation)?
  - vi. Share how you would present these **timeless truths** with passion to bring them alive to a contemporary audience today (1-2 pages).

**8. Quizzes.** Quizzes will provide an in-class learning activity.

**9. Final Exam.**

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**Grading** (out of a total of 100 points)

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|----------------------------------------------------|-----|
| 1. Class attendance                                | 10% |
| 2. Journal/sharing                                 | 10% |
| 3. Group activities (participation & presentation) | 10% |
| 4. Memorize NT Books                               | 10% |
| 5. Drama/Role play                                 | 10% |
| 6. Book Study                                      | 10% |
| 7. Paul's Life                                     | 10% |
| 8. Quizzes                                         | 10% |
| 9. Final Exam                                      | 20% |

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**Course Outline**

- Lesson 1: Why Study the New Testament?
- Lesson 2: Historical, Social, and Religious Settings of the World of Jesus
- Lesson 3: The Life and Ministry of Jesus
- Lesson 4: The Gospels
- Lesson 5: The Historical, Social, and Religious Setting of the 1st-Century, Greco-Roman World
- Lesson 6: The Apostle Paul
- Lesson 7: Paul's Letters to the Churches
- Lesson 8: Paul's Letters to Individuals
- Lesson 9: The General Epistles
- Lesson 10: Revelation

Lesson 1

## ***WHY STUDY THE NEW TESTAMENT?***

### ***Introduction***

New Testament History and Literature is a foundational class for understanding the setting and message of the New Testament. This class will introduce the student to the New Testament biblical literature, Bible study methods, and the environment of the Early Church. Special attention will be given to the political, cultural, religious, and geographical setting, the literary genre, and the meaning of the text in its original cultural, historical, and literary context for the purpose of discovering the principles of truth to be applied to our contemporary setting. It provides the basic groundwork for understanding future Course of Study classes in biblical studies, church history, theology, and practices.

*Ask the students to introduce themselves by telling:*

- *What is your name?*
- *Where are you from?*
- *What is the most important thing you hope to learn from this course/module?*

*Spend some time going through the Syllabus. Ask students if they have questions and make sure they know what is expected of them for attendance and assignments.*

### ***Objectives for this lesson***

***At the beginning of each lesson,*** instruct students to locate objectives in the Student Workbook and read over them together. *This serves as an advanced organizer for the lesson and alerts learners to key information and concepts.*

By the end of this lesson, students should:

- know the difference between the Old Testament, Apocrypha, and New Testament
- classify and list the books of the New Testament
- understand basic terms used in New Testament study
- explain why the New Testament canon is trustworthy

### **√ Why study the New Testament?**

- *What is the difference between studying your Bible and reading it as devotional literature?*
- *Why is it important to study the New Testament and not just read it devotionally?*

## The Bible: A big investment

**People have died for the Bible.** Not only were the early Christians martyred, but William Tyndale, a 16th-century priest, was executed for translating the Bible into English. In the 20th century Bible smugglers endangered their lives and Christians living in Muslim countries were persecuted and killed. A recent *Christianity Today* magazine has a story of a young boy whose family was killed because they would not deny their Christianity. The little boy was thrown in the fire and left for dead.

**More copies of the Bible have been printed than any other single book.** No one traveling in Africa or Latin America can bring enough Bibles to fill the demand. Even in North America, where Bibles are not scarce, more copies are sold than any other book, including “best sellers.”

--Walter A. Elwell and Robert W. Yarbrough, *Encountering the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1998). 20.  
(References to this text will be abbreviated as ENT in the future.)

**The Bible, consisting of the Old and New Testaments, has deeply affected the world we live in.**

- *What are some ways you see that the Bible has affected your world?*

## The Old and New Testaments

**The Old Testament** is the Scripture God gave to the Israelites. It is a testimony to God’s creation of the world and humanity, the human fall into sin, and God’s attempts to reconcile them with himself.

**The Old Testament Apocrypha** is a collection of books written from about 200 BC to AD 100 which contain valuable historical and religious information. They were not accepted into the Jewish canon or by the Protestant churches as divinely inspired. Roman Catholics and some Eastern Orthodox churches do recognize them as Scripture. We will be referring to some of these books, especially 1 and 2 Maccabees, as we review the intertestamental history.

**The New Testament** is a testimony of God’s reconciliation through Jesus Christ and the creation of His reconciling community, the Church.

- **The Gospels:** Matthew, Mark, Luke, John  
These four Gospels tell the story of Jesus’ life on earth in four different versions, or from four different viewpoints.
- **History:** Acts  
This book is the only real “history” book in the New Testament and traces the development of the Early Church from Jesus’ ascension to Paul’s imprisonment in Rome (ca. AD 30–65).
- **Epistles (Letters):**
  1. **Pauline:** Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon. Paul’s letters were sent to churches and individuals to help them understand what to believe, how to live out this belief, and how this faith related to their

community.

2. **Johannine:** 1, 2, and 3 John  
These three rather short letters of John were sent to churches and an individual (Gaius) encouraging them to be strong in the faith.
  3. **General** (Catholic): Hebrews, James, 1 and 2 Peter, Jude (1, 2 and 3 John are also usually considered General Epistles.) General Epistles are sometimes called Catholic (meaning universal) Epistles or letters. They were written by various Christian leaders to an unspecified audience, perhaps several different churches. They emphasize the superiority of Christianity over Jewish traditions, call for Christians to act out what they believe, and warn against false teachers.
- **Apocalyptic or Book of Hope:** Revelation of John  
The Revelation of John is an entirely different book which uses Jewish apocalyptic language and symbols of the period to encourage the early Christians to endure persecution, because God has already won the war.

### **Discussion: Why study the New Testament?**

#### **Three reasons why we should study the New Testament.**

-- from Elwell, Walter A. and Yarbrough, Robert W., *Encountering the New Testament*. Grand Rapids†: Baker Books, 1994.

1. It mediates God's presence and God's truth.  
*What does this statement mean?*  
*What do you think about the statement that in the Bible God has given us absolute truth, applicable anywhere, anytime?*
2. It is of ultimate personal significance.  
*What does this statement mean?*  
*Why is this an important reason to study the New Testament and proclaim its truths?*
3. It is foundational to much cultural literacy.
  - Jaroslav Pelikan, in his opening statement to *Jesus Through the Centuries: His Place in the History of Culture*, says:  
Regardless of what anyone may personally think or believe about him, Jesus of Nazareth has been the dominant figure of the history of Western culture for almost twenty centuries. If it were possible, with some sort of super-magnet, to pull up out of that history every scrap of metal bearing at least a trace of his name, how much would be left? It is from his birth that most of the human race dates its calendars, it is by his name that millions curse and in his name that millions pray.  
*--(New York: Harper and Row, 1985), 1.*
  - New Testament teaching influences us today.

*What are some concrete ways we find New Testament teachings in this culture in our everyday lives?*

## √ Definitions of terms relating to the Bible

We will define the terms we will be using so we are all working from the same definition in our understanding and usage.

**Revelation:** By revelation we mean God's self-disclosure to humanity through His words and actions. This revelation is recorded in the Bible and is based on historical events. Biblical history is best described as a theological understanding of historical events that happened to or around God's people.

**Inspiration:** When the term "inspiration" is used it means the involvement of God in the process of communicating His revelation (self-disclosure) and usually refers to its written form. Inspired, or "God-breathed," means the Holy Spirit worked in and through the minds and hearts of His people to produce a trustworthy account of God's truth. There are three main theories of inspiration:

- Dictation (Verbal Inspiration): God dictated every word to the human writer. There was no actual involvement of the person (except in a mechanical sense) in the thought process of putting the ideas in written form.
- Guidance of the Holy Spirit (Dynamic Inspiration): Human writers recorded their understanding of God's self-revelation in their own language and for their specific culture under the direct guidance of the Holy Spirit. The Bible is totally and completely inspired (plenary inspiration) because it is the result of a dynamic relationship between God and the human writers.
- Influence of Tradition, Religious Practices, and Biases: Some Christians believe inspiration is the process of human writers recording their understanding of God's revelation under the influence of their religious traditions, biases, and religious thinking. This theory does not generally include the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It is a purely rationalistic theory.

**Authority of Scripture:** Protestant tradition regards Scripture as the only source of the Church's beliefs and practices. This *sola scriptura* principle was adopted by Martin Luther in the Reformation. Our own Wesleyan tradition is based on this, but also recognizes that historic Church tradition, human reason, and human experience are very important to the interpretation of Scripture. We recognize that the Bible has authority because God is the "author." The Bible is the record of His self-disclosure.

**Hermeneutics:** This is the art of biblical interpretation. The technical study of hermeneutics covers the rules and principles used in the practice of biblical interpretation. The goals of hermeneutics are: (1) to discover the historical context and meaning of the passage for the original audience and (2) to translate the content of that original meaning for the contemporary audiences.

**Exegesis:** This is the process of bringing the meaning "out of" the biblical text by the modern reader. Exegesis is part of the hermeneutical process.

## √ Formation of the New Testament Canon

Where does the term "Bible" come from? It comes from the port of Byblos in Lebanon. Byblos was known to be an important place for the shipment of papyrus. *Byblos* in the old Greek language originally meant the inner bark of the papyrus plant. Papyrus bark was striped into long pieces, pressed to get the water out, dried in a crisscross pattern, and used for paper in the ancient world. So *byblos* came to be associated with books and then became a specific book, the Bible. The very earliest copies of the New Testament were written on this kind of material.

### The Canon of the New Testament

**Definition of Canon:** The word "canon" comes from the Greek term *kanon* which originally meant a "reed" used for measuring. Eventually it came to mean "a standard" and, in literature, it described a list of works that could be attributed to a certain author.

- The canon of the New Testament is an authoritative collection of books recognized by the Church as the standard for belief and practice.
- Because the New Testament was written by at least nine different people (some apostles, some not, some eye-witnesses, some not), the question of the canonicity of a New Testament book cannot be decided totally on authorship.
- Nor can the canon be decided only on the church's acceptance of the books. Some of the books were widely accepted, some received with hesitation, and some not accepted at all by some of the early churches.
- The only true criterion for canonicity is "inspiration." Tenney suggests three ways inspiration can be demonstrated.
  1. Intrinsic Context: The central subject is Jesus Christ.
  2. Moral Effect: Reading and following the principles of these books will effect transformation in a person's life.
  3. Historic Testimony of the Church: This shows the value the community of faith has placed on these books down through the centuries.

### Authority of the New Testament message

**Internal testimony:** The New Testament itself testifies to the authority of the message.

- References indicating the Old Testament is the Word of God: 2 Tim 3:15-17, 2 Pet 1:20-21, Heb 8:8, Acts 28:25.
- References which talk about the teachings of Jesus as "a word of the Lord": 1 Cor 9:9, 13-14, 1 Thess 4:15, 1 Cor 7:10, 25.
- References to the fact that certain information was received directly from God, by divine revelation: Gal 1:1, 12, 1 Thess 2:13.
- References that acknowledge Paul's letters as authoritative: 2 Pet 3:15-16.  
-- Merrill C. Tenney, *New Testament Survey*, revised by Walter M. Dunnnett (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1992), 404-5.

**External testimony:** The Early Church fathers and leaders recognized the canonicity of the New Testament books.

-- Tenney, *New Testament Survey*, 405-9.

Informal witnesses: By informal we mean the casual use of the books of the New Testament by Early Church fathers. These quotations testify to the existence and authority of the books at the time of the writing by the Early Church fathers.

1. The earliest document to quote any of the books of the New Testament was 1 Clement, written from Rome to the church in Corinth and is usually dated about AD 95. It contains allusions to Hebrews, 1 Corinthians, Romans, and the Gospel of Matthew.
2. Ignatius of Antioch in Syria (AD 116) knew all of Paul's letters, quoted Matthew and possibly John.
3. Polycarp of Smyrna (AD 150) knew Paul's letters, Matthew, and quotes from 1 Peter and 1 John and alludes possibly to Acts.
4. The *Didache* (AD 100-150) used Matthew, Luke, and many other New Testament books in its attempt at a catechism or discipleship course.
5. By Irenaeus' time (AD 170) there was no question the books of the New Testament were authoritative. The growth of Gnosticism and other heresies forced a flood of apologetic literature that continued until the time of Origen (AD 250). This literature carefully outlined which books were orthodox and which were not.

Formal lists: These are the official lists of New Testament books accepted by groups of Christians or Church Councils. Examples include:

1. Canon of Marcion (AD 140). This canon was developed by Marcion, an Early Church heretic, who was "anti-Jewish" and selected books that would be free from Jewish influences. His New Testament canon consisted of Luke and 10 letters of Paul, all except the Pastoral Epistles.
2. Muratorian Canon (fragment copy from about AD 170). This early orthodox canon included: 4 Gospels, Acts, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Galatians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, Romans, Philemon, Titus, 1 and 2 Timothy, Jude, 1, 2, and 3 John, Revelation. It did not mention James, Hebrews, or Peter's letters.

The Councils: An "official council" was a formal discussion by delegates of the church. The earliest council we know of which dealt with the issue of canon is the Council of Laodicea (AD 363). This council decreed only canonical books of the New Testament should be read in the church. The extant document contains a definitive list, but most scholars do not think it is genuine. They think it was revised based on later council decisions. The earliest council listing the present 27 books of the New Testament was the Third Council of Carthage in AD 397, which is usually cited as the date for the closing of the New Testament canon. The Council of Hippo in AD 419 gave the same list.

**Conclusion:** The canon, then, is not the product of any one person's arbitrary judgment, nor was it set by councilor vote. It was the outcome of the use of various writings that proved their merits and their unity by their inward dynamic. Some were recognized more slowly than others because of the smallness of their size, their remote or private destination or anonymity of the authorship, or their

seeming lack of applicability to the immediate ecclesiastical need. None of these factors mitigates against the inspiration of any one of these books, or against its right to its place in the authoritative word of God.

--Tenney, *New Testament Survey*, 111.

**\*\* Group Activity: Advantages of studying the New Testament**

In you small groups, discuss and list **ten** advantages of studying the New Testament. Prepare to present this in class (Course outcomes 6, 9, 11).

***Lesson Close***

***Journal or share with your discussion partner***

Include your reflections on why you want to study the New Testament and a discussion on the following questions:

- How would you explain to a layperson how a certain book got into the New Testament?
- Do you think the Church would ever "open" the canon again to include another letter by the Apostle Paul which may be found in the future by archeologists? Why or why not?

***Assignment***

Memorize the Books of the New Testament in order and be able to spell them correctly.

## ***Historical, Social, and Religious Settings of the World of Jesus***

### ***Introduction***

- *How does history help us to understand people we know? Think of a specific situation where knowing the history altered your view of the situation.*
- *Have you ever been in a social setting where you felt "out of place" and unsure of what was expected of you?*
- *Have you ever visited another country or associated with people of another culture or ethnic group? What were the questions running through your mind?*

### ***Objectives for this lesson***

By the end of this lesson, students should:

- understand the historical events that led up to the Jewish messianic expectations in the first century.
- understand the setting for the "hellenization" of the Jews, especially Diaspora Jews (Jews outside of Palestine)
- understand the customs and religious setting of first-century Jews and be able to identify the differences among the major Jewish religious groups of the first century
- be able to use this historical, social, and religious data as a basis for interpreting the New Testament

### **√ Historical setting**

#### **539 BC—Persian Empire**

Persia conquered Babylon in 539 BC and Cyrus, the Persian king, proclaimed freedom to the Jews in Babylon and allowed them to return to Palestine from Babylon. This marks the beginning of Israel's post-exilic history.

**Ezra 1:2-4; 6:3-5.** The return of the Jews to their homeland took place in stages. Some returned immediately; others waited and returned at a later time. The main reason for the delay was that the economic prospects were much better in Babylon than in the devastated land of Israel. So the return continued over the next 200 years, and some never returned to their homeland. **The first group** of

homecoming Jews was led by Shezbazzar in 538 BC and they began the rebuilding of the Temple. **A second group**, under the leadership of Zerubbabel, continued the rebuilding program. Zerubbabel was the last surviving heir to the throne of David and in 520 BC he was made governor of Judah by the Persian government. The Samaritans who occupied the Jewish homeland were a Jew/Gentile mixture of people, the result of people the king of Assyria transported to the Northern Kingdom of Israel to replace the Jews exiled after the fall of Samaria in 722/721 BC. They offered to help rebuild the Temple but Zerubbabel would not allow them due to their religious syncretism. Because of this the Samaritans opposed the building of the Temple and the animosity that developed lasted into the first century AD.

**Ezra 4:1-5.** The arrival of Haggai and Zechariah from Babylon brought new energy to the Jews living in Jerusalem. Because of their challenge to continue rebuilding, the Temple was completed and dedicated in 515 BC. Joshua was appointed as the high priest. Jerusalem was repopulated and the walls rebuilt. The arrival of Ezra and Nehemiah between 500 and 450 BC brought reformation to the religious and civil life of the people.

- Nehemiah was a layperson, a cup bearer in the palace of the Persian king, Artaxerxes. With the permission of the king, he returned to Palestine and rebuilt the walls and the gates of the city of Jerusalem in 52 days. He restored civil life to the Jews returning from Babylon. In 445 BC, he became governor of Judah.
- Ezra, a priest, attempted to restore the religious life of the Jews. He called for religious loyalty to the covenant laws given by Moses and set new rules and regulations to guide the religious and secular life of the Jews in Palestine. As high priest, who enforced the observance of the Jewish law, he was the first in a long line of rabbis instrumental in forming and preserving Judaism.

Under the Persian rule, the Jews enjoyed relative peace and economic and political stability.

### **334-332 BC—Greek Empire**

Alexander of Macedonia (the Great) began his conquest of the Persian Empire in 334 BC and completed it in 332 BC. He extended his rule over three continents and created the largest empire ever known to this point. The death of Alexander the Great in 323 BC resulted in the vast empire being divided into four areas; two concern Palestine:

- The Ptolemies ruled in Egypt. They captured Jerusalem in 320 BC, but their policies created no real problems for Jews. This was a peaceful reign.
- The Greek General Seleucus ruled in Asia and Syria. Later this part of the Greek Empire would conquer Palestine and chase the Ptolemies out.

Alexander the Great's conquest of Palestine changed the way people would live and think by beginning the process of "hellenization," the imposition of Greek culture and language on the east. The term comes from "Hellen," the Greek word for a person of Greek origin or culture. The Jews began to adapt Jewish faith to Greek thought and practice. The Greek Septuagint (usually abbreviated LXX, a translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek and the "Bible" for most of the early

Christians) and the Greek New Testament are a direct result. Also, Jewish teachers like Philo compared great Jewish leaders, like Moses, to the Greek philosophers. They wanted to show that Hebrew thought was as enlightened as Greek thought.

## **198 BC—Seleucid (Syrian) Empire**

Antiochus III (the Great) defeated the Ptolemies and took over the land they administrated. He treated the Jews well by providing financial assistance to rebuild from the war and exempted them from taxes for three years. Hellenistic culture was welcomed by the Jewish upper class. They saw economic and political advantage and were eager for assimilation. Jason, the high priest, tried to set Jerusalem up as a Greek city-state. He had a gymnasium built under the patronage of Hermes and Hercules. Because Greek sporting events were done in the nude, there were even attempts to reverse circumcision. The desire on the part of the rich to be "Greek" was very strong. The poor, on the other hand, opposed hellenization, seeing no advantages and only corruption of their religious rituals and beliefs. Because of this stance, the term "poor" also carried the meaning of pious or holy people by the first century AD.

### **Jewish religious crises**

- Antiochus IV (Epiphanes) in 175 BC decided to promote Greek culture and customs throughout the empire. He banned Judaism and killed or sent into slavery Jews who resisted. He erected an altar to Zeus in the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem.
- In 168 BC, Antiochus ordered the desecration of the Temple in Jerusalem. In December he offered a pig on the altar and took holy vessels and money from the Temple treasury.  
*--2 Macc 5:15-16 (Desecration); 6:1-9 (Crisis and Desecration); 7:1-7 (Torture of the Faithful).*

## **167 BC—Maccabean period and the Hasmonean dynasty**

Mattathias was a priest with five sons (John, Jonathan, Judas, Simon, Eleazer) who revolted in 167 BC, when Antiochus IV required Jews to offer pagan sacrifices. Mattathias killed another Jew who stepped forward to offer pagan sacrifice. After this, he and his sons fled to the hills

Judas the Maccabee (which means hammerer) was the third of Mattathias' sons. He succeeded his father as the leader of the revolt and conducted guerrilla warfare against opposing Jews (hellenized) and Syrians. Wearing the Syrians down with his continual hit-and-run raids at night, he liberated Jerusalem in 164 BC.

*-- Read 2 Macc 8:5-7 (Guerrilla Warfare).*

The Liberation of Jerusalem in 164 BC is celebrated by the Festival of the Dedication referred to in John 10:22, known today as "Hanukkah." This feast celebrated the purification and rededication of the Temple after Judas the Maccabee liberated Jerusalem.

The Jewish kingdom that developed after this revolt was the Hasmonean Dynasty (134-63 BC). This dynasty of priest-kings traced their roots back to Mattathias.

- Their capital city was Jerusalem, which became the center of religious, political,

- and economic life.
- The Jewish sects of the Pharisees and Sadducees developed and flourished during this time. We will discuss these groups later on in the course.
- One of the most powerful Hasmonean kings was John Hyrcanus, who expanded the borders of the Jewish nation. He destroyed the Samaritan Temple on Mount Gerazim in the process of conquering Samaria. This action only added to the hostility between the Jews and Samaritans, begun several hundred years earlier in Zerubbabel's time. Samaritans continued to maintain distinct national and religious identity even after being conquered by the Jews.
- In 63 BC, internal struggle for power within the Hasmonean family led to the occupation of Palestine by the Roman Empire.

## **63 BC—Roman rule of Palestine**

### **Pompey captures Jerusalem in 63 BC**

The rivalry between the two sons of longtime Hasmonean ruler Alexander Jannaeus weakened the Jewish Dynasty, so Pompey came in with Roman legions and captured Jerusalem in 63 BC. Antipater, the Hasmonean king's minister and power behind the throne (Herod the Great's father), was given a political position with the Roman government because of his help to the Romans. The Hasmoneans were allowed to rule Jerusalem until Herod the Great. In addition to the land of Palestine, Pompey added the Decapolis (which means "10 cities") on the eastern frontier of Palestine as a buffer between the Roman Empire and the Arabian steppe.

### **Republic fell apart and Caesar became emperor**

Shortly after this time, the Roman Republic was torn apart by strong men trying to gain power. Julius Caesar became emperor and Rome united the then-known world in several ways.

**Government:** Provided one central government with local governors bound to Rome by oaths. These oaths were pledges of loyalty to the emperor which, if broken, meant death for the local rulers.

**Road system:** There was a saying at that time: "All roads lead to Rome." These roads were built for military purposes but facilitated trade and dissemination of ideas for a very large area.

### **Language:**

- Latin: This was the native language of the Romans and was generally spoken by Roman citizens, merchants, and soldiers.
- Greek: The common, unifying language of the Roman Empire was Koine (meaning common) Greek. It was the language of trade, was used in many government offices, and was the everyday language of many people. For most Diaspora Jews, Greek was their common language.
- **Ethnic Languages:** Each ethnic group had its own dialect or language. The Jews had two:
  - Aramaic: This language came originally from the seminomadic Arameans. It flourished after the exile and during the Persian and Hellenistic periods. It was exclusively a language of Jewish and Samaritan populations.
  - Hebrew: In first century AD, Hebrew was exclusively the language of the

INDIGENOUS Jews of Palestine. It was not spoken much in the north (Galilee). Although Hebrew was read in the Galilean synagogues, the discussions on the Hebrew Scripture were most likely conducted in Aramaic or Greek. Most archeological evidence for Hebrew comes from central and southern Palestine.

## **Herodian period (63-4 BC)**

This period begins with Antipater II (63-37 BC), father of Herod the Great. He became procurator of Judea in 47 BC for his military support of Julius Caesar.

Herod the Great (37-4 BC) is the most famous king in this lineage but probably inherited and/or learned his astute political ways from his father.

- He was the “King of the Jews” and ruled over Judea, Idumea, Perea, and Galilee.
- He was part Jew and part Idumean, and more Hellenistic than most Jews. Primarily due to his loyalty oath required by Rome but also because of his natural inclinations, he had total loyalty to Rome. He was deeply hated and feared by the Jews for this.
- He was a regional king or “puppet” king for Rome. He also had the fortune of ruling during an era of economic prosperity.
- He was a passionate builder. He began the rebuilding of the Temple (20 BC-AD 63). He also made the city of Caesarea Maritima into a comfortable Roman city, building a theatre and other civic buildings. Later Roman rulers, like Pontius Pilate, preferred to live in Caesarea and come to Jerusalem only when their presence was necessary. Herod built many palaces for his enjoyment as well as fortresses for defense.

After his death around 4 BC, Herod’s kingdom was divided between his three sons:

- Archelaus was given Judea, Idumea, and Samaria.
- Herod Antipas received Galilee and Perea.
- Philip ruled the land north and east of the Jordan.

We will look more closely at these later rulers later.

## **√ Jewish life: social and religious setting**

### **Significant changes in Jewish lifestyle and religious life during the Babylonian Exile: 597/587—539/8 BC**

Several significant changes happened to the Israelites during the Babylonian exile. When they were in Israel they were members of 12 different tribes, but during the exile this covenant community established their identity as members of the tribe of Judah and became known as “Yehudites” or Jews.

- They adopted the language of Babylon, Aramaic, which became the official language of Judaism for the next 600 hundred years at least.
- They took the initiative to preserve the sacred writings, and the beginning of the process of canonization of the Old Testament Scriptures began, which was completed in AD 90 at the Council of Jamnia.
- They adopted a commercial way of life, i.e., merchants and bankers, in contrast to the agricultural way of life they had in Israel.
- They organized small-group assemblies for the purpose of reading and studying the Law and for prayer. This was the beginning of the synagogue as a religious institution. Synagogues later became centers of religious education and worship in Israel.

-- Alexander Varughese, *Beyond Eden: An Outline of the Story and Faith of the Biblical Communities* (Mount Vernon, OH: Mount Vernon Nazarene University, 2002), 82

## **Jerusalem became a pilgrimage city**

Because of the exile, the phenomenon of Diaspora Judaism became dominant. Most Jews were living outside of Palestine and Jerusalem, but according to the Jewish law, every Jewish male was required to visit Jerusalem three times a year. This meant Jerusalem became a pilgrimage city with (during the early part of the first century AD) a year-round population of around 25,000, which would swell to 200,000 or more during festival days.

**The Temple** remained the religious center of Judaism until AD 70, even with the rise of the local synagogues,

- The Temple area, including the large Court of the Gentiles, was 26 acres or 108,000 square meters.
- The outside court—outside the walls of the main Temple area—was the Court of the Gentiles. Here was where the buying and selling of animals for sacrifice took place, as well as the exchange of money from Roman to Temple money, so people could pay their tithes, etc. It was generally a noisy and difficult place to pray.
- The Women’s Court was inside the walls but at the opposite end from the holy of holies. In this court were the alms boxes, storage rooms for wine, oil, and wood, as well as the consulting rooms for those taking a Nazirite vow and for those suspected of leprosy.
- Through the Great Gate or Nicanor’s Gate the ritually pure Jewish man could proceed to the Court of the Israelites. From this court the men would bring their sacrificial animals and food to the priests, who would take the sacrifices into the Court of the Priests. These two courts were not separated by a wall, so the men could view everything that happened in the Court of the Priests.
- The Court of the Priests contained the altar for sacrifice, the laver for water purification, and probably slaughtering rooms.
- The holy place and the holy of holies was housed in a tall cubical building at the back of the Court of the Priests. In the holy place were the altar of incense, the menorah (lampstand), and the table of showbread. Behind a curtain was the holy of holies. This most holy place was entered only one time a year (during Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement) by the high priest, to offer a sin

- sacrifice for all the people.
- The Temple layout not only reveals zones of holiness or purity but also indicates the hierarchy of the Jewish society. The closer one could get to the holy of holies, the higher one's status.

**The Synagogue** was the *local* center since the third century BC. It preserved study and observance of Old Testament law. Some scholars think it became a community center, school, and civil law center in the first century AD.

The Synagogue Service Order reminds us that many early Christians attended synagogue services.

- Singing a Psalm
- Reciting the Shema and Blessings (Deut 6:4-9)
- Reading from the Law
- Reading from the Prophets
- Sermon
- Blessing by the President of the Synagogue (This was usually the person (or relative) who gave the money for the building.)
- Priestly Blessing (Num 6:24-27)

*What similarities do you see between our modern-day worship services and this ancient synagogue service order? What differences do you see?*

## **Annual feasts/festivals—religious practices and beliefs**

Another very important aspect of Jewish religious life during this time was the annual feasts or festivals. "Religious" Jewish men were expected to come to Jerusalem three times a year to participate in these events. There are seven main events and several of these follow one after another.

- The **New Year festival**, or **Rosh Hashanah**, came in September or October depending on the Jewish lunar calendar. It was also called the **Feast of Trumpets** since trumpets were used to announce the beginning of the New Year. This festival also coincided with the end of the grape and olive harvests.
- Ten days after the New Year celebration came the **Day of Atonement** or **Yom Kippur**. This was not a feast but a serious time of reflection on one's faithfulness to God. During this time the high priest entered the holy of holies and offered a "sin offering" for all the people.
- **Feast of Tabernacles** or **Booths** came five days after the Day of Atonement. This was a celebration of the fall harvest, a time when the Jews remembered the days in the wilderness when they lived in tents or booths. This festival lasted eight days with eating, visiting, and even sleeping outside under a shelter of leaves and branches. Many Diaspora Jews who came for the New Year festival would stay until the end of this feast, over three weeks.
- The festival of **Hanukkah** came in December and was a celebration of the liberation of Jerusalem by Judas Maccabeus and the rededication of the Temple in 164 BC. During this time lamps were lit to remind the people of the miracle of the oil. There was only enough sacred oil for the lamp stand in the Temple

for one day, but God caused the oil to last eight days until more sacred oil could be made. So this festival also lasts eight days.

- The festival of **Purim**, which comes in February or March depending on the lunar calendar, remembers the Jews' deliverance in the time of Esther. During the first century this festival was not celebrated in Palestine. It developed in Babylon and had a wild, carnival-type flavor. The Jewish leadership in Jerusalem felt it was much too wild. We do not find this festival referred to in the New Testament, but it does become very important and prominent to the Jewish people during the middle ages and even in the modern era, especially during the time of Hitler.
- The feast of **Passover** comes in March or April, again depending on the lunar calendar. It is a celebration of freedom from slavery and a time to remember the Exodus from Egypt. It was a very important and significant feast during the first century.
- The feast of **Pentecost** was celebrated in May or June. It came 50 days after Passover, and thus the name *Pente* or 50. Its religious significance is the remembrance of the giving of the Law to Moses on Mount Sinai. This festival also coincided with the end of the wheat harvest.

## **Important first-century Jewish beliefs**

In addition to the festivals, as well as the Temple and synagogue worship, there are several significant general beliefs of the Jews during this first century AD.

- The Law was a framework for Jewish life and was the legal basis for regulation of activities in Palestine.
- The Jews believed keeping the Law (God's revelation to Moses on Mount Sinai) was the basis for receiving God's covenant blessings. Those who did not keep the Law could expect God's wrath. So blessings were associated with being good and disaster with being bad. Therefore, like we do today, they struggled with why bad things happen to good people.
- They also believed God will create a new order of things and deliver His people. The apocalyptic book *The Assumption of Moses* was written at the end of first century BC. Its apocalyptic language sounds much like Mark 13:24-27.

-- PHEME PERKINS, *Reading the New Testament* (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), 35-45.

## **Political and social conditions**

There were luxurious palaces and villas in upper Jerusalem for the high priests and the wealthy. The palaces and villas of the wealthy were built of brick or concrete, had tile floors, a central atrium (court), open-hearth kitchen, oil lamps, plumbing and heating, inside toilets, walls with murals, and floors of mosaics. They were in "upper" Jerusalem because the sewage flowed downhill. So the lower on the hill you were, the smellier and less desirable your location.

The common people usually lived in lower Jerusalem or in the towns. They lived in

homes made of sun-dried brick and stucco, floors of hard earth or stone, and mud-plastered, flat rooftops used for sleeping in hot weather and to dry or store food. They slept on mats and had no plumbing or inside toilets. These were two-level apartments or houses with the upper level for people and the lower level for animals.

During the first part of the first century Palestine was peaceful and prosperous. A common Roman proverb of the time was: "Peace to Rome and quiet to the provinces."

Rome protected Jewish privileges. Jews were allowed to pay Temple tax in lieu of public works taxes. Rome also issued a decree protecting the sacred Torah scrolls even from Roman soldiers and leaders. Jews were allowed to observe the Jewish Sabbath and were exempted from military service. This last exemption was probably in the interest of the Romans as well as the Jews. What Roman centurion would want men in his troop who had to eat special foods, prepared in special ways, and could not eat with the rest of the men because they were unclean; or required time off for Sabbath and festival celebrations?

## **Jewish religious roles, parties, and sects**

**Religious roles.** Three main roles need to be understood, as they are referred to over and over again in the New Testament:

- The **high priestly families** in Jerusalem were collaborators with the Romans to some degree, because their positions were political appointments. They had the delicate position of being the Jewish religious leaders who presided over Jewish religious and civil cases, based on the Law, but had also to make Rome happy with their decisions. Rome was primarily concerned about rioting, so a priority for these high priestly families and leadership would be NOT to cause or incite riots.
- The **Levites** were the priests for Temple service. Zechariah, John the Baptist's father, was a Levite. Generally these priests took turns serving in the Temple and were farmers or artisans the rest of the time.
- The **Scribes** were teachers and interpreters of the Law. They were generally called "Rabbi" and had disciples. They were laypeople.

**Parties.** The two main parties during this time were the Pharisees and the Sadducees. Those in the above roles could be either a Pharisee or a Sadducee, but the priests tended to be Sadducees and the scribes tended to be Pharisees.

- **Pharisees**, which means "separated ones," included both priests and laypeople. They developed the oral law that was later codified in the Mishnah around AD 200. The Pharisees described the oral law as a "fence" around the Torah that helped to prevent inadvertent breaking of the Law of God. For example: A tailor was not to carry a needle on the Sabbath (oral law), because he might accidentally use the needle and "work" on the Sabbath, thus breaking one of the Ten Commandments (Torah). They also believed in angels, spirits, and bodily resurrection.

- The **Sadducees** came mostly from priestly families and the wealthy. They opposed the oral law of the Pharisees and their belief in angels, spirits, and resurrection. They tended to collaborate with the Romans. They only accepted the Pentateuch as authoritative. The Prophets and the Writings we include in the Old Testament were considered good literature but not authoritative religiously. This party disappeared after AD 70 when the Temple was destroyed, since the Temple was the center of their religion.

**Sects.** In addition to these two main parties there were several smaller sects. The two largest and most well-known of these are the Essenes and the Zealots.

- The **Essenes** withdrew from society either physically or socially to maintain their pure religion. They saw most of Israel's history as unfaithful to God and especially the first-century Temple religion. It is thought the Qumran Community, which existed during the time of Jesus, was Essene and that perhaps John the Baptist belonged to or was influenced by some kind of Essene sect.
- The **Zealots** were so called because of their zeal for the Law. They advocated rebellion against non-Jewish rulers as a sign of loyalty to Yahweh. According to their understanding, there was no legitimate king of the Jews except God. Many of these people suffered death and torture for their beliefs. One of Jesus' disciples, Simon the Zealot, is identified with one of these groups (Mt 10:4). These people were considered very dangerous because of their tendency to incite riots, a number-one prohibition by Rome.

***\*\*Group Activity: religious context***

Discuss in your groups the various aspects of the religious context of the New Testament period, and be prepared to share your conclusions with the class for 3-4 minutes.

## ***THE LIFE AND MINISTRY OF JESUS***

### ***Introduction***

- *Why is it important to know where and when Jesus lived?*
- *Of what value is an "historical" understanding of Jesus?*

### ***Objectives for this lesson***

By the end of this lesson, students should:

- understand Jesus' life, ministry, and teaching in its original setting
- use historical data as a basis for interpreting Jesus' teachings
- understand the authority with which Jesus taught
- know the theme and methods of Jesus' teaching

### **√ Who Is Jesus?**

#### **The Gospels: our main source for the life of Jesus**

Modern biographies usually begin with an account of the subject's childhood years, and then progress consecutively through adolescence and adulthood to show how the mature person has developed in response to the various influences of early life and environment. However, the Gospels are primarily a witness to Jesus. Their main emphasis is the last week of Jesus' life. This is prefaced by the reports of Jesus' teaching and accounts of a few events from the three years before His death. There is no real discussion of His childhood and adolescence.

#### **The Gospel material was preserved**

**Oral tradition:** The events and teachings of Jesus were passed on from one generation to the next through memorizing the stories. We know that in oral societies today, peer monitoring for accuracy is continual. They allow room for different perspectives and points of view but are intolerant of inaccuracies or deliberate skewing of information.

**Written tradition:** In the case of the stories of Jesus, there was an early commitment to writing. These took different forms: miracle stories, pronouncement stories, sayings and parables, instruction for disciples, and passion narratives.

## Roles of Jesus found in the New Testament

**Teacher.** Jesus was called “Rabbi” by His followers and disciples, both men and women (Lk 8:1-3). The term Rabbi during time was not a technical designation indicating special schooling for this position as it came to mean later on in Judaism. But it does denote a teacher with students or disciples, which was also characteristic of the scribes of the first century.

**Healer.** Jesus was also a healer, not just of diseases, but also of demon possession. His miraculous powers showed authority over both the physical and the spiritual worlds.

**Lord.** Quite remarkably, Jesus was also called Lord or Master by His followers. These terms indicate that His authority was recognized. Lord or Master was a term commonly used for people of importance, but also was the name used for God since the Jews were prohibited from using God’s name, Yahweh. For example, note Mark 2:23-28; 3:1-6 where Jesus calls himself the Lord of the Sabbath.

**Miracle worker.** Matthew 12:27 tells us Jesus is not the only miracle worker who drove out demons. But He was significantly different in that He did not charge for His miracles! His miracles were often used to help people “hear” what He had to say. Reasons for His miracles can be found in the three different Greek words used and translated “miracle” in English.

- *Dunamis—power:* They witnessed to Jesus’ power and thus established Jesus as the Messiah.
- *Semeia—sign:* They showed that in Jesus the kingdom of God had come.
- *Tepas—wonders:* Their purpose was to teach the wonders about who Jesus is and what the kingdom of God was about, not to entertain.

Miracles can be categorized into these types:

- provision (Lk 9:10-17, 5:1ff.)
- healing (Mk 5:21-43)
- destruction (fig tree, Mt 21:18-22)
- authority over the physical world (calming of the Sea, Mk 4:35-41)
- authority over the spiritual world (Mt 9:1-8)
- New creation miracles, which are exorcisms (Mk 5:1-20) and resurrection (Jn 11:38-44)

**Messiah and Savior.** Jesus is acknowledged as the Messiah in John 1:41 and 4:25. He never used the title for himself because of the possibility for it to be misunderstood. “Christ” which is Greek for “Messiah” is used so often in the New Testament, that some people think it is Jesus’ last name. However, since it was not commonly used for “Messiah” before Jesus’ time, the Christian community was able to give this word the special meaning of “Messiah” which Jesus came to be. Jesus is specifically referred to as Savior in Luke 2:11, John 4:42, and 2 Timothy 1:10.

## √ **When did Jesus live?**

### **Date of Jesus' birth: historical issues to consider**

Several historical events give us clues as to when Jesus was born.

-- Paul Maier, *First Christmas* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1971), 69-81.

We know it had to be before Herod the Great died in 4 BC since he was still king approximately two years after Jesus' birth when the wise men arrived in Judea.

Luke tells us Mary and Joseph came to Bethlehem because of a census, decreed by Augustus when Quirinius was governor of Syria. Here we have our first problem, since secular historical data tells us Quirinius was made governor of Syria in AD 6-7 when he finished the census. In trying to harmonize these issues some scholars suggest Quirinius may have finished his census in AD 6-7 when he was made governor of Syria. But he may have been given the commission much earlier and that is the time to which Luke is referring.

Another historical event is the appearance of the Christmas star. There are several explanations of the star, including the belief that it was a miracle star just for that occasion to those who believe. Others think it is just a story and there is no historical substance to it. A middle road suggests God worked through the naturally occurring phenomenon, which was being interpreted by these eastern wise men or pagan priests according to their traditions. A possible reconstruction from the history of astrology is:

- 7-6 BC—A conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn happens which would indicate the birth of a king according to their traditions.
- 5 BC—Comet, Williams No. 52
- 4 BC—Nova or Comet, Williams No. 53

Following these events in the heavens it would have taken the magi westward over a period of two years. The astrological significance of these events would lead the magi to inquire in the palace for the birth of a king, which is what they did.

Another historical consideration comes from the Scripture itself. Luke 3:1, 23 tells us Jesus was about 30 years old in the 15th year of Emperor Tiberius' reign. The official date of him becoming Emperor is AD 14, but he had been sharing power since AD 11. This later date is likely the date Luke used. So Jesus was baptized in AD 24-25 and born in 6 or 5 BC before Herod the Great's death in AD 4.

The current numbering system for the Gregorian calendar was developed by Dionysius Exiguus, or "Dennis the Small." He based the calendar on what he thought was the date of Jesus' birth, which occurred 532 years earlier. He miscalculated the birth of Jesus by at least 4 years. Therefore we have Jesus born between 6 and 4 BC (Before Christ!). Also, there was no concept of zero, so that also removes 1 more year from the calculations when crossing over from BC to AD.

## Dates of Jesus' ministry

Luke indicates Jesus began His ministry about AD 24-25. Traditions say His ministry lasted one to three years. So His death and resurrection would have been no later than AD 29-30 and perhaps as early as AD 27-28.

## √ The teaching of Jesus

### Jesus had authority

One of the first things noticed by the people who listened to the teaching of Jesus was that He taught with authority. Greek has a couple of words translated "authority" in English, but they imply different things.

The Scriptures say Jesus had *exousia*, a Greek word meaning:

- Freedom of choice or right to act
- The ability, capability, or power to do something
- The authority, absolute power, warrant to do something

-- From Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (2nd ed., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979).

But in the Scripture it is also clear Jesus did not have role authority, *huperokee*, which is a place of earthly superiority or prominence. This term is used in 1 Tim 2:2 when Paul exhorts Timothy and his church to pray for kings and others in "authority."

Matthew 7:29 tells us Jesus taught "as one having authority." This was in contrast to the scribes who would say, "According to Rabbi so and so, this would be interpreted this way." The people noticed Jesus spoke as one who knew what He was talking about. He spoke as one who had the power to understand life and had the right to explain it to us.

Luke also addresses the issue of Jesus' authority in several different passages.

- He speaks with authority (power): 4:32
- He acts with authority: 4:36
- He forgives sins with authority: 5:24
- He gives His disciples authority: 9:1-2

In Luke 20:1-8 His authority is questioned by Jewish leaders, but the question was insincere, designed to trap Jesus into something they could twist into blasphemy, His power was God's power or that He was God. So Jesus answers with a question that would put them in a delicate position about John the Baptist, who was executed by Herod.

### Kingdom of God is the central theme: Mark 1:15

Mark and Luke use the phrase "kingdom of God," which probably reflects a primarily Hellenistic audience. Matthew uses primarily "Kingdom of the Heavens," with "Heavens" being an alternative term for "God." This reflects the Jewish practice of avoiding using the name of God for fear of breaking the commandment

found in Exodus 20:7, "You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God."

What did Jesus mean by kingdom of God? Many Christians and church theologians have assumed Jesus was talking about the Church or community Jesus' followers would form. In English, when we use the term "kingdom," we think of a territory ruled by a king. But the Greek word translated into English as "kingdom" (*basileia*) "more often means the activity of a king rather than the territory he rules. And the Aramaic word which most scholars think Jesus himself used (*malkutha*) certainly has that meaning. So we are justified in supposing that Jesus was talking about what we might call 'the kingship of God,' rather than his 'kingdom.'" Therefore the phrase kingdom of God, means God's reign or rule. It does not indicate a territory God rules over. It indicates Jesus was not so concerned about a "new society" as about the quality of life and the relationships people have with each other and with God.

-- John Drane, *Introducing the New Testament* (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1986), 113.

In Jesus' teachings, the kingdom of God is both future and present.

**Future:** Mark 14:25—The promise of final salvation is coming. Jesus is coming back to have fellowship with His people and to bring ultimate salvation and justice.

**Present:** Luke 17:20-21—When Jesus was questioned by the Pharisees as to when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus responded that the kingdom of God "does not come visibly" because the kingdom of God is within or among you.

In Luke 11:20, as well as other places, the implication is that the presence of the kingdom of God depends on the presence of the King. So the kingdom of God is wherever the presence of Jesus is present.

## What did Jesus teach through His life/roles?

**Compassion and justice issues.** Through the several roles Jesus took on, His values of compassion and justice were demonstrated.

- As a *miracle worker* He showed, not only His ability to heal, but His compassion for the people. Most miracle workers of His time charged a fee for their services, but Jesus did not. He healed freely.
- Some passages in the New Testament talk about Jesus as a *revolutionary deliverer*, champion of the peasants, or a spokesperson for the poor. Mary's Magnificat in Luke 1:46-55 is a prime example. This shows His concern for justice and the condition of the poor.
- Jesus is also portrayed as a *prophet* to judge unrighteousness. In John 9:39 (NIV), Jesus said, "For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind." Here the indication is that unrighteousness is not just wrong actions (as thought by the Pharisees), but it begins in the inner person, those who are blind because they choose to be.

**Jesus is the Savior.** The Apostle Paul tells us the Resurrection is God's definitive word on who Jesus is. He is the center of Christian faith.

First Corinthians 15:3-6 is an early creed which Paul tells us all Christians were

taught: Jesus died for our sins, He was buried, and He was raised on the third day. *But* it doesn't stop there. The creed goes on to say the resurrected Jesus appeared to the Twelve and to 500 believers at one time! Yes, Jesus' teachings and life are very important, but the confirmation of Jesus and His mission came with the Resurrection.

This issue of resurrection was not an easy one for everyone to understand in the first century. The Sadducees and Greco-Romans did not believe in the resurrection of the body. For the Greco-Romans the idea of the resurrection of the body was ludicrous, since they believed the body was a prison of the soul, which was freed at death. Why would anyone want to return his or her soul to a bodily prison? Paul had to spend a lot of time helping new Gentile Christians understand Jesus' resurrection and their own. There were, of course, the Pharisees who believed in the resurrection. Jesus' resurrection is described in the sense that they understood resurrection

-- See Luke 20:27-40.; 1 and 2 Thessalonians; Acts 23:6-8.

## **Theological Issues: Jesus' Roles in Salvation and God's Agent of Salvation**

Four very significant terms are used in the New Testament to elaborate and define Jesus' roles in salvation.

The first title to discuss is **Messiah**. Jesus never directly used this term to describe himself because it was so colored by the contemporary understanding of an apocalyptic, political deliverer of the Jewish people. The Messiah was seen as a "king," so it was a contradiction in terms for Him to be "anointed" and to "suffer." In Luke 24:26 the resurrected Jesus used the term "Christ" and reinterpreted the role of Messiah as Suffering Servant.

Jesus uses the phrase **Son of Man** in describing His role in judgment. It is also used in relationship to Jesus' death and resurrection.

- Judgment—Mt 25:31-32
- Death and resurrection—Lk 9:22

Jesus as the **Son of God** is declared by

- God's witness—Mk 1:11, 9:7
- John's witness—Jn 1:14
- God's Peace Child—Jn 3:16, Rom 8:3
- Through the Son of God we become sons/daughters of God—Rom 8:14-15

The most common title for Jesus in the New Testament is **Lord**. This title is used in relation to

- Jesus' suffering and exaltation—Phil 2:6-11
- Prayer and confession are made to Jesus, our Lord—1 Cor 16:22
- And this term, which is also used of God in the Old Testament, refers to the exclusiveness of sovereignty—1 Cor 8:6

### **\*\*Group Activity: how did Jesus teach?**

Through parables Jesus illustrated what He meant by the kingdom of God and its value in our lives. Generally these parables have one main point, but some of them

have more than one lesson to teach. Mark 4:11-12 seems to suggest Jesus told the parables deliberately to hide the meaning of what He was trying to say. This is so contrary to what we know of Jesus and His teaching that it must be interpreted in light of a parallel passage, Matthew 13:13. Matthew indicates Jesus taught in parables *because* the people just had difficulty understanding. This would lead us to interpret the *so that* in Mark as a description of the consequences rather than the purpose of Jesus' teaching in parables.

Let's look at the parables in depth to discover more of Jesus' teachings about the kingdom of God.

Each group is to:

- Tell what the passage is talking about
- Identify the main points or principles being taught
- Suggest a modern application of these principles

You will have about 15 minutes for discussion and then we will come back together and discuss the passages in the order given below:

### **Parables are the language of faith**

Mk 4:11—They reveal the mystery of the Kingdom.

Mt 13—The Parables of the Kingdom (Lk 4:1-33)

Lk 15—The Parable of the Lost Sheep, Coin, Son

Lk 10:25-37—The Good Samaritan (love your neighbor)

Jn 15—Vine and Branches (abiding in Christ)

### **Wisdom in the sayings of Jesus**

Mt 13:52—Things old and new

Mt 25:1-13—The wise and the foolish

Mt 5:17-48—The old and new covenant, Sermon on the Mount, fulfilling the law, murder, adultery, divorce, oaths, eye for an eye, love for enemies

### ***Lesson Close***

#### ***Assignment***

Continue to work on memorizing the Books of the New Testament.

**Prepare to present your drama or role play** – choose one of the following to present in a group before the class.

1. Three events or three important people found in the New Testament
2. Convince an unbeliever to understand that Jesus is truly the son of God.

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**Lesson 4**

## ***THE GOSPELS***

### ***Introduction***

- *Why was it necessary to have written Gospels?*
- *What purpose do they serve?*

### ***Objectives for this lesson***

By the end of this lesson, students should:

- understand the genre and purpose of each of the Gospels
- appreciate the trustworthiness of the Gospels
- discover the core content of each of the Gospels
- gain a basic understanding of the elements of exegesis
- understand the major comparisons between the Gospels

### **√ Introduction to the Gospels**

#### ***Discussion: the content of the "Gospel"***

The content of the preaching message about Jesus as our Savior is referred to as the *kerygma*. It consists of factual information about John the Baptist, Jesus and His life and ministry (especially His death and resurrection), and the meaning of these events for Christians and the Church.

In groups of two to three, find "factual information" from these passages. Select one person to report your findings to the class.

- Acts 10:34-43
- Acts 2:22-28
- Acts 2:29-36
- Acts 3:17-26
- Acts 4:8-12
- Acts 5:29-32
- Acts 7:44-53
- Acts 13:21-31
- Acts 13:32-41
- 1 Cor 15:3-7

#### **Group reports**

We will make a list of your findings as each group reports.

- *What is recurring and what is not covered about the story of Jesus?*

The Apostles' Creed is an example of how the Church eventually summarized the *Kerygma*.

Ewell and Yarbrough, in *Encountering the New Testament*, summarize the *kerygma* as God's offer of salvation; the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus; the call to faith in light of the coming judgment.

-- The rest of the lecture was adapted from *ENT*, 72-76, and Craig L. Blomberg, *Jesus and the Gospels: Introduction and Survey* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1997), 107-8.

## The form of the “Gospel”

Justin Martyr in AD 155 calls them “Memoirs.” The Gospels fit best into the ancient form of biography but are really a new subdivision of this form.

**The general nature of the Gospels.** Modern biographies usually begin with an account of the subject’s childhood years, and progress consecutively through adolescence and adulthood to show how the mature person has developed in response to the various influences of early life and environment. They are generally very psychological, sociological, or show how history influenced the development of the person they are writing about. The Gospels are very different from this.

Scholars have looked for some term other than history or biography to characterize the form or “genre” of the Gospels. Some have suggested “aretalogies,” Greco-Roman accounts of the life of a Greek hero who was usually the child of a god and a human virgin. Other scholars prefer the language of theater and refer to Gospels as dramas, “comedies” (having a good ending) or “tragedies” (usually ending in the death of the hero). Some emphasize the use of the Old Testament and characterize the gospels as *midrash* or commentaries on the Old Testament.

None of these suggestions account for the majority of the features of a Gospel. Blomberg writes:

An increasing number of scholars, therefore, recognize that the list of traits setting the Gospels apart from *modern* biographies does not distinguish them nearly so much from *ancient* Greco-Roman biographies or Greek and Jewish ‘historiography’ (history-writing).

Ancient writers were more highly selective, ideological, and artistic in narrating the great events of their day or the lives of key individuals. There are unique features of the Gospels, to be sure, generally related to the unique events they narrate and the distinctive nature of the person of Jesus of Nazareth. But this makes them no less historical or biographical by the convention of their day. Perhaps it is best, then to refer to the Gospels as *theological biographies*.

--*Jesus and the Gospels*, 107

The four Gospels are primarily witnesses to Jesus. Their main emphasis is the last week of Jesus’ life. This last week is prefaced by the reports of Jesus’ teaching and accounts of a few events from the three years before His death. There is no real discussion of His childhood and adolescence, and especially on how these influenced what He became. They are testimonies to who Jesus was—from the very beginning of His life.

**Why the Gospels were written.** The Gospel authors were evangelists and so they were primarily concerned with how to deliver the message about Jesus to the people of their day, and secondarily, writing a biography.

**The Gospels are selective accounts.** Incidents in Jesus’ life are used as appropriate illustrations to explain theological points. They incorporate incidents heard in the preaching of apostles. For instance, Papias, an Early Church father, claims Mark’s Gospel is taken from the preaching of Peter.

Some of the details we would like to know (i.e., details of His childhood, what He looked like) are not relevant to “winning other people to faith in their Lord.” So the Gospel writers did not include them.

**Each story is told for a reason.** Generally we refer to this as the theological content or perspective of the writer. To understand the stories we must always try to relate them to the purpose of the author or to the theology of the author. It is impossible to get a picture of the simple Galilean, because as far back as we can go, Jesus is making great claims for himself and telling men and women how they should relate to God. Because these are selective accounts we can discover some things about the author and audience, by comparing what they have selected as important with the other Gospels, especially Matthew, Mark, and Luke. These three Gospels tell the story of Jesus in roughly the same order and repeat large sections of material found in the others.

How do the writers themselves describe what they are doing?

**Mark 1:1:** *“The Beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ.”*

- Gospel = *euangelion* = Good News. “Gospel” is an old English word which means Good News.
- *Beginning.* This is the first stage in the development of the message. This story was an integral and important part of Mark’s own experience as a Christian. It was the first stage in the development of the message to which he and others had responded and committed their lives.

**Luke 1:3-4:** *Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.* Luke writes so his readers may know the full implications of the Christian message they had heard so often.

**Matthew** is not so direct in telling us why. He begins with A record of the genealogy of the Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham (1:1). Later on in this chapter he says, This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about. (1:18). His apparent reason is to give a detailed and accurate account of the life of Jesus for a Jewish Christian audience. This brings out the important point that when these Gospels were being written the eyewitnesses were beginning to die and the church was exploding in growth. The best way to get the accurate story of Jesus out to the most people was to put it in written form.

## **The trustworthiness of the Gospels**

Where did the evangelists get their information? What were their sources?

1. Accounts from living eyewitnesses, including themselves
2. Old Testament Texts—*testimonia*

These are lists of Old Testament passages the Messiah would fulfill when he came. The people of Qumran kept such lists and so did other Jewish groups. Matthew, John, and Paul use Old Testament quotations extensively. It may be that collecting the passages was one of the earliest literary activities in the

Christian Church. They were assembled for the convenience of Christian preachers to support their claim that Jesus had fulfilled the Old Testament promises concerning the Messiah.

3. Words of Jesus: *logia*

These are collections of sayings of Jesus. They were collected for different purposes and occasions. There were probably several different collections used in different areas of the Roman Empire. We have some later collections such as *The Gospel of Thomas*, which was written in Egypt in the Coptic language in the 2nd or 3rd century AD. And we have references—to other works, which do not exist today—that refer to collections of the sayings of Jesus such as Papias' *Exposition of the Oracles of the Lord*. Around AD 130-140 Papias, the bishop of Hierapolis, wrote this five-volume book, where he says he compiled the *logia* in the Hebrew language.

Matthew and Luke have large sections of the teachings of Jesus which are absent in Mark. Matthew and Luke had access to a *logia* Mark did not.

- Scholars call this *logia* "Q" coming from the German word *Quelle*, which means "source." The debate has long been whether it was an oral or written source. Scholars are divided on this, but many lean toward a written document that circulated among the early Christians.
- In the fall of 1999 Claremont Graduate University, under James M. Robinson, published the results of a long-term project in the reconstruction of this collection of sayings. John Kloppenber has also published results of this "reconstruction." These reconstructions are based on comparisons of the teaching materials in the Canonical Gospels, Gospel of Thomas, and other literature of the first and second centuries. Both James Robinson and John Kloppenber believe there was a written document containing the sayings of Jesus which has not yet been discovered.

## √ **Exegesis: learning to ask the right questions**

- *When you are asked to give advice on or interpret a situation you have not been a part of or witnessed, what are some of the questions you need answers to before you give an answer?*

*--the following lecture was adapted from C. Jeanne Serrao, Holiness and Sexual Ethics in Paul (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Dissertation Service, 1996), 219-21.*

Proper Bible study does "exegesis," which means to "read out" of the text the meaning of the scripture. The Bible was written many years ago and in different cultures from our own. Sometimes the meaning of the text is very straightforward and simple to understand, but many times there is danger of reading a verse "out of context" because we do not understand or take into consideration the historical and cultural setting of the passage.

There are many ways to "do exegesis," but this method was developed to give you an easy way to remember the most important questions to ask about your text.

## **WHO?**

This question reminds us that we need to identify both the person(s) speaking and the listener(s). If these are different from the author and the reader(s), then these must also be identified. Try to answer the question first from your text and secondarily from commentaries: "Who are they and how can they be described?"

### **The speaker/author's point of view**

Read the chosen text and identify who is talking. It may be a "narrator" and thus the only "Speaker/ Author" is the author. There may be one or several people speaking. If so describe each one. Most times clues about the author are found in the first few verses of the book. Rarely are there any clear descriptions of the speakers or the author. So look "between the lines" for any clues. We can learn more about the speakers and author by looking at their choice and arrangement of words, treatment of the subject matter, use of evidence, argumentation, and control of emotion to see how the author/speaker tries to persuade his or her audience to believe something or believe it more profoundly.

### **Cultural considerations**

Sometimes the text and our own understanding of how things work are not enough. This is why we go to books which tell us what has been discovered about the general customs, authority structures, relationships (marriage, friendship, employment), and commerce (agricultural/urban) in the first-century world. The combination of this data with actual descriptions of these things we have read in the text will give us a clearer picture of everyday life and the people we are trying to understand.

## **WHAT?**

### **What does the text say?**

Make a simple outline of the text you are studying. Identify the major events or points of teaching and then list a couple of minor points which help to describe the event or point of teaching.

Identify the form and style of writing/speaking: Is it a story? A warning? A lecture? A sermon? A poem? A hymn? Don't worry about using "correct" style terms at first. The important thing in your first look at the text is to identify what the author/speaker is trying to do. Consult your commentaries for their description of the form or style of writing/speaking.

Pick out two to three key words in your text and look them up in a biblical dictionary. Check a couple of commentaries for ideas on key words as well as for studies on those words. How does the study of these words help you understand what the author/speaker is trying to say?

## **WHERE?**

### **What is the geographical setting of the text?**

Look for clues in the sections right before and after your text for the geographical setting. Is a town or city name mentioned? Are there animals or crops talked

about? Try to answer the question, "How does this geographical setting affect how the people would have heard/read your text?" Read the introductory sections to your specific book in commentaries and New Testament introductions, and find out if the author or audience would have been familiar with the geography of your text. How would they have understood the text from their geographical perspective?

## **WHEN?**

Here we are not so much after a date as we are concerned about the historical setting and what the text came before or after.

Look for clues in the sections right before and after your text for the historical setting. Is a political or civil event mentioned? Is a ruler mentioned? Try to answer the question, "How does this historical setting affect how the people would have heard/read your text?"

Read the introductory sections to your specific book in commentaries and New Testament introductions and find out if the author or audience would have been familiar with the history of your text. How would they have understood the text from their historical perspective?

## **WHY?**

The why question has three parts:

- Why did the speaker say what he or she did?
- Why did the author include this section in the book?
- Why is it important for us today?

Step back mentally from the Who? What? When? Where? questions and answers, and think about what you have learned in the process. What is the central point of the passage and why is it important in each of the three situations above? This is creative thinking time!

## **Follow these principles of interpreting Scripture**

1. Always interpret a verse in agreement with its context. That is, the meaning of the part must be consistent with the whole.
2. When interpreting a passage, consider the customs and events when it was written. Interpret a text in the light of its probable meaning for the persons to whom it was written. In reference to Matthew 18:20, two to three witnesses were required in court.
3. Interpret a passage in the light of all other Scripture. Do not use an obscure passage to disprove one with clear and obvious meaning, and do not interpret a passage in such a way as to make it deny what we know to be true of God from other Scripture. For example, the interpretation of 1 Tim 2:15 must be in light of Jn 3:16.
4. Interpret a passage according to the best use of the original language. John

21:15-17 uses in Greek the two words *phileo* (friendship love) and *agapao* (committed love). Most of the English translations translate them all as "love," which misses the point of the conversation between Jesus and Peter.

5. If there is a principle set forth in the passage, do not interpret or apply the passage in such a manner as to deny or reverse the principle. Interpret social teaching in line with doctrinal teaching in the text. Ephesians 5:21-28 has the principle stated in 5:21.

## ***Discussion: Gospel discovery***

### **Matthew**

*The instructor should involve the class as a whole in answering the five hermeneutical questions discussed above. Each student was to have completed their discovery project. They should contribute information based on what they found. If possible, write out answers on a blackboard.*

*You have suggested answers to these questions here in this portion of the Faculty Guide, which can be used as summaries of the class findings from Scripture and previous lecture notes. But the emphasis should be on discovery.*

Matthew is usually characterized as a Jewish-Christian Gospel. In art and literature its symbol has been the Lion, representing Christ's kingship as "the lion of the tribe of Judah." The Lion is the symbol of royal authority and strength.

**WHO?** (This question is NOT obvious in Scripture)

- Author: Matthew, a disciple of Jesus, former tax collector, Jew.
- Audience: Christian Jews in Syria, Diaspora Jews.

**WHERE?** (This question is NOT obvious in Scripture)

- Author: Antioch in Syria.
- Audience: Syria.

**WHEN?**

- AD 60-70 (Some scholars date Matthew after Jerusalem's fall, 70-80's).
- Before the destruction of the Jewish Temple.
- Written during the first Jewish Rebellion and increasing tension between Rome and the Jewish people as well as between the Jews and Jewish Christians.

**WHAT?**

- Outline of Matthew.
- Jesus the Messiah is the fulfillment of prophecy. See 1:22; 2:15, 17, 23; 4:14-16; 8:17; 12:17; 13:35; 21:4; 26:53-54; 27:9, 35.
- Characteristics: Jewish-Christian; systematic arrangement; gospel of the Kingdom; church gospel; Hebrew poetic form, parallelism; use of Old Testament quotations.

**WHY?**

- To show Jesus was the promised Messiah.
- To preserve what Matthew remembered of what Jesus said and did.
- To encourage these Christian Jews in the midst of Roman/Jewish tensions as well as Jewish/Jewish-Christian tensions.

## Mark

Mark is the fast-action gospel which seems to want to get the facts down so they can be preserved and passed onto the next generation. In art and literature it has been symbolized by the Ox, the Bull, or the Calf. These represent Christ's patient work, service, and power.

### WHO?

- Author: Mark was a disciple of Peter, but not necessarily of Jesus because of his age. He wrote down Peter's recollections and was striving for accuracy. His version is not a strictly chronological narrative.
- Audience: Christian Gentiles and Jews in Rome, Diaspora Jews.

### WHERE?

- Author: Rome.
- Audience: Rome.

### WHEN?

- Late 50s to early 60s AD.
- Written before the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple (Some scholars date Mark after the destruction of the Temple, 70s).
- Written before the Jewish Rebellion, because relations between Romans, Christians, and Jews are fairly good.

### WHAT?

- Outline of Mark.
- Theme: Jesus the Supernatural, Suffering Servant and Conqueror.
- The supernatural nature of Jesus as the Son of God: 1:24; 2:5, 8-10; 3:11; 5:7, 26-27, 40-42; 6:39-44, 47-48.
- Characteristics: Messianic Secret which means Jesus tried to keep His Messiahship a secret until His death and resurrection; realism, action, Peter's Influence, historical mode, vivid detail, little of Jesus' teachings, no genealogy or infancy stories.

### WHY?

- To show Jesus as the supernatural Son of God.
- To preserve what Peter remembered of what Jesus said and did.
- To give an accurate account of the life of Jesus of Nazareth, who He was and the impact He made on those who came in contact with Him.

### ***Group activity: unique & special passages in Matthew & Mark***

Briefly answer the five hermeneutics questions for these specific passages. Since in class we have just answered the questions for the whole book, concentrate specifically on the passage itself. Each group/individual will report to the class.

Read the passage out loud first, then give the answers to the five questions, and close with what you think is the most important application of this passage for our contemporary society/church.

- Mt 1:18-25: The angel announces Jesus' birth to Joseph.
- Mt 5:3-12: The beatitudes
- Mt 6:9-13: The Lord's Prayer

- Mt 28:18-20: The great commission
- Mk 13:1-37: Signs of the End of the Age or "The Little Apocalypse"
- Mk 16:15-18: The Great Commission (Note: 16:9-20 is not included in some early manuscripts. What does this suggest about how to treat this passage?)

## Luke

Luke is usually characterized as the Gentile Christian Gospel concerned for the common person. It is symbolized in art and literature by a man or a man's face representing Christ's humanity, His human sympathy, wisdom, and character.

### WHO?

- Author: Luke, a traveling companion of Paul, a well-educated Gentile, a doctor, and close friend of Paul. He was with Paul near the end of his life.
- Audience: Gentile Christians, "Most excellent Theophilus." Luke's explanation of Jewish practices, geography, and the use of Greco-Roman names for places suggest this.

### WHERE?

- Author: Rome, especially if written during Paul's imprisonment there (Debated: Greece [Achaia], Caesarea, Alexandria).
- Audience: Unknown, could be Rome, Philippi, or Antioch but author could have had a wider audience in mind.

### WHEN?

- Late 50s to early 60s AD (some scholars who date Mark later would also date Luke as later because of the seeming dependence of Luke on Mark's chronology, AD 70-80).
- Before the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in AD 70
- Before the Jewish Rebellion (AD 66-70), so relations between Gentiles and Jews are fairly good. Christianity would still be considered a part of Judaism and therefore treated as a *religio licita*, or legal religion.

### WHAT?

- Outline of Luke
- Theme: Jesus is the Son of Man. He is the Universal Savior, not just the Jewish Messiah.
- Luke highlights social concern, concern for the poor. Individuals and women are highlighted along with a few more details of Jesus' childhood. The use of medical and technical terms suggests Luke, the physician, although there is some debate whether the terms he uses are all that technical. Luke also emphasizes prayer and poetry. Luke is one of two volumes, with Acts.
- Luke's purpose: He wants Theophilus to know faith in Jesus rests on historical facts that stand up under the most severe scrutiny and are founded on first-hand testimony.

### WHY?

- To show: the universal nature of God's dealings with the world; Jesus as Savior of the World; the events of the early life of Jesus and His mother, Mary
- Special emphasis on the place of women in Jesus' ministry; the work of the

Holy Spirit (continues on through Acts, which is the second volume of Luke's two-volume work on the beginnings of Christianity).

## **John**

John is characterized as the theological or reflective Gospel because it tends to dwell on the meaning of Jesus' life and His divinity. This Gospel is symbolized in art and literature with an eagle. This symbolizes Christ's deity and His soaring heavenliness.

### **WHO?**

- Author: John, the son of Zebedee, one of the 12 apostles. Modern scholars debate this on the basis that this author is too theological and mystical, the words of Jesus are not in the same order as the other Gospels, and his Christology is too well developed.

Compare Paul's Christology (Rom 8:31-39, Phil 2:1-11) which was written much earlier. Paul's Christology is every bit as developed as John's Gospel suggests.

*What do you think?*

- Audience: Jewish and Gentile Christians in Asia Minor

### **WHERE?**

- Author: Ephesus was John's "headquarters" in the last part of his life. But if the author is not John, his location could be anywhere outside of Palestine.
- Audience: Asia Minor in the region around Ephesus and the area of the seven churches named in Revelation.

### **WHEN?**

- AD 80-90
- After the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple.
- There is tension between the Gentiles and Jews.
- There is tension between the Jews and Christians because the Christians include Gentiles in their community.
- The Jewish Council of Jamnia took place around this time in AD 90. It was at this council the Jewish leaders closed the Jewish Canon, our Old Testament Scriptures, in response to the rise of Jewish Christian literature. Non-Christian Jews were distancing themselves from Christianity. The closing of the canon was to identify what was "Jewish" and what was "heresy." John's reference to the "synagogue of Satan" in Revelation 2:9, as well as his use of the term "the Jews" to identify those against Jesus, and his emphasis on the Jews' unbelief reflect the fact that Christianity was now seen as totally separate from Judaism.

### **WHAT?**

- Outline of John
- Theme: Jesus is the Son of God. Therefore He is "God Incarnate" and existed before creation.
- It is a theological Gospel and reflects on the human Jesus; the preexistence of Jesus; and the contrasts of: light and darkness, life and death, belief and unbelief; and the generic adversaries of Jesus and the Christians are called the "Jews" and sometimes the "world."

- Purpose: He is writing in order that readers might believe Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and by believing have life in His name (Jn 20:31).

## **WHY?**

- To emphasize the divine glory of Jesus.
- To describe the divine qualities and essence of Jesus.
- Jesus is a unique, divine messenger. He is not just one of the prophets; He is God.
- Jesus is the answer to humanity's deepest needs.

### ***Group activity: unique and special passages in Luke and John***

Briefly answer the five hermeneutical questions for the specific passage. Since in class we have just done the questions for the whole book, concentrate specifically on the passage itself. When your group reports to the class, read the passage out loud first, then give the answers to the five questions, and close with what you think is the most important application of this passage for our contemporary society/church.

- Lk 1:5-25: The announcement of John's birth to Zechariah
- Lk 10:25-37: The parable of the Good Samaritan
- Lk 15:1-32: The parables of the Lost Sheep, Lost Coin, and Lost Son
- Lk 24:13-25: Jesus and the two disciples on the Road to Emmaus
- Jn 3:1-21: Jesus and Nicodemus: the new birth (includes Jn 3:16)
- Jn 14:16-17 and 16:12-15: The promise of the Holy Spirit
- Jn 17:1-26: Jesus' high priestly prayer
- The "I Am" Passages found in various places in John:
  - 6:35 ff. Bread of Life
  - 8:12 Light of the World
  - 10:7-9 Door (Sheep gate)
  - 11:25 Resurrection and the Life
  - 14:6 The Way, the Truth, and the Life
  - 15:1-15 The Vine

### ***Discussion: Holy Week***

*In small groups, have the students summarize in outline form what their Gospel says about each day of Holy Week. If their Gospel does not talk about the day, just have them write "no comment."*

*Then as a class, start with Sunday and the Matthew group and have them list what happened on Sunday. Then have the Mark group add to that, then the Luke group, and so on.*

*For Monday, start with the Mark group, and since there is no Luke or John comments, then go to the Matthew group. For Tuesday, start with the Luke group, then have the Matthew and Mark groups add.*

*Follow this pattern so each group gets to start twice. Suggested answers have been provided here in the Teacher Handbook.*

### **Sunday:**

- The Triumphal Entry  
Mt 21:1-11; Mk 11:1-10; Lk 19:29-44; Jn 12:12-19

**Monday:**

- Jesus cleanses the Temple  
Mt 21:12-13; Mk 11:15-18

**Tuesday:**

- Jesus teaches in the Temple  
Mt 21:23-23:39; Mk 11:27-12:44; Lk 20:1-21:4
- Jesus anointed at Bethany  
Mt 26:6-13; Mk 14:3-9; Jn 12:2-11

**Wednesday:**

- The plot against Jesus  
Mt 26:14-16; Mk 14:10-11; Lk 22:3-6

**Thursday:**

- The Last Supper  
Mt 26:17-29; Mk 14:12-25; Lk 22:7-20; Jn 13:1-38
- Gethsemane  
Mt 26:36-46; Mk 14:32-42; Lk 22:40-46
- Jesus' arrest and trial  
Mt 26:47-27:26; Mk 14:43-15:15; Lk 22:47-23:25; Jn 18:2-19:16

**Friday:**

- Jesus' crucifixion and death  
Mt 27:27-56; Mk 15:16-41; Lk 23:26-49; Jn 19:17-30
  - Jesus' burial in Joseph's Tomb  
Mt 27:57-66; Mk 15:42-47; Lk 23:50-56; Jn 19:31-42

**Sunday:**

- The Empty Tomb at Jerusalem and other Resurrection appearances  
Mt 28:1-8; Mk 16:1-8; Lk 24:1-10; Jn 20:1-9

**\*\*Group Activity: Jesus' lifestyle and pastoral ministry**

Discuss five ways to improve our ministry that pastors can learn from Jesus' lifestyle. Prepare to share with the class.

***Lesson close******Journal or share with your discussion partner***

Write in you journal about this question:

- *What is your favorite Gospel? Why?*
- *Which of the Gospel writers you most identify with? Why?*

Lesson 5

**THE HISTORICAL, SOCIAL, AND RELIGIOUS SETTING OF THE 1ST- CENTURY, GRECO-ROMAN WORLD**

**Introduction**

- *If you were going to start a worldwide organization, what would be the characteristics of an ideal setting to start this organization in?*

**Objectives for this lesson**

By the end of this lesson, students should:

- understand the historical events and public, social climate of the first century and their impact on the spread of Christianity
- understand the social and religious settings of the first century and their impact on the spread of Christianity
- understand the setting for the development of the Early Church
- use this historical, social, and religious data as a basis for interpreting the New Testament

√ **Historical Setting of the 1st-century, Greco-Roman world**

**Herodian period (63 BC—AD 66)**

**Antipater II (63-37 BC)**

As we begin this section we will briefly review the end of the historical overview we discussed for the setting of the life of Jesus. Antipater II was the father of Herod the Great. His official title was "ethnarch," which means a local governor or prince of Palestine. He was given this position in 47 BC because of his military support of Julius Caesar. The Hasmonean kings continued to take care of the more Jewish issues and serve as high priests, but they were no longer recognized as the only power in Palestine. Julius Caesar, also because of Antipater's support, made Judaism a *religio licita* (legal religion), which meant Jews had freedom of religion, did not have to make pagan sacrifices, they could keep the Sabbath, and their Torahs were sacred and could not be desecrated by even a Roman ruler. This religious privilege was extended to Christianity as long as it was recognized as part of Judaism, probably into the 70s and 80s. During this time the ruling power of the Jews was divided between client kings (Antipater) and high priests (former Hasmonean king). Rome appointed both of these positions during the 1st century AD. So not only were the "kings" appointed by a pagan empire, but also the Jewish high priests were appointed by the Romans.

## **Herod the Great (37-4 BC)**

Again, by way of review, remember that Herod was called the "King of the Jews" when Jesus was born. His kingdom included Judea, Idumea (Edom), Perea, and Galilee. His vicious personality was known even to the Roman emperor. Augustus Caesar said of him: "It is better to be Herod's pig (hus) than his son (huios)" (notice the play on words in Greek). This comment came as a result of Herod's actions toward his own family members. He drowned his son-in-law, assassinated two of his sons, strangled his wife, had his eldest son executed five days before his own death, and left orders that upon his death all the leaders be executed so there would be mourning in the land at his funeral. Herod ruled under Octavian or Augustus Caesar (31 BC-AD 14) who decreed the census at the time of the birth of Jesus. Augustus Caesar was somewhat of a moral reformer, making laws that encouraged marriage, and having children, and discouraged adultery and divorce.

## **Kingdom divided between 3 sons after Herod's death about 4 BC**

1. **Archelaus** ruled from 4 BC to AD 6 over Judea, Idumea, and Samaria. He was a ruthless ruler, whose tyrannical rule incensed the Jews and the Samaritans, so Archelaus was deposed and exiled to Vienne in the Rhone Valley.  
--See F. F. Bruce, *New Testament History* (Garden City: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1980), 24-25.
2. **Antipas** ruled over Galilee and Perea from 4 BC-AD 39. After Archelaus' exile he also ruled Samaria, Judea, and Idumea. He was an astute politician like his father and he maintained his position with his own army. Herod Antipas was known for his "slyness," love of women, and the building of Sepphoris and Tiberius in Galilee. Jesus called him "that sly fox" and he is also the one who beheaded John the Baptist.
3. **Philip** ruled from 4 BC to AD 34 over a small area west of the Upper Jordan and a larger area east of the Jordan. He rebuilt and enlarged a small town, Paneion, and called it Caesarea or Caesarea Philippi. He also rebuilt Bethsaida as his winter residence, and called it Julias after Augustus' daughter Julia. He was a moderate and tolerant ruler who ruled mostly Gentiles and so did not have as many of the Jewish problems as his brothers did. -- See *Ibid.*, 25-26.

These three Herodian kings ruled under Emperor Tiberius (AD 14-37), cited in Luke 3:1 as ruling at the time of Jesus' baptism.

## **Agrippa I (AD 37-44)**

After Herod Antipas died, King Agrippa I, grandson of Herod the Great, ultimately became king over all Palestine.  
-- See *Acts 12:19-23*

He ruled under Emperors Caligula (AD 37-41), who tried to erect a statue of himself in the Temple in Jerusalem in AD 41; and Claudius (AD 41-54), who expelled all Jews from Rome for "disturbances" at the instigation of a man named "Chrestus," which many scholars think may be a reference to "christos," or Christ in Greek.

## **Agrippa II (AD 44-66)**

King Agrippa II followed, ruling over Palestine and having the power to appoint the

high priest. He shared power with Felix from 52 to 60, the Roman governor of Judea whose wife was Drusilla, a great-granddaughter of Herod the Great, and with Porcius Festus from 50 to 62 who followed Felix, the Roman governor of Judea. He is the king to whom Paul gave his defense and who said to Paul, "Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?"

-- See Acts 26:28.

## **First Jewish revolt and destruction of Jerusalem (AD 66-70)**

The end of the Herodian dynasty coincided with the beginning of the first Jewish revolt.

The emperor of the revolt was **Nero**, who ruled Rome from AD 54-68. He is also the emperor who, in AD 64, blamed the fire of Rome on Christians and brought about the first organized persecution of Christians.

But Nero died before the revolt ended and **Vespasian** was called back from his fight with the Jews to become emperor in 68. He ruled from 68 to 79 and was in power during the destruction of Jerusalem and the burning of the Temple. When Vespasian died, **Titus** became emperor and ruled from 79 to 81. Titus's claim to fame was that he was the Roman general who conquered and destroyed Jerusalem in AD 70.

**Emperor Domitian** ruled from 81 to 96 and is credited with decreeing the first official persecution of the Christians throughout the Roman Empire. From the Council of Jamnia in AD 90 on, the Jews identified themselves as separate from Christians. They closed or confirmed the Old Testament canon and became a religion of the Law (Torah) because the Temple was destroyed. So this persecution by Domitian did not include the Jews, since Judaism was still a *religio licita*.

The emperors of **Nerva** (AD 96-98) and **Trajan** (AD 98-117) continued to carry out similar policies, but there was also growing unrest among the Jews during this time.

It was during the reign of **Emperor Hadrian** (AD 117-138) the second Jewish War occurred under the rebel leader Bar Cochba, a messianic zealot who fought the Romans AD 132-135. This rebellion led to the destruction of Jerusalem, again. It was rebuilt as a Roman city with a temple dedicated to Jupiter. Hadrian expelled the Jews from Jerusalem and banned them from ever entering the city again. He renamed Judea as Palestina and Jerusalem as Aelia Capitolina in AD 135.

## √ **Public social climate of the 1st-century Greco-Roman world**

### **Social classes**

In the Roman world there was a sharp contrast between the rich and the poor. There was a small middle-class, and the slaves were at the bottom as far as status was concerned. The slaves' quality of life depended greatly their masters. Some slaves of aristocratic households enjoyed what we might call a "wealthy" lifestyle;

however, they were not free to do as they pleased.

Slaves outnumbered the free and this was a cause for concern. Many feared the possibility of slave riots. The Roman class system was very explicit and complicated, but basically there were the aristocrats, the freedmen, and the slaves. Economically, there were primarily two classes, rich and poor. But some self-made merchants and tradespeople could be considered an economic "middle-class."

Jewish society had minimal extreme poverty—except during time of famine and revolt—and was basically a two-class system with chief priests and leading rabbis in the upper class. Farmers, artisans, and businesspeople made up the broad middle class. Tax collectors became wealthy but were despised as collaborators with the Romans, extortionists, and oppressors of the poor.

The *Am ha-Aretz*, people of the land, or common people, were the largest group in this Hellenistic, Jewish society. They worked hard to make ends meet, had little political power, and tried to please God the best they could.

When we look at the Pauline letters we discover a mixture of social statuses. Christians were both Jewish and Gentile but they also included different occupations, genders, and economic levels.

- Craftspeople, traders, and merchants, like Paul and most of the apostles, seem to predominate. Unlike the Gentiles, the Jews felt it was honorable and important to learn a trade, or "to work with one's hands." Every Jewish boy was taught a trade whether or not he used it during his life.
- We find references to both slaves and masters, like Onesimus and Philemon.
- There were also wealthy Christians, with perhaps Theophilus being an example of a patron for Luke. There were, of course, others who had homes big enough in which to host Christian churches. And there were the poor, probably exemplified best by the widows mentioned in Acts 6:1. Widows without adult children to support them would ordinarily be destitute. The Early Church looked after the needs of these women.
- Counted among the Christians were public officials like Erasmus (Rom 16:23). They were probably not a large percentage of the Christian Church, but certainly an influential part.
- Especially contrary to Jewish practice, we find women were actively involved in the Early Church. The Gentile world more readily accepted the role of women in the religious sphere because religion to them could also be a private event, hosted in homes. For the Jews, religious practice was almost always a public event in the synagogue or Temple worship. Priscilla was a prominent Jewish-Christian woman who, along with her husband Aquilla, was probably exiled from Rome during the time of Nero. Priscilla was actively involved in discipling Apollos.

## **Entertainment**

Gladiatorial shows in the arena were very popular, which usually ended in the death of men and animals. Violence in entertainment is not a new thing.

Sports heroes were winners of the chariot races and Olympic athletes.

Theater shows took place during the day, usually during the “siesta time” of the early afternoon because without electricity, it was very difficult to see at night! Interestingly, actors were not considered good marriage material. “A senator, or his son, or his grandson, or his great-grandson, by his son, or grandson, shall not knowingly or with malicious intent become betrothed to, or marry a freedwoman, or a woman whose father or mother practices, or has practiced the profession of an actor.”

-- From *Women’s Life in Greece and Rome: A Source Book in Translation* [WLGR], eds. Mary R. Lefkowitz and Maureen B. Fant (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), 188.

Music and literature were highly honored and supported by wealthy patrons.

## **Business and labor**

Trade guilds with patron deities functioned like trade unions, with benefits for widows and orphans and burial. Some regulated working days and hours. They provided a welcome place for workers who had to live away from their hometowns and extended families.

Industry was limited to small, local shops and home industry. Apparently Paul would work with other tent-makers or leather-workers in their local shops to pay for his room and board as he evangelized.

Compared to overland caravans, shipping was expensive and risky. But sometimes it was the only way to transport goods and people.

Agricultural practices were quite highly developed and included fertilization, seed selection, use of pesticides, and crop rotation.

All kinds of modern banking services were available, and interest rates varied from 4 to 12 percent.

## **Science and medicine**

Jews were not interested in science during this period. They were an occupied people with no time or money for interests outside of providing food, clothing, and shelter for their families.

In the Greco-Roman world medicine, surgery, and dentistry were widely practiced, but there was no anesthetic.

Among the Greeks and Romans mathematics and astronomy were highly developed.

## **√ Social and religious setting of the 1st-century, Greco-Roman world**

### **Everyday life issues in Roman Palestine**

**Meals.** Romans tended to eat four meals a day, perhaps reflecting a more urban lifestyle. Most Jews ate two meals a day, one at noon and one at night, reflecting

a more rural lifestyle or one in which the men worked away from home for most of the day. The main meal for both groups was at night. This night meal usually took two to three hours to eat and was combined with long conversations. After all, there was not much else one could do after it got dark, with no electricity and only oil lamplight to see by. The common people ate largely a vegetarian diet with meat only rarely. The wealthier one was, the more often one could afford meat. For the common people meat came to be associated with religious feast days when the food was provided by the wealthy. This is perhaps an important social background to the "strong and the weak" in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, chapter 8. The strong being the wealthy who did not associate eating meat with religious festivals, and the weak being the poor whose few times of eating meat were at pagan religious festivals. The people of this period sat for informal meals and reclined on cushions at formal meals.

**Clothing and styles.** The men wore tunics extending to the knees with a belt or sash at the waist and a scarf on the head. They would wear a cloak for warmth. Togas were reserved only for Roman citizens to wear. It was illegal for a non-Roman to wear one. Women wore a short under-tunic and a colored, outer tunic extending to the feet, and sometimes cosmetics, earrings, and nose ornaments. Married women covered their head with a veil when they went out in public. Non-Jewish males kept their hair short and they shaved. Jewish men grew beards and longer hair. Women's hair was generally kept long and worn in a bun after marriage. Some prostitutes and hetaerae (mistresses or female entertainers) would cut their hair short.

**The family.** As we mentioned earlier, Caesar Augustus was somewhat of a moral reformer. He recognized there was a low birth rate and high divorce rate among Greco-Romans, and especially among the aristocrats. He felt this was endangering the power and influence of the ruling class, so he enacted the Augustan Social Laws:

- "In 18 BC, the Emperor Augustus turned his attention to social problems at Rome. Luxury and adultery were widespread. Among the upper classes, marriage was increasingly infrequent and, for couples who did marry, childlessness was common. Augustus was interested in raising both the morals and the numbers of the upper classes in Rome, and in increasing the population of native Italians in Italy. He enacted sumptuary laws, laws against adultery, and laws which encouraged marriage and having children."
- "The law against adultery (*lex Iulia de adulteriis coercendis*) made the offense a crime punishable by exile and confiscation of property. Fathers were permitted to kill daughters and their partners in adultery. Husbands could kill the partners under certain circumstances [e.g. when he finds him in his own house] and were required to divorce adulterous wives." Augustus eventually had to invoke this law against his own daughter, Julia. He exiled her to the island of Pandateria  
-- From WLGR, 180-81.
- "The Augustan social laws were badly received, and the emperor, years later, modified them. The *lex Papia Poppeae*, enacted in AD 9, softened slightly the rigidity of the earlier legislation (*lex Iulia de maritandis ordinibus*)." The law was named after the two consuls of that year, both bachelors. The laws were

never officially repealed, but they were never really successful either.

*-- Ibid., 181.*

- There were prizes for marriage and children. "He [Augustus] laid heavier assessment upon the unmarried men and women and on the other hand offered prizes for marriage and the begetting of children. And since among the nobility there were far more males than females, he allowed all [free men] who wished, except senators, to marry freedwomen, and ordered that their offspring should be held legitimate." *--Ibid., 181.*

In Palestine and among the Jewish population the extended family was the basic unit with large nuclear families. Deformed and many female babies were unwanted and many were exposed—left outside the walls of the city for animals to kill and eat—or killed and disposed of upon birth. An early Christian compassionate ministry was the collection of these children and the forming of orphanages. Jewish male babies were circumcised and named on the eighth day. Non-Jewish babies had to be recognized as legitimate by the father before being named.

There were no family surnames, but individuals were identified by the name of their father (Simon the son of Zebedee), occupation (Simon the Tanner), or other designation (Simon the Zealot).

The average marriageable age for Roman women was 12, with their husbands ranging between 30 and 50 years old. The concern here was that all the children born to this woman would belong only to the husband. Wives were chaperoned whenever they left the house.

Average marriageable age for Jewish women was 13-14 years old with their husbands ranging between 25-50 years old. Engagements, which were sometimes referred to as "marriage," could take place as much as 10 years earlier. Note the difference between Matthew 1:24-25 "married," and Luke 2:5 "engaged," on the relationship of Joseph and Mary at the birth of Jesus. Jews generally waited until after the woman menstruated, because the Jewish value shifted slightly from chastity (although this was also a very important issue) to the ability to have children. So they would be concerned that the woman was "normal."

Roman husbands had the power of life or death over their wives and children. Examples from law: "The offspring then of you and your wife is in your power, and so too is that of your son and his wife, that is to say, your grandson and granddaughter, and so on. But the offspring of your daughter is not in your power, but in that of its own father" (Patria potestas—the power of the father.) This father's right of life and death also extended over any man who committed adultery with his daughter. *-- Ibid., 192.*

**Morals.** The Greco-Roman gods were guilty of every type of immorality and as such were not high moral examples. This was in stark contrast to the God of the Jews, who demanded a very high level of morality.

Acceptable Greco-Roman sexual practices included: Temple prostitution as part of worship, use of street prostitutes and hetaerae (educated and talented women who entertained at banquets), bisexuality, and pederasty (men and boys had sexual relationships generally as part of the mentoring process of bringing the boy into his station in society). This was in stark contrast to the Jewish sexual

practices of the first century. Temple prostitution, bisexuality, and homosexuality were abhorrent to the Jewish mind. Sex outside of marriage was prohibited for both respectable Greco-Roman and Jewish women, but there are conflicting views on whether it was considered proper for a Jewish man to have relations with a prostitute.

Slavery: Slaves had no rights and could be abused or murdered at will. Runaway slaves could be punished by branding or death

## **Competing religions and philosophies**

Jews were known as abstainers from the imperial cult, but their religion was admired by many during this period of time. The ancientness of its Scriptures and traditions was highly admired. And the sense of community characterized by the synagogue was not found anywhere else in ancient Greco-Roman religion.

### **Religions**

***Greek and Roman mythology:*** This was an ancient tradition which colored the identity and understanding of the Romans, but it was not a vital part of people's lives by the first century. The chief god was Zeus (Greek name) or Jupiter (Roman name). In Lystra Barnabas was called Zeus, probably because he was the oldest and Paul was called Hermes because he was the chief spokesperson (Acts 14:12).

***Emperor worship:*** This was required by the state, of all persons—except for Jews because of the special position of their religion as a *religio licita*—but was more of a political acknowledgment than a source of hope. The emperor was the chief priest for the worship of the Roman gods and so emperor worship was intertwined with the Greek and Roman mythology. They believed dead emperors became deities, and eventually living emperors (Caligula) declared themselves deities to be worshiped.

***Mystery religions:*** These were more informal religious groups which met the need for personal involvement, salvation, afterlife, health, and welfare. Greek, Egyptian, and Oriental in origin, these religions featured secret initiation, baptism, and blood sprinkling for purification, trances (spirit possession), "tongues," and sacramental meals. Because of the similarities in worship styles and practices, Christianity was sometimes lumped with the mystery religions in pagan literature.

***Superstitions:*** Astrology and magic were practiced by all classes and by both Jews and Greco-Romans, and probably some Christians, although they were not considered proper for a good Jew or Christian to practice.

### **Philosophical schools**

***Neo-Platonism*** was the prevailing philosophy that served as a foundation for the different schools of the first century. The two main ideas that affected their worldview were:

- Mind over body. The mind could control the body and its desires.
- Body (matter) is not important and only houses the soul, which is always looking for a way to go back to the "forms," the essence of what is. This is why the bodily resurrection the Pharisees and the Christians advocated was so undesirable for the Greco-Romans. They could not understand why anyone

would want to have a resurrected body, when the goal of the soul was to escape the body.

***Epicurean school:*** The motto of the Epicureans was: Withdraw from society and don't worry about it. They sought to avoid pain and seek pleasure that endures throughout life, the serenity of the soul and intellectual pleasure. A famous Epicurean slogan is, "Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die." Although the "pleasure" usually associated with Epicureans is "sensual pleasure," the most accurate understanding of this group is seeking "pleasure" which endures, such as serenity of the soul and intellectual pleasure. Overeating and drinking too much ultimately produces pain, so these are not truly something to be sought after. Moderation in these things brings true pleasure.

***Stoic school:*** The duty of the stoic was to remain in society and put up with life. Their philosophy had a sense of fatalism as in the song: "Que sera, sera," what will be, will be! To be content a person must conform to nature and maintain harmony and balance in life. The modern idea that we cannot control our circumstances, but we can control our attitudes would be a good stoic idea. But above all, the stoic would say that to be happy one must: Do your duty!

***Cynicism:*** The cynic steps outside the boundaries of society and judges it from without. These people lived a simple life on the fringes of society, and rejected the comforts of affluence and prestige. Many of the famous cynics were wealthy men who gave up their wealth as a protest against society. The term "cynic" means "dog," a dirty, despicable animal, not your pet poodle! Many cynics called attention to their message of cultural and social critique by antisocial behavior, such as urinating in public.

***Skepticism:*** The skeptic, like the stoic, remains in society, but suspends judgment on society. A skeptic believes absolute truth is unattainable because reason cannot penetrate into the true meaning of things. It can only understand what they appear to mean. A good skeptic slogan would be: Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.

### ***Discussion: the 1st-century***

- *What differences do you see between the pagan religions and philosophies of the first century and Christianity? What similarities?*
- *Where do you think misunderstandings would develop in the communication of the gospel to these pagan Gentiles?*
- *Do we have any similar problems in our modern situation? If so, what? If not, why not?*

### ***Lesson close***

#### ***Assignment***

**Chronology of Paul's Life:** Using the Scriptures below as well as a map and timeline, construct a **chronology** (in their proper sequence) of the events of Paul's ministry. (Course outcomes 4, 6) Due 4th day (Thursday)

- Acts 9:1-31, 11:19-30, 13:1-28:31
- Gal 1:11-2:21
- Rom 15:22-29
- 1 Cor 16:1-9

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## Lesson 6

# ***THE APOSTLE PAUL***

## ***Introduction***

- *Have you ever written a letter with the intent of teaching or correcting someone? How difficult is that?*

## ***Objectives for this lesson***

By the end of this lesson, students should:

- develop a chronology for Paul's life
- understand the historical, geographical, social, and literary setting for Paul's life and ministry
- identify the major points of Paul's theology
- understand the questions Paul was facing in his ministry
- gain an understanding of the author, audience, date, and place for Acts
- gain an appreciation of why Acts was written

## **√ Paul's ministry: Christianity in an urban environment**

Judging from the Gospel stories, the Jesus Movement had a rural beginning. Jesus and His disciples came from a rural, farming, and fishing society in Galilee. The settings of the parables indicate these social backgrounds. The background of Jesus and His disciples is in sharp contrast to where the Apostle Paul grew up and ministered.

Paul, a Diaspora Jew, grew up in Tarsus, Cilicia: Here are some major characteristics of this city.

- A busy commercial city on the Southeast coast of Asia Minor.
- A regional Roman capital, which meant Roman officials and their families would live in the city, and Roman officials from Rome would come and go periodically, bringing news and ideas from different parts of the Empire.
- On a major road used for trade and moving military personnel. Information from far-off places moved through town on a regular basis.

- Had a world-class university which specialized in Greek philosophy and rhetoric. Although we have no indication that Paul went to this university, his writings give indication of his knowledge of the use of rhetoric.
- Greek language and culture predominated in Tarsus, but it also contained a Jewish community, characteristic of many cities Paul evangelized.

Paul's "field training" was done in Antioch, Syria, similar to Tarsus.

- It was in a similar cultural area to Tarsus
- It was also on the major trade route
- The Church community in Antioch first consisted of Jews, perhaps Jews converted at Pentecost. Then Gentiles were converted and became a part of the Christian community, even before Paul got there.
- The Bible tells us the disciples were first called "Christians" there (Acts 11:26). Perhaps this was a name to distinguish them from the Jewish community who did not accept Jesus as Messiah, since Gentiles were also a part of the Church.
- After Paul's "field training" he and Barnabas were sent out as missionaries by the church in Antioch.

One of the earliest observations was that the church was growing fast in urban areas and the gospel was spreading to the surrounding areas through the communication networks already in place. This was perhaps because of the ability to reach more people quickly with the gospel and perhaps also because those who moved to the cities were more open to learning new things and change in their lives.

### ***Class project: chronology of Paul's life***

From the information you gathered in your homework we will attempt to put together a single chronology. We may find many differences between your individual work but hopefully we will come to some agreement.

6 BC	Paul's birth
28-30	Public ministry of Jesus
33	Paul's conversion
33-36	Paul in Arabia—being taught by revelation of Jesus Christ
35 or 36	Paul's first postconversion visit to Jerusalem
35-44	Paul preaches in Cilicia
44-46	Paul invited to Antioch, Syria, by Barnabas—famine in Palestine Paul's second visit to Jerusalem
47-48	First missionary journey with Barnabas to Cyprus and Galatia
49	Jerusalem Council
49	Jews expelled from Rome by Claudius because of the "Chrestus" riot
49-52	Second missionary journey with Silas through Asia Minor and Greece
52	Third visit to Jerusalem and a visit to Antioch
52-55	Third missionary journey—Ephesus
55-57	Third missionary journey—Macedonia, Illyricum, and Achaia
57-59	Fourth visit to Jerusalem, arrested and imprisoned at Caesarea under Felix
59-60	Appears before Festus and King Agrippa and appeals to Caesar; voyage to Rome
60-62	Under house arrest at Rome

62-64(65)	Released, journeys to Spain?
64	FIRE in Rome
64 (67)	Paul returns to Rome and is martyred under Emperor Nero

## √ **Historical and literary issues for Paul's life and ministry**

Debate in the dating of Paul's life revolves around a perceived difference between events recorded in Acts and similar events recorded in Paul's letters.

-- Adapted from Janet Meyer Everts, "The CH Timeline," Christian History Magazine 14 (1995), 31.

Acts records five trips of Paul to Jerusalem:

- Acts 9:26, right after his conversion
- Acts 11:29-30, to bring money for famine relief
- Acts 15:2-4, to attend the Jerusalem Council
- Acts 18:22, after his second missionary journey
- Acts 21:17, final visit when he is arrested

Paul's letters record only three trips to Jerusalem:

- Gal 1:18, right after his conversion
- Gal 2:1, to attend a council
- Rom 15:25/1 Cor 16:3, final visit when he was arrested.

The debate comes in the middle of Paul's life: Which Acts visit is mentioned in Galatians 2:1-10? There are two positions.

- One side assumes Paul is referring to the Acts 15 Council in Jerusalem in Gal 2:1-10, and Paul's understanding of the outcome of the Jerusalem Council is very different from what Luke reports in Acts 15.
- The other side thinks Gal 2:1-10 refers to the famine relief visit in Acts 11:29-30 when an informal Jerusalem council took place. This would place Peter and Paul's confrontation in Antioch before the "formal" Council of Jerusalem in AD 49 and would not necessarily reflect a difference in understanding of the Jerusalem Council decision.

*Which one makes more sense to you and why?* Both positions are well accepted by scholars.

## **Background issues to understanding Paul in his context**

Jewish/Gentile Christianity: we find four different but related views of the relationship of Judaism, Christianity, and Gentiles stated or reflected in the New Testament. These views all existed at the same time, bringing conflict and misunderstanding to the Early Church. Some of these views were more prevalent at different times than others.

### **Four types of Jewish/Gentile Christians** (From Raymond Brown)

- Gentiles must become Jews after becoming Christians: This was the position of Judaizers who seemed to follow Paul wherever he went. They felt all Christians should keep all the Jewish laws including circumcision and diet.

- Gentile Christians are viewed as Gentiles living within Israel who must compromise so as not to offend Jews: This was the position of James and sometimes of Peter.
  1. They were to eat no meat offered to idols.
  2. They were to keep from sexual immorality (Jewish definitions).
  3. They were to avoid eating blood and meat from animals with blood inside of them.
    - See Lev 17-18 and Acts 15:28-29.
    - from Perkins, *Reading the New Testament*, 162-63.
- Gentile Christians are not under the law: This was the position of Paul. By law he meant Jewish dietary laws and practices. Paul further believed Jewish Christians were not required to abandon their Jewish heritage in churches inside or outside Israel.
- Jesus has replaced Judaism: This was the position of John and the author to the Hebrews. This idea was taken from Jesus' words in Mark 2:21-22, "You can't put new wine in old wineskins." In John and Hebrews Jesus replaces the Temple, Temple worship, and major Jewish feasts. Jesus is better than anything offered in Judaism, so why stay with the good, when you can have the best?
  - See Gal 2:10-14 and Rom 9:4-5.

## **The art of letter-writing: possible models for Paul's letters**

As mentioned before, Paul grew up in a town known for its rhetoric. An extension of rhetoric, which usually refers to the spoken word, is the letter.

The typical letter of this period generally followed this pattern or form:

- Salutation (from/to)
- Prayer or expression of thanks to God (or gods)
- Body
- Advice or exhortation
- Closing farewell

*In groups of two to three have the students outline one or two of Paul's shorter books according to this pattern. You should decide which books you want the students to work with and assign each group a different combination of books. Allow 10 to 15 minutes for the groups to work together.*

In addition to the form of the letter, several documented types of letters were studied in the universities. Paul seems to incorporate elements from many of these types in creating his own type of a Christian pastoral letter.

*-- Adapted from Stanley Stowers, *Letter-Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), 49-173.*

**Letter of friendship:** Ancient traditions asserted that friendship required the sharing of all things between socially and morally equal people, including affection and companionship. When being together was impossible, friendly letters were said to provide a suitable substitute for actual companionship. No actual letters of friendship are given in the NT, but language from friendship letters is used: "absent in body, but present in spirit" (2 Cor 5:3), "Sharing in one another's feelings" (Phil 2:17-18), and "letter writing as a conversation" (1 Cor 10:15).

**Letter of praise and blame:** Praising and blaming were fundamental activities through which the social construction of the ancient world was

maintained. We refer to these types of societies as honor and shame cultures. Those who give praise and blame are trying to locate each person and thing in their proper place by bestowing honor and causing shame. No pure letters of this type are in the NT, but Paul makes significant use of praise in his thanksgivings. Praise and blame in 1 Cor 11:2, 7, 22, and 1 Cor 13 is comparable to passages in Greco-Roman literature that praise virtues.

**Letter of exhortation and advice:** There are seven subtypes isolated in this area in ancient literature. Exhortation can be defined as strong encouragement, which included not only telling the person what he or she is doing right, but also what he or she needs to change in his or her life. These styles are used quite extensively by Paul. They range from letters that provide a model of behavior, to giving a specific course of action, from gentle blame to rebuke and reproach, as well as consolation.

1. Paraenetic letters (Exhortation and Dissuasion): In a sample letter Libanius illustrates the essential characteristic of providing a positive model of behavior that the reader is either urged to imitate. The author's own behavior may be given as an example. *Paraenesis* concerns those basic and unquestioned patterns of behavior sanctioned by honor and shame. It is not supposed to teach anything new. Exhortation plays a major role in all the letters of Paul and the Pauline school, except Philemon. I Thessalonians is an excellent example of a *paraenetic* letter.
2. Letters of advice: Advice differs from paraenetic letters, when a specific course of action it called for. Paraenesis only seeks to increase adherence to a value or to cultivate a character trait. Paul very skillfully mixes paraenesis and advice in 1 Corinthians. Advice is found especially in 7-8 and 10-14.
3. Protreptic letters: No theorist ever defined the *protreptic* letter in antiquity. It was neither a recognized type nor a widely used kind of letter. Nevertheless, it is important for those who have an interest in early Christian letter writing. *Protreptic* writings are those exhortations to take up the philosophical life. *Protreptic* works urge the reader to convert to a way of life, join a school, or accept a set of teachings as normative for the reader's life. In both form and function, Paul's letter to the Romans is a *protreptic* letter.
4. Letters of admonition: The gentlest type of blame was admonition. It is the instilling of sense in the person being admonished, and teaching him or her what should and should not be done. The writer constructively criticizes certain aspects of the reader's behavior. Admonition is used very consciously and explicitly in the letters of Paul. 2 Thessalonians 3:6-12 admonishes certain people in the community and 3:15 urges members to admonish one another.
5. Letters of rebuke: Rebuke was considered harsher than admonition. Rebuke was directed at fundamental flaws of character or a basic pattern of "immoral" behavior. The rebuker tried to shame the sinner into stopping the misbehavior and often explicitly called for a change to an honorable way of life. Paul uses rebuke in his letter to the Galatians (1:6-10, 3:1-5, 4:8-10). His expression "I am amazed" and his denunciation of them as "fools" are characteristic of rebuke.
6. Letters of reproach: Reproach was a harsh blame that only the sternest sort of philosopher considered morally beneficial. Letters of reproach seem absent

from the corpus of early Christian letters. Paul contrasts the gentleness of his own teaching to harsher methods (1 Thess 2:6-7) and the Pastoral Epistles argue against harsh and quarrelsome teachers (2 Tim 2:23-26).

7. **Letters of consolation:** Consolation was very important in the Greco-Roman world. It had an important place in both the philosophical and the rhetorical traditions. Consolation contains traditional materials such as quotations from the poets, examples, precepts, and arguments against excessive grieving. Giving consolation was considered one of the philosopher's chief functions. Like many complex paraenetic letters, 1 Thess contains a consolatory section (4:13-18). Paul's call for the Thessalonians to stop grieving is a set expression in consolatory literature.

**Letter of mediation:** The basic purpose of these letters is for one person to make a request to another person on behalf of a third party. Letters of introduction, which were very important to those who traveled and needed hospitality, are included in this category. Letters of introduction are mentioned several times in the New Testament: Acts 9:2, 18:27, 1 Cor 16:3, 2 Cor 3:1-2. Philemon is an intercessory letter on behalf of a runaway slave.

**Accusing, Apologetic, and accounting letters:** These are technical and nontechnical letters of petition, prosecution, and defense. There are technically no letters of this type in the New Testament. But Revelation 1-3 does seem to be a recounting of Christ's evaluation or judgment of the seven churches in Asia Minor. This style would fit best under this category.

## √ The teachings of Paul

### Which letters did Paul write?

Over the last 200 years, scholars have been examining and dissecting Paul's letters in the New Testament. Right now most scholars agree Paul wrote: Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, and Philemon. These books seem to "fit" Paul's historical situation and his theology.

-- Materials adapted from *ENT*, 258-68.

There is less agreement on Ephesians, Colossians, and 2 Thessalonians, with some scholars making the argument that these books reflect a more developed church with needs in the area of organization and the second coming of Christ. And many scholars, including evangelical scholars, do not think the Pastoral Epistles—1 and 2 Timothy and Titus—were written by Paul because the language, content, and style are so very different from his other letters. They argue these reflect an older, more established church.

These arguments have merit, but it is also important to point out that one major reason these books are so different from the others is they were written to people in leadership and administrative positions—not to congregations or lay members of congregations—as all of Paul's other letters were. The fact they reflect an older, more established Church may be because Paul is addressing second generation leadership, who must lead the Church through the next phase of its development.

Language, style, and content tend to change depending on the audience and reasons for writing.

Whether one thinks Paul wrote all 13 epistles or not, it is still scholarly responsible to draw on all 13 books for Paul's theology. Even those who deny Paul's authorship of some of the books, say whoever wrote these books belonged to the "School" or way of thinking of Paul. So Paul's theology is recognized as consistent through all the books traditionally assigned to Paul.

## **Paul's Gospel and Jesus' Gospel**

On the issue of the differences between Paul's gospel and Jesus' gospel there are basically two main viewpoints.

### **The Rationalistic viewpoint**

Which says:

- Jesus taught a simple ethical spirituality, or called for political or social revolution.
- Paul transformed the simple, gentle Jesus into an idealized divine man.
- This position does not acknowledge Jesus as the divine Christ and further argues Jesus did not see himself as divine either. Jesus is described as a sage, reformer, or revolutionary, but not as the divine Son of God. They would say it was Paul who "mythologized" the human Jesus and transformed the simple, ethical message of Jesus into the story of a divine human who came to die for our sins.

### **Orthodox Christianity viewpoint**

- Acknowledges there are differences between Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of God and Paul's of the risen Christ. But the differences are secondary to the fact that God was manifesting himself in the ministry of Jesus.
- Paul and Jesus are not identical in their message, but they are complementary.

## **√ Paul's theology**

### **GOD is to be feared, loved, served, and worshiped.**

God is at the center of Paul's theology. Of the 1,300 times the New Testament uses the word "God," over 500 of them are in Paul's writings.

- God is all-wise and all-knowing (Rom 11:33-36, 1 Cor 1:21, 24, 2:7; Eph 3:10).
- God is worthy of all praise and glory forever (Rom 16:27, Gal 1:5, Eph 3:21, Phil 4:20, 1 Tim 1:17, 2 Tim 4:18).
- God is faithful (2 Cor 1:18) and commands that the gospel be made known to all (Rom 16:26).
- God comforts the distressed (2 Cor 1:3-4), raises the dead and rescues from deadly peril (2 Cor 1:9-10), and establishes believers in their faith and gives us His Spirit (2 Cor 1:21-22).
- God is the creator and sustainer of creation (Rom 1:25, Col 3:10, Acts 14:15-17).
- God is the King of Kings, immortal, invisible (1 Tim 6:15-16).
- God is one: versus polytheism (1 Tim 6:15, Rom 3:30, Gal 3:20).
- God is personal and accessible: versus stoicism/ fatalism (2 Cor 1:3-4, 10, 21-22).

- God is concerned with social morality and personal ethics: versus Roman and Greek mythology (Rom 1:18-2:11, 12:20-21).
- God is more than a spirit experienced through rites of worship, ascetic denial, or mystical sensuality: versus mystery religions (2 Cor 5:18-6:4, 6:16b-18).

### **EVIL**

- Paul does not speculate on the origin of evil, but does acknowledge that under the ultimate rule of God (1 Tim 3:15), evil exists, orchestrated by the devil or Satan, mentioning the devil 5 times and Satan 10 times (1 Cor 7:5, 1 Tim 3:7, 2 Tim 2:26).
- The devil/satan is a personal, powerful, malevolent being with subservient underlings, human and angelic (Eph 6:11-12, 2 Cor 11:14-15, 12:7).
- Evil, mentioned by Paul 43 times, is real and influential, but passing, and will not triumph (2 Tim 4:18, Eph 6:10-16).

### **HUMAN CONDITION**

- Human beings were created in God's image—we are God's offspring (Acts 17:28-29).
- Each person has an outer nature (body) and an inner nature (mind, soul, heart) (2 Cor 4:16, 5:8). The body can be controlled by the mind or the inner person (1 Cor 9:27).
- Human beings have physical bodies here on earth, but they will be transformed into spiritual bodies in heaven (1 Cor 15:35-46).
- Each person has a conscience (Rom 2:15) which may be spoiled by sin (1 Cor 8:7, 1 Tim 4:2).
- No one is righteous within oneself (Rom 3:1-20).
- Human beings can be good or bad depending on whom they belong to (2 Tim 3:13-17).
- All have sinned (Rom 3:23-28), and naturally follow the passions of the flesh (Eph 2:1-5). They are held captive by the devil, but can escape with God's help (2 Tim 2:24-26).
- Each person has a mind which has been darkened by sin (Eph 4:17-18) but can be renewed by God (Rom 12:2).
- Christians are adopted by God and therefore become His children, not just His servants (Gal 4:1-9).

### **THE LAW**

- "The Law" or the Old Testament is authoritative for all (Rom 3:31, 7:12, 14, Gal 5:13-14, 6:2) and emphasizes that all are lost (Rom 3:10-11, quoting Ps 14:1-3). It condemns legalism which believes one is saved by the merit of one's good works and points to the need of forgiveness (Rom 3:23-24, Col 1:13-14). Therefore it points to Christ (Rom. 3:21-24, Gal 3:24).
- "The law" or the Jewish dietary or circumcision customs are definitely not necessary for salvation. Paul characterizes this use of the term as a legalistic misrepresentation of the Old Testament. The Law rightly understood requires salvation by faith, wrongly understood requires salvation by works (Rom 3:28, Gal 2:16, Eph 2:15).

### **PEOPLE OF GOD**

- Paul does not see himself as the founder of a new religion. He sees the Church as a continuity with the true Jews, a remnant truly following God's will. The foundation of Paul's gospel is on the covenant God made with Abraham (Acts 13:17, Rom 9:4-8, 11:12; 2 Cor 11:22, Gal 3:8-9).

- As people of God we are children and heirs of God, no longer servants or slaves (Gal 4:4-5, Rom 8:16-21, Phil 2:15).

### **REVELATION AND SCRIPTURE**

- Paul was called to reveal the gospel or the mystery of the gospel and lay the foundation for the Gentiles' faith. God gave him special grace for this task (Rom 15:15-16, 16:25-26; 1 Cor 3:10, Gal 2:6-9).
- Christ is the awaited Messiah, the word of salvation itself (2 Tim 2:10).
- Gentiles were co-heirs of God's covenant favor with believing Israel (Eph 3:4-9).
- These ideas were also held by Christ, other apostles, and Old Testament Scripture (Acts 24:14, Gal 2:6-9).
- All Scripture is inspired by God and useful for correcting and instructing people so they might be equipped for the ministry God has for them (2 Tim 3:16-17).

### **CHRIST/MESSIAH**

- Messiah: Paul uses the Greek translation of Messiah, "Christ," close to 400 times.
- Christ is one with God, yet willingly humbled himself by taking on human form and enduring the shameful cross (Phil 2:6-11).
- Christ was integral in creation and even now upholds the created order (Col 1:15-20).
- Christ came in human likeness, vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, proclaimed to the nations, believed in all over the world, and taken up in glory (1 Tim 3:16).
- "God was in Christ" (2 Cor 5:19).

### **REDEMPTION**

- Christ died for us when we were still sinners (Rom 5:7-8, 1 Tim 2:6).
- "Redemption" refers to the paying of a price, or "ransom" for the release of prisoners from captivity. It has rich Old Testament associations with the liberation of God's people from Egypt. It is both a present event (forgiveness of sins) and a future event (heavenly inheritance of believers) (Rom 3:24-25).
- Redemption is also a future event and will involve all of creation including our bodies (Rom 8:23).
- We are redeemed by the blood of Christ which means we have forgiveness of sins, an inheritance in Christ, and have received His Holy Spirit as a pledge of our coming redemption (Eph 1:7-14).

### **THE CROSS**

- Punishment reserved by the Roman overlords for the most despicable crimes. Jews in Jesus' day interpreted Dt 21:23, "anyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse," to refer to crucifixion and thus this proved to them Jesus was not the Messiah, but was cursed by God (1 Cor 1:18-23, 2 Cor 13:4).
- Paul turns this around to say Christ became a "curse" for us so blessing might come to the Gentiles (Gal 3:13-14).
- The Cross became a symbol of the means by which God in Christ atoned for sins (Eph 2:16, Col 1:20, 2:14).
- The Cross is also the means by which believers walk in the footsteps of Christ. It is an inspiration and effective agent in "killing" the sinful nature and its passions and desires (Gal 5:24, 6:14).

### **RESURRECTION**

- He refers to resurrection at least 60 times in his letters (2 Tim 2:8).

- Paul says the Christian message stands or falls with the truth of Jesus Christ rising bodily from the dead (Acts 13:34-37, 1 Cor 15:14).
- There will be a resurrection of the righteous and the unrighteous before judgment (Acts 24:15-21).
- Jesus' resurrection means we have victory over sin which is the ultimate cause of death (Rom 4:24-25).
- Jesus' resurrection means we will also be resurrected (Rom 8:11).

### **THE CHURCH**

- He uses the term over 60 times in his letters.
- The Church is the Body of Christ (Eph 1:22-23, 4:15, 5:23).
- The Church is the one body God created out of two: Jew and Gentile. It emphasizes unity and interdependence (Gal 3:28, Eph 2:11-16, Rom 12:3-5).
- The Church as a social entity means the believers are to live humbly and exercise their gifts for the sake of others in the body of Christ and for the extension of the kingdom of God (1 Cor 12:1-31).
- The Church is connected to Christ, the bride of Christ, and so must be holy and pure (2 Cor 11:2).

### **ETHICS**

- We are to be imitators of God and Christ (Eph 5:1, Phil 2:5-11).
- Our conduct is regulated by God's presence in our lives and His purpose in saving and calling us (Eph 1:4, 4:1, Titus 2:6-10).
- We are the temple of God and as such we must keep ourselves holy (1 Cor 3:16-17, Titus 2:14).
- Our ethics are also a means of witness. We are to meet the minimum expectations of a "decent" person in our society (1 Thess 4: 11-12, Titus 3:1-14).
- Above all, love is the crowning virtue (1 Cor 13:13).

### **LAST THINGS**

- The future has profound implications for how life is to be lived now (Rom 2:1-11, 8:15-18).
- Creation itself is waiting and longing for redemption (Rom 8:19-22).
- When Paul talks about the Parousia (appearing) of Christ it includes final judgment (2 Thess 1:5-10).
- The Holy Spirit is a sign of the end of the age which believers are already enjoying. The Holy Spirit is a "seal" of the inheritance and adoption believers have and enables them to call God, "Abba" (Rom 8:15-17).
- Paul's view of the end times means we must live in a state of readiness for Christ's return as well as continue to spread the good news of salvation to everyone who will hear it (Rom 13:11-14, Phil 3:17-4:1).

## √ **Acts: the Gospel to the nations**

### ***Discussion: development of the earliest Church—Acts 1-12***

*Involve the students as you answer these questions.  
Write their responses on the blackboard so the whole class can see them.*

## WHO?

### Author: what do we know about him?

- Technically, Acts is anonymous since Luke does not give his name.
- Tradition, since the AD 100s, has always suggested Luke, the Greek physician who accompanied Paul (Col 4:14). Luke is also mentioned in Phile 24 and 2 Tim 4:11.
- Eusebius, an early Church historian, wrote in his "Ecclesiastical History" that Luke was from Antioch and he was the author of Luke/Acts.
- The "we" passages that begin in 16:10 and go through 20:4-6 remove Paul's other companions as the possible author. However, "we" was sometimes used in narratives of that time by authors who were not present, but wished to give a more dynamic, immediate feel to their story, so this evidence is not conclusive, but adds to the other evidence.
- The medical terms used are also not definitive, but suggestive of Luke, the physician. Also the cultured, Greek writing style points to Luke. Howard Clark Kee says, "The complexity of the sentences, the acknowledgment of predecessors in the field, the expression of purpose by the writer, and the address to the patron are all literary conventions of the time. Luke is making a bid to have his books regarded seriously by the sophisticated of his day."  
-- From Howard Clark Kee, *Understanding the New Testament* (5<sup>th</sup> ed., Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1993), 188.
- Virtually all scholars agree the same author wrote Luke and Acts since the style and language are identical in Luke and Acts and the addressee is the same—Theophilus. However, they do not all agree it was Luke.

### To whom was it written?

- Theophilus: In Acts 1:1, Luke addresses Theophilus and reminds him of Luke's first book about Jesus, the Gospel of Luke.
- Luke 1:3 refers to "most excellent Theophilus" while Acts 1:1 uses the simple name as if he is continuing a story.
- Theophilus can be translated: "Lover of God" or "Friend of God" since "philus" is the Greek word for friendship love. So some suggest Luke may be referring to someone or anyone who loves God.
- The term used in the Gospel of Luke, "Most excellent," would ordinarily be used of a Roman of High Rank.

## WHEN was it written?

Three suggestions from Drane are:

-- From Drane, *Introducing the New Testament*, 236-38.

### AD 95-100, or later—Position of PHEME PERKINS

- Acts 5:36-37 refers to Theudas and Judas and 21:38 mentions an Egyptian troublemaker. Josephus' *Antiquities of the Jews* 20.5.1 seem to describe the same events and it was not published until AD 93. So this section of Acts could not have been written until after AD 93.

Drane's argument against this position is that there is no evidence that Luke read Josephus as his description is different from Josephus'.

- Acts may have been written in the second century to counteract the heretic Marcion who thought Paul was the one true interpreter of Jesus.  
Drane's argument against this is that Acts does not seem to have second-century concerns.

**AD 62-70**—Position of Ajith Fernando, F. F. Bruce, J. A. T. Robinson, and T. W. Manson

- The fact that Acts ends abruptly with no mention of Paul's death is the strongest argument for this date. The question is, "If Acts was written after Paul's death, then why no word of it?"  
Drane's argument against this is simply that Paul is Luke's hero and he wants to portray him triumphantly.
- There seems to be a generally favorable attitude toward the Roman government in Acts. We know this changed in AD 64 with Nero's persecution and other organized persecutions of the Christians.  
Drane's argument against this is that Acts is simply remaining true to the spirit of the age in which the events took place.
- There is no hint of the Fall of Jerusalem in AD 70. It seems Luke would have wanted to include this, as it would have been a vindication of his position on Judaism.  
Drane's argument is that we cannot know what would be in the mind of an ancient author or what he might be expected to write in a given situation.
- There is no mention of the books of Paul, so Acts must have been written before they were collected and circulated as a group. Acts must have been written earlier than 2 Peter.

**AD 80-85**—Position of John Drane and Norman Perrin

- If we date Mark's gospel AD 60-65, then Luke must have been written after that as he incorporates Mark's material. In Acts 1:1 he refers to Luke as the book he wrote first.  
The argument against this is that the prologues to Luke and Acts could have been added later and so the main body of the books were originally written and circulated earlier.
- Acts seems to reflect an "early catholicism" which sought to give the impression that the Early Church had a largely uncontroversial existence, indicating the Gentile Christianity was dominant. Paul's letters reveal much controversy in contrast.  
The argument against this is that if Luke is writing a counterhistory to Roman history, then he would recount the battles as they were won. He is showing the development of the Church as God designed it.
- *Which dates do you see Acts best fitting in?*

**WHERE was it written from and to whom?**

- Place of composition: Anyone's guess and has been:  
Ancient traditions: Achaia, Boeotia, Rome  
Modern attempts: Caesarea (H. Klein); Decapolis (R. Koh); Asia Minor (K. Löning)
- Destination: Even more unknown: Written to Gentiles in a Gentile setting.

## **WHAT is Acts? How is it composed?**

The key verse and major outline of Acts is found in Acts 1:8.

- Witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria is found in Acts 1:1-12:35
- Witnesses to the ends of the earth is found in Acts 13:1-28:31

There are 10 major sections, with five in each of the two halves of the Book of Acts.

-- From Stephen L. Harris, *The New Testament* (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield Pub. Company, 1988), 182.

### **First half**

- Prologues and account of the Ascension (1:1-11)
- Founding of the Jerusalem Church (1:12-2:47)
- Work of Peter and the apostles (3:1-5:42)
- Persecution of the "Hellenist" Jewish Christians and the first missions (6:1-8:40)
- Preparation for the Gentile mission: the conversion of Paul and Cornelius (9:1-12:25)

### **Second half**

- First missionary journey of Barnabas and Paul: the Jerusalem conference (13:1-15:35)
- Paul's second missionary journey: evangelizing Greece (16:1-18:21)
- Paul's third missionary journey: revisiting Asia Minor and Greece (18:22-20:38)
- Paul's arrest in Jerusalem and imprisonment in Caesarea (21:1-26:32)
- Paul's journey to Rome and his preaching to Roman Jews (27:1-28:31)

## **Peter and Paul: parallel stories**

Not only does Luke divide the book into two parts, describing the Church's witness to "Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria" and "the ends of the earth." But he also has a main character or "hero" for each of these sections: Peter for the witness nearby and Paul for the witness faraway.

Notice how carefully Luke tried to parallel these two "giants" of the Early Church. The careful writing is part of what scholars are referring to when they talk about Luke's style as "cultured Greek."

-- Adapted from Perkins, *Reading the New Testament*, 264.

## **√ The missionary efforts of the early Church**

### **Why was Acts written? What is its purpose?**

Ideas from Drane, *Introducing the New Testament*

- To show that Christianity is a faith with the potential to change the world.
- To show that Christianity can have a good relationship with the Roman government.
- Luke claimed to be the first historian and tells his story in the style of the first-century, Greek historians. The speeches we find are typical of ancient methods of telling history. The Church was a developing institution which needed to know its

origins and history. Luke provided this in an orderly and well-researched manner.  
-- From Drane, 238-42.

Ideas from Perkins, *Reading the New Testament*

- Acts is not just a "church history" in the sense of a collection of events that happened to Christians in the past.
- Acts is a "story" in the sense that it tells of how God's providence worked through apostles Peter and Paul to bring into being the church and traditions which Luke and his readers have inherited.
- Acts as "salvation history": The Gospel of Luke told the story of how the Savior came to earth, died, and was resurrected. Acts shows the role of the church in salvation. It begins with Pentecost, then people from different nations hear the good news and accept it. They join together in a fellowship to hear the teaching of the apostles, share fellowship meals, and pray together. Emphasis on the Holy Spirit confirms to Luke's readers that the history of the church is God's doing.
- Acts is also a "counterhistory." Luke goes to great pains to emphasize the connections between the Christian story and the larger world of events in Roman history. His references to various Roman governors in different provinces, the death of Herod (Gospel of Luke), and the famine under Claudius are part of this pattern. Roman historians would have argued their own history was divinely guided, that they had been destined to rule the civilized world. Luke presents the Christian reader with a counterhistory. The Roman world is the larger context within which God's providence is working to spread the news of salvation to all peoples. According to Luke, the Church, not the Roman Empire is the "Divine event."  
-- From Perkins, 260-63.

## How the story of Acts develops

The Church develops with two major emphases.

- **Evangelism:** Witnessing signs of God's power, people from different nations hear and accept the Good News.
- **Nurture:** Members of the Christian community shared all things in common.

### Peter dominates chapters 1—12

- He is the preacher at Pentecost (2).
- He heals, speaks before the Sanhedrin, judges Ananias and Sapphira, is miraculously delivered from jail twice, and is the first one to preach to the Gentiles when he preaches to Cornelius and his family.
- He is prominent at the Jerusalem Council (15) and sides with Paul and Barnabas.
- Other leaders during this time include: Stephen the first martyr (6 and 7); Philip, evangelist to Samaria (8); and James, patriarch of the Jerusalem Church, head of the Jerusalem Council and half-brother of Jesus (15).

### Paul dominates chapters 13—28

- Paul's first appearance takes place as he persecutes the Church in Acts 8:1-3, but he has the Damascus Road experience and begins his ministry in Acts 9.
- His first missionary journey was with Barnabas (13-14). They went to Cyprus, Pamphylia, Pisidia, Galatia, and Antioch in Syria. It ends with their participation in the Jerusalem Council (15).

- The reason for the Jerusalem Council was the ongoing debate on whether circumcision was necessary for the Gentiles' salvation: 15:1-2. Conclusion (15:19-20): James as the head of the Jerusalem Church is the spokesperson. He summarizes the feelings of the Jerusalem Church:
    - We should not make it difficult for Gentiles who have become Christians.
    - But they must follow ancient Jewish rules for Gentiles who live among the Jews (Lev 16—19). He summarized these rules as:
      1. Abstain from food polluted by idols.
      2. Abstain from sexual immorality – Follow Jewish sexual standards
      3. Abstain from meat of strangled animals and from blood.
- Rationale: Jewish Christians can have table fellowship (Communion) with Gentile Christians who keep these three rules and not be condemned by their leadership for leading “unclean” lives
- Paul and Barnabas split company over a disagreement on taking John Mark with them on the second missionary journey (15:36-18:21) because he had deserted them on the first journey. Paul takes Silas with him to Syria, Cilicia, Pisidia, Galatia, Asia, Macedonia, Achaia, and Jerusalem in Judea. They strengthened the churches in Syria, Cilicia, and Pisidia and established the church in Macedonia, Achaia, and Asia.
  - Paul's third missionary journey (18:22—21:16) begins at his “home” church in Antioch of Syria, then he goes on to Cilicia, Pisidia, Galatia, Asia, Macedonia, Achaia, and Judea. Paul basically encourages the churches he had already visited and collects the money for the needy Christians in Judea. But he spends two years in Ephesus, his longest continuous ministry in one place.
  - When he returns to Jerusalem to bring the offerings from the Gentile churches for the poor church in Jerusalem, he is arrested. After two years in jail in Caesarea Maritima, he eventually travels as a prisoner by boat to Rome, where the story of Acts leaves him under house arrest while still continuing his ministry (21:7-28:31).

### ***Lesson close***

#### ***Journal or share with your discussion partner***

Write in your journal. Choose **one** of the following questions:

- Imagine Paul has just written you a letter concerning your ministry. What would it say? How would you react?
- If you could talk to Paul, what topic would you want to discuss? Why?
- Reflect on insights and what you have learned about the Early Church.

#### ***Assignment***

**Book study:** Choose **one** of the studies in Assignment #7 of a book of the New Testament – either the Book of Acts or an Epistle of Paul. Do this study according to the instructions for Assignment #7 in the Syllabus.

## ***PAUL'S LETTERS TO THE CHURCHES***

### ***Introduction***

- *When you have to communicate with someone about a certain subject, how do you decide what form that communication will take? Phone, in person, e-mail, letter?*
- *What else affects your choices in communication and presentation?*

### ***Objectives for this lesson***

By the end of this lesson, students should:

- gain an understanding of the types of letters written in the first century
- know the purpose and main content for Paul's letters to the Romans and Corinthians

### **√ The art of letter-writing, Romans and Corinthians**

In Lesson 10 we briefly studied Stanley Stowers' review of the types of letters learned in school and used by literate people of the first century. As we go through these sections on the letters of Paul, as well as the General Letters, we will review some of these types of letters and how they are used in the specific letters we are studying. The following are types reflected in Romans and 1 and 2 Corinthians.

### **Letters of friendship**

Ancient traditions and proverbs asserted that friendship required the sharing of all things between socially and morally equal people, including affection and companionship. When being together was impossible, friendly letters were said to provide a suitable substitute for actual companionship. Friendship in the first-century world was possible only between equals. So letters between male and female, slave and free persons, or people of different classes would not be considered "friendship" letters. The "family" letters were not "friendship" letters, but were used to maintain family relationship when the family was separated.

Although there are no letters of friendship in the NT, some letters employ language from the friendly letter tradition. The phrase "absent in body but present in spirit" occurs in 2 Cor 5:3, 10:1-2; Col 2:5; and 1 Thess 2:17. The theme of "longing to be with the loved one" appears in 2 Cor 1:16; 1 Thess 3:6-10; Phile

22; 2 Jn 12: 3 Jn 14. The following may also be related to the friendship genre: "yearning for the loved one," Phil 1:7-8; "sharing in one another's feelings," Phil 2:17-18; "letter writing as a conversation," 1 Cor 10:15.

## Letters of praise and blame

Praising and blaming were fundamental activities through which the social construction of the ancient world was maintained. Praise legitimated and effected social structures and the societies, constructions of reality. In a society where there is deep agreement about "the way things ought to be," those who give praise and blame work to locate each person and thing in their proper place by bestowing honor and causing shame. Some philosophical groups and Christians might challenge the accepted structure of honorable and dishonorable behavior, but they did not challenge the system of honor itself or the process of praise and blame through which the system was sustained. Letters of praise and blame, then, are perhaps the most basic and most ideal of the types. The ancients defined one of the three departments of rhetoric, *epideictic*, as the speech of praise and blame that demonstrated the honorable and shameful.

Although no pure letters of praise exist in the NT, Paul makes significant use of praise in certain parts of his letters. He characteristically includes a word of praise for the recipients in his thanksgiving (Rom 1:8, 1 Thess 1:3, 2 Thess 1:3-4, and Phile 1-4. In 1 Cor 11, Paul balances praise and blame in the service of giving advice (cf. 11:2, 17, 22). Chapter 13 of the same letter is comparable to passages in Greco-Roman literature that praise virtues. Six of the seven letters in Revelation 2-3 mix praise with something else, such as blaming, threatening, consoling, or promising. In good epistolary form they begin with praise and then turn to blaming or threatening.

## Letters of exhortation and advice

**Letters of advice.** Advice differs from *paraenetic* letters, which we will discuss in the next lesson, when a specific course of action is called for. *Paraenesis* only seeks to increase adherence to a value or to cultivate a character trait. Advice calls for action. Paul very skillfully mixes *paraenesis* and advice in 1 Corinthians. Advice is found especially in 7-8 and 10-14.

**Protreptic letters:** No theorist ever defined the *protreptic* letter in antiquity. It was neither a recognized type nor a widely used kind of letter. Nevertheless, it is important for those who have an interest in early Christian letter writing. *Protreptic* writings are those exhortations to take up the philosophical life. *Protreptic* works urge the reader to convert to a way of life, join a school, or accept a set of teachings as normative for the reader's life.

In both form and function, Paul's letter to the Romans is a *protreptic* letter. One person makes a request to another person on behalf of a third party. These may be divided usefully but somewhat artificially into letters of introduction and other kinds of intercessory letters. Sometimes the purpose is to reestablish a broken relationship or to petition someone in authority on behalf of the third party.

Since travel and hospitality were extremely important in earliest Christianity, it is not surprising that letters of introduction are mentioned several times in the NT (Acts 9:2, 18:27, 1 Cor 16:3, and 2 Cor 3:1-2. Philemon is an intercessory letter on behalf of the runaway slave Onesimus.

## √ **The Letter to the Romans**

**Type:** Romans is a protreptic letter in that it is exhorting the Romans to take up the Christian life. It is also epideictic, in that it uses "praise and blame" to locate ideas and people within their proper place in the Christian worldview.

### **WHO?**

**Author:**

Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, who is a converted Jew.

**Audience:**

Christian Church in Rome, most likely made up of both Jews and Gentiles. Paul has never been to this church, but knows a few people whom he greets at the end of the letter.

-- Adapted from ENT, ch. 18.

### **WHEN?**

About AD 57, near the end of Paul's 3rd missionary journey. It is a very mature letter, the result of Paul's thinking and experience over his Christian life and ministry.

### **WHERE?**

**Author:**

Paul was in Greece, probably Corinth.

**Audience:**

Readers were in Rome. Paul commends Phoebe as the person who carried his letter from Corinth to Rome. Her home church was Cenchrae, a small town eight miles from Corinth (16:1).

**Rome:**

Rome was the capital city of the Roman Empire. It was the city where the emperor lived and is called "the greatest city of classical antiquity in the west." This city controlled an empire which included approximately 100 million people.

Christianity probably came to Rome first with Jews who heard Peter's preaching at Pentecost in Jerusalem. According to Suetonius, Emperor Claudius evicted Jews from Rome in AD 49 because of "disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus." Scholars have interpreted "Chrestus" to refer to "Christ." Apparently the Jewish community was rioting over the issue of Christ as the Messiah as early as AD 49.

-- Adapted from ENT, 275.

## WHAT?

*Consult outlines from commentaries on 1 and 2 Thessalonians.  
Discuss the first century principles and their application to the 21st century*

Paul was concerned about the health of the church in Rome. Until Peter and Paul get there, because of their imprisonments, we don't hear of a prominent Early Church leader being in Rome.

We find Paul's personal hopes and aims recounted as well as his passion to see his Jewish kinsmen accept their Messiah (9-11). Paul is also interested in getting their support for his mission to Spain (15:24).

The Letter to the Romans is a summary of Paul's gospel or theology for a group of people, some of whom knew Paul, but most of whom did not know him. So Paul has to be as clear and comprehensive in this letter as he can, since he was writing to people who had not heard him preach before. Most of Paul's other letters are follow-ups to his personal ministry.

## WHY?

*Read highlights from this passage.*

Paul starts out defining the problem as sin—Romans 1:19-3:20. He begins with the obvious sins of the Gentiles, but then includes the Jews and their sins as well. The hope for sinners is justification by faith in Jesus Christ rather than good works—Romans 3:21-8:17. This goes counter to the common religious ideas of both the Gentile and Jewish populations.

Paul tells them the redemption by grace involves the whole created order, both seen and unseen. God assures the victory—Romans 8:18-11:36.

True to form, Paul does not just leave the audience with generalized theological statements; he gets down to the basics and describes how we should live as Christians—Romans 12:1-15:13.

## The Importance of Romans

Paul's letter to the Romans has greatly influenced the development of Christianity and some scholars claim it was instrumental in the development of Western individualism.

*--From Stanley Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans: Justice, Jews, and Gentiles* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 1994).*

**St. Augustine** (354-430) found new life and freedom from the bondage of his sins and desires when he read Romans.

Romans 1:17 convinced **Martin Luther** (1483-1546) that salvation was by faith and not by works of penance. He then helped to set in motion the Protestant Reformation in Germany and it spread across Europe.

On May 24, 1738, **John Wesley** in England attended a church meeting and listened as the leader read from Luther's preface to his Romans commentary. Wesley reported, "While he was describing the change which God works in the

heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt that I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for my salvation: And an assurance was given me, that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death."

The Swiss theologian **Karl Barth** (1886-1968) wrote his commentary on Romans (1919) that helped to break the dominance of liberal theology for a while and begin the neo-orthodoxy movement in theology.

-- From *The Works of John Wesley*, 14 vols. (3rd ed., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991 (1872)), 1:103.

Although Romans is not truly a "systematic" theology, it is Paul's major work on what he believed and why he believed it. The principles Paul gives us in this book are vital for understanding many of his other letters, which seem to be much more occasional in the sense that they are addressing very specific problems and issues.

## √ The letters of 1 and 2 Corinthians

*Involve the students as you answer these hermeneutical questions.  
Write their responses on the blackboard so the whole class can see them.*

These two books give us our first encounter with Paul's letters that deal with specific problems in a church.

**Types:** Paul uses friendship terms common to the friendship letters, but these letters are primarily a mix of letters of exhortation, advice, and praise and blame. Paul is anxious to help this primarily Gentile congregation understand the Christian lifestyle.

Through praise and blame of certain persons and actions as well as direct advice, Paul is helping this congregation to understand what is proper and acceptable for a Christian.

They are also *paraenetic* in that Paul spends a lot of time reminding them of what he had already explained to them when he was with them.

### **WHO?**

**Author:** Paul, the apostle

**Audience:** Christian Church in Corinth, both Jews and Gentiles. But probably mostly Gentiles.

### **WHEN?**

About AD 55/56. Midway through Paul's third missionary journey.

### **WHERE?**

Paul probably wrote 1 Corinthians from Ephesus and 2 Corinthians on the road to the church in Corinth

**Corinth** was the largest city in first-century Greece and the capital of the Roman province of Achaia.

- Corinth was an important city of commerce and social interchange. Most shipping heading to or from Rome passed through Corinth because it was located on a narrow isthmus—3.5 miles wide—where cargo was unloaded from large ships, transported across the isthmus, and loaded onto another ship.
- Corinth also controlled the two harbors: Cenchreae leading to Asia and Lechaem to Italy.
- It was a city of “self-made” people, descendants of the initial colonists who had turned it into a thriving city in two generations.
- It was also notorious for its immorality, especially in the early years of the colony. Its Greek culture exhibited a low sexual morality compared to Jewish standards. Their socially-accepted morality included temple prostitution as well as use of street prostitutes and heterae, female entertainers for banquets.
- Corinth had a large community of Diaspora Jews, which grew larger after the Roman emperor, Claudius, expelled Jews from Rome in AD 49.

## WHAT?

We have only two of the letters sent to Corinth; it seems at least four were written by Paul.

*Consult outlines from commentaries on 1 and 2 Thessalonians.  
Discuss the first century principles and their application to the 21st century*

Outlines of these books reveal the varied nature of the issues Paul deals with. It is only possible in this class to introduce you to the variety of subjects covered in these two letters.

## WHY?

**1 Corinthians:** Paul tells the church they are divided as a result of listening to human wisdom rather than divine wisdom (2:1-16). They think they are divided because they each have what they think is the truth, along with a champion of their position (parties of Apollos and Paul). Paul calls them “worldly, mere infants in Christ” (1 Cor 3:1) and urges them to follow the “foolishness of the gospel.”

### **Specific issues in 1 Corinthians:**

- They were tolerating open immorality in their church community (5:1). This seems like a simple issue to us. But when we consider the morality standards most of these Christians were coming from, it took some time for them to understand and adjust to the high (Jewish) sexual standards set by Paul.
- Paul answers specific questions on marriage, divorce, and celibacy (7). Most of his comments here need to be seen within the context of 7:26 (present crisis) and 7:29 (time is short). Paul’s seeming negativity on marriage has to do with the fact that the church community is in some kind of crisis, and he expects Jesus to return at any time. So they need to be focused on getting as many people into the Kingdom as possible, not on settling down and having a family.
- Paul also answers specific questions on diet, idolatry, and personal Christian freedom (8-10). His basic thought here is that these issues are not important.

If what we do hinders people from coming into the Kingdom or weakens their resolve to remain Christians, then we should adjust our actions.

- Paul answers their questions about worship, spiritual gifts, and congregational order (11-14). Here he is encouraging them to bring some order to their worship style. Their worship style was probably reflective of the mystery religions many of them had been a part of before becoming Christians. Paul does not condemn their worship style, but he does encourage order which probably reflects his concern that seeking Jews would be offended by the wildly expressive worship of this particular church, thus not having an opportunity to come into the Kingdom. Throughout Paul's address of these internal issues of this church we see expressed his evangelistic or missionary concerns. Nothing else is more important than getting people to know Christ as their Savior and/or Messiah.
- Paul also answers questions about resurrection and the age to come (15). These are recurring themes whenever there was a dominant Gentile contingency. Resurrection was just not a part of the Gentile worldview and so was very difficult for them to understand.

**2 Corinthians:** Paul's theme is "The way to glory is the way of the cross." The Corinthians saw Christ as a way to better themselves, a way to power and affirmation by peers. Paul taught them about the constructive outcome of suffering and that his suffering is evidence that his ministry is legitimate.

#### **Specific issues in 2 Corinthians:**

- Paul has to defend his apostolic authority because the Corinthians were setting aside his teachings, even though he was the founder of the Corinthian church.
- Paul is encouraging the church to be generous in giving money for the Jerusalem church (8-9). He commends them for being very excited about the project at first and encourages them by comparing what the Macedonian churches had done to what they could do.
- Paul appeals for complete reconciliation (6:1-7:4). He says he has not withheld his affection from them, but they have withheld theirs from him.

#### ***Discussion: salvation by faith***

- *Why do you think Paul emphasizes salvation by faith versus salvation by works?*
- *For Paul, what is the relationship between good works and salvation?*
- *Discuss this statement and its implications for our contemporary setting:*
- *If what we do hinders people from coming into the Kingdom or weakens their resolve to remain Christians, then we should adjust our actions.*

## √ **The art of letter-writing, Galatians and Thessalonians**

Again we will briefly review the types of letters learned in school and used by literate people of the first century. We will expand on the types reflected in Galatians and 1 and 2 Thessalonians.

## Letters of exhortation and advice: additional types

**Paraenetic letters** (Exhortation and Dissuasion): In a sample letter, the ancient scholar Libanius illustrated the need to provide a positive model of behavior the reader is either explicitly or implicitly urged to imitate. The author's own behavior may be given as an example. *Paraenesis* concerns those basic and unquestioned patterns of behavior, which are sanctioned by honor and shame. It is not supposed to teach anything new. Exhortation plays a major role in all the letters of Paul and the Pauline school, except Philemon. Second Thessalonians is an excellent example of a *paraenetic* letter.

**Letters of admonition:** The gentlest type of blame was admonition. It is the instilling of sense in the person who is being admonished, and teaching what should and should not be done. The writer constructively criticizes certain aspects of the reader's behavior. Admonition is used very consciously and explicitly in the letters of Paul. Second Thessalonians 3:6-12 admonishes certain people in the community and 3:15 urges members to admonish one another.

**Letters of rebuke:** Rebuke was considered harsher than admonition. Rebuke was directed at fundamental flaws of character or a basic pattern of "immoral" behavior. The rebuker tried to shame the sinner into stopping the misbehavior and often explicitly called for a change to an honorable way of life. Paul used rebuke in his letter to the Galatians (1:6-10, 3:1-5, and 4:8-10). His expression "I am amazed" and his denunciation of them as "fools" are characteristic of rebuke.

**Letters of reproach:** Reproach was a harsh blame that only the sternest sort of philosopher considered morally beneficial. Letters of reproach seem absent from the corpus of early Christian letters. Paul contrasts the gentleness of his own teaching to harsher methods (1 Thess 2:6-7) and the Pastoral Epistles argue against harsh and quarrelsome teachers (2 Tim 2:23-26).

**Letters of consolation:** Consolation was very important in the Greco-Roman world. It had an important place in both the philosophical and the rhetorical traditions. Consolation proper contains traditional materials such as quotations from the poets, examples, precepts, and arguments against excessive grieving. Giving consolation was considered one of the philosopher's chief functions. Like many complex paraenetic letters, 1 Thess contains a consolatory section (4:13-18). Paul's call for the Thessalonians to stop grieving is a formulaic expression in consolatory literature. Like Paul, writers of consolations eased the sting of death by calling it sleep.

### √ The letter to the Galatians: letter of rebuke

The Letter to the Galatians is unusual among Paul's letters because of the "harshness" of his tone. We don't have any other letters to this church or group of churches, but can assume Paul tried, reminding them of what he had taught them and giving them strong advice, but none of that had worked. This is a church that

had known conversion and the filling of the Holy Spirit, but was now caught up in legalism (3:3). It no longer understood the freedom that comes in the Spirit.

*Involve all the students in the discussion and exploration of the hermeneutical questions. Write responses on the blackboard as they are given.*

## **WHO?**

**Author:** Paul, the apostle

**Audience:** Jewish and/or Gentile Christians who were being persuaded or had been persuaded by "Judaizers" to trust in the law for salvation.

## **WHERE?**

**Author:** Paul, probably wrote from Ephesus during his third missionary journey.

**Audience:** There are two main theories on the exact location for the audience.

*North Galatian Theory:* This theory currently has the least support.

- Some scholars think Paul is referring to the ethnic area, the "Galatian country" of Acts 16:6.
- This area is located in the central highlands of Anatolia where tribes of Celts had settled in Hellenistic times. Paul's "O Galatians" in Galatians 3:1 means, "O Celts," or "O Gauls."
- Roman roads connected the three small cities in this area to cities like Sardis and Paul's hometown, Tarsus.

*South Galatian Theory:* This is currently the predominant theory.

- Acts 13:13-14:25 lists the names of several cities Paul visited in the South Galatian area during his missionary journeys: Perga, Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra.
- The Galatian letter was written to give guidance on issues that came up after Paul and Barnabas were there. Galatians 1:11 and 4:13 indicate that Paul preached to these people. In 4:11, Paul comments he fears he has wasted his efforts on these people.
- The arguments for it being the audience location include:
  1. South Galatia is the location of the cities Paul ministered according to Acts and Paul's letters. It is also the location of the largest cities in Galatia.
  2. Paul was sick when he went to Galatia (4:13). North Galatia would not have been a good place for him to go in this condition. It was considered wild and uncivilized.

## **WHEN?**

AD 52-55 during his third missionary journey.

## **WHAT?**

*Consult outlines from commentaries on 1 and 2 Thessalonians. Discuss the first century principles and their application to the 21st century*

**Thesis:** Salvation comes only through faith in Christ (2:15-21).

**Conclusion:** Maintain your freedom in Christ (5:1-12).

**Ethical applications:** Defines what freedom in Christ is not (5:13-21), and what it is (5:22-6:10). -- Adapted from Perkins, *Reading the New Testament*, 165

**Special passages:**

2:20: "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me."

3:28: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

5:22-23: Fruit of the Spirit

**WHY?**

- To remind them salvation by faith brings freedom and not bondage.
- To clarify the issues being confused by the Judaizers, that Christians had to follow the dietary and ritual laws of Judaism to please God.
- To reestablish Paul's authority and thus the authority of his gospel in their minds.
- To remind them they are all one and equal because they have been baptized in Christ.

√ **The Letters to the Thessalonians**

**Types:** Friendship terms, praise used in introductory thanksgiving. Uses elements of paraenetic, admonition, and consolation letters.

*Involve the students in the discussion and exploration of the hermeneutical questions. Write responses on a blackboard as they are given.*

**WHO?**

**Author:** Paul is the unquestioned author for 1 Thess, but some question his authorship of 2 Thess due to slightly different vocabulary, more formal style, and reference to "the lawless one."

Those who do not think Paul wrote 2 Thess would have the letter written by someone in the "school of Paul" sometime late in the first century. However, the changes in Paul's vocabulary, style, and reference to the "lawless one" can also be explained by a shift in his purpose based on the response he received from his first letter.

**Audience:** Gentile Christians in Thessalonica

**WHERE?**

**Author:** Paul wrote from Corinth

**Audience:** Gentile Church in Thessalonica, in Northern Greece (Macedonia).

- This proud, Greek city was founded by Cassander in 315 BC. He was one of Alexander the Great's generals.
- Thessalonica enjoyed special privileges because it sent troops to fight with the Roman ruler Octavian, who won the Roman civil war in 42 BC.
- Legally the Thessalonians were allowed to govern themselves, but in reality their elected officials were bound to Rome by an oath of allegiance.
- Religion: As was true of most Greek cities, Thessalonica had worshipers of many different gods. The "state" religion was the Hellenistic ruler cult or emperor worship. Mystery religions: The Dionysiac mysteries were the most prominent
- They were concerned with the ascent of Dionysos from the underworld and so reflected a strong interest in what happened after death.
- They looked after the burials of their members.
- They did not believe in the bodily resurrection of the dead.
- Egyptian mystery cults of Serapis and Isis were popular in this city. The cult of Isis offered claims of salvation and eternal life. Humility, confession of sin, and repentance were a part of their initiation.
- Asklepios (healing god) was worshiped in Thessalonica along with Zeus, Aphrodite, and Demeter in temples, which included temple prostitutes.
- Some of the issues the common people prayed to the gods about were justice, health, beauty, relief from taxes, protection from natural disasters, safety, and wealth.

## WHEN?

AD 50-52—Assuming Paul wrote both letters.

Acts 18:12 tells us Gallio was proconsul over Achaia when Paul was in Corinth. Since he was proconsul for only a short period of time, it is possible to date Paul's stay in Corinth.

## Thesis:

*Consult outlines from commentaries on 1 and 2 Thessalonians.  
Discuss the first century principles and their application to the 21st century*

### 1 Thessalonians:

- God's call to a life of holiness—4:1-12.
- Resurrection and the need to prepare for the parousia—4:13-18, 5:1-11.
- Christian relationships and attitudes—5:12-24.

### 2 Thessalonians:

- Teaching on the preparation and nature of the parousia—1:3-2:12.
- Stand firm in the gospel of salvation and sanctification—2:13-17.
- Warning against the rebellious idle, how to deal with the disobedient—3:6-15.

### Special verses:

1 Thess 4:1-3: How do we please God?

1 Thess 4:3: It is God's will that you be sanctified.

1 Thess 4:3-8: What does holiness "look like" in our private/intimate lives?

1 Thess 4:9-10: How does holiness affect our relationships with our brothers and sisters in Christ?

- 1 Thess 4:11-12: What does holiness "look like" to those outside the church?
- 1 Thess 4:15-18: How does Paul describe the *parousia*, or second coming of Christ?
- 1 Thess 5:23-24: Sanctification benediction
- 2 Thess 2:1-12: What does Paul say about the timing or date of the second coming of Christ?
- 2 Thess 2:16-17: Encouragement benediction
- 2 Thess 3:6-15: What is Paul's attitude toward the "idle" and how should they be treated?

## WHY?

### 1 Thessalonians:

- Paul wants to help these Greek Christians understand persecution is part of being a Christian. In their former life, problems were associated with "wrongdoing" as defined by their pagan culture.
- Paul encourages the believers by praising their faith and by reminding them of his instructions.
- Paul encourages them by giving them insight into the last things, an issue their city was very concerned about, but viewed in a very different way than Christianity did.

### 2 Thessalonians:

- This letter is similar to 1 Thess in its content, but narrows the topics to those Paul understands them to be dealing with specifically: Nature of and preparation for the *parousia*.
- Paul corrects a misunderstanding about the end times. Apparently some in the church thought the end times had already come. He also gives a strong warning against the "ataktoi." This Greek word is best translated "the rebellious idle." Paul has taught that Christians need to prepare for the end times. These idle Greeks were following their ancient teachings of fatalism and so felt there was nothing to be done to prepare for the end.

### ***Discussion: growing Christians***

Compare the issues of these growing Christians in Galatia and Thessalonica with new and growing Christians of today.

- *How are they similar? How are they different?*
- *What principles can we apply to our current time?*

## √ The letter to the Ephesians

Paul writes this letter from prison in Rome. He wants to reassure the church and remind them of his teachings. He does not deal with specific church problems, so it may have been a circular letter written to a group of churches in the Ephesus area.

**Type:** Primarily a *paraenetic* letter. Paul is writing to remind the Ephesians of what

he taught them when he was with them.

*Involve all the students in the discussion and exploration of the hermeneutical questions.  
Write the responses on a blackboard for all to see.*

## WHO?

**Author:** There are two primary theories on authorship

1. Paul, the apostle (traditional position)—Eph 1:1 The arguments for this position are:
  - Paul is named in verse 1 as the author.
  - The differences in vocabulary and terms reflect a change in Paul’s thought and style and do not necessarily require the author to be a different person.
2. Pauline School: The arguments for this position are:
  - There are some differences in vocabulary.
  - Some terms have a different meaning in Ephesians than they do in other Pauline writings.
  - The style is different.

**Audience:** Church in Ephesus and perhaps the surrounding area of Asia. Most likely a circular letter since Paul does not seem to deal with the problems of a particular church. Five ancient copies lack the words “In Ephesus” in 1:1, but the title says: “To the Ephesians.”

## WHERE?

**Author:** Paul wrote from Rome in prison.

**Audience:** Lived in Ephesus:

- This was a prosperous commercial city.
- It was the capital city of the Roman province of Asia.
- The temple to Artemis (Diana, mother goddess) was the largest building in the city. The artisans and others who served this temple had a strong influence in the city.
- Other cults included: Cybele, Sarapis, Emperor cult.
- It was a major port city of Asia Minor.

## WHEN?

**Traditional author:** During Paul’s Roman imprisonment, around AD 60-62.

**Pauline school:** Later in first century as it provides a summary of Paul’s teaching in Asia Minor.

## WHAT?

*Consult an outline from a commentary on Ephesians.  
Discuss the first century principles and their application to the 21st century*

**Theme:** Christ is the Head of the Body, His Church.

**Brief outline:**

- Re-creating the Human Family of God—What God Has Done—1:3-3:21.
- Re-creating the Human Family of God—What God Is Doing—4:1-6:20.

**Special verses:**

2:11-22: Unity of Jew and Gentile in Christ

3:4-20: Prayer for holiness

4:11-16: Spiritual gifts and growth

5:21-33: Christ and the Church as a model for marriage

**WHY?**

To encourage those who had once worshiped the pagan gods but were now Christians by reminding them of Paul's teaching.

Paul's emphasis on the supremacy of Christ was important in a city of many gods.

Paul ends with exhortations on how they should live, what their lifestyle should look like in their particular situation.

## √ The Letter to the Philippians

Philippians is unique in Paul's writings, as it is the only letter written to primarily Roman Gentile Christians whom Paul has personally discipled. Paul is writing to them while in prison in Rome, their mother city. He wants to assure them his chains have served to advance the Kingdom and he is in prison only because of Christ and not for any other reason.

**Types:** Friendship letter, *Paraenetic* letter

*Involve all the students in the discussion and exploration of the hermeneutical questions. Write the responses on a blackboard for all to see.*

**WHO?**

**Author:** Paul's authorship has rarely been contested.

**Audience:** Church in Philippi. Gentile Christians, most likely the grandchildren of Roman war veterans who settled there on land grants from the Roman emperor for their war service.

**WHERE?**

**Author:** Paul was in a Roman prison.

**Audience:** City of Philippi in Macedonia

- Philippi is nine miles west of the port city Neapolis on the Via Egnatia, the major east-west commercial highway.
- It was a busy, Roman administrative center.
- It was a Roman colony since 42 BC and populated by Roman war veterans. The people had certain civic and tax privileges.

- The people spoke both Latin and Greek.
- The city had a library and theatre.
- The Acropolis (sacred high ground) had temples for Isis, Sarapis, and the Mother Goddess.

## WHEN?

AD 60-62 while Paul was in prison in Rome

## WHAT?

**Main purpose:** Express Paul's pastoral concern for them. He felt they needed reassurance that the gospel they believed in was marching on to victory, in spite of Paul's imprisonment.

### Special verses:

1:21: "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain."

2:5-11: Kenosis passage. Christological poem.

3:7-11: Considers all things loss compared to knowing Christ.

4:8-9: What to think about: whatever is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable.

4:13: "I can do everything through him who gives me strength."

4:19: "And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus."

## WHY?

Paul wants to express his pastoral concern for the readers whose mother country has Paul in prison.

Paul wants to identify the enemies of the gospel. They include Rome, false teachers, and troublemakers in the church in Philippi. For the latter he wanted to point them to Jesus Christ. He called for a healing and unity in the Body of Christ.

Paul also reminded them of his high Christology. Jesus was not just a human, but divinity itself.

## √ The letter to the Colossians

Colossians is a letter which uses friendship terms, but, like Ephesians, is primarily a *paraenetic* letter which reminds the church of what Paul taught when he was with them.

**Types:** Friendship letter, *Paraenetic* letter

*Involve all the students in the discussion and exploration of the hermeneutical questions. Write the responses on a blackboard for all to see.*

## WHO?

**Author:** Paul, the apostle. Colossians and Ephesians are very similar in content, but scholars think Paul wrote this shorter letter. Those who do not think Paul wrote Ephesians say someone in the Pauline school used Colossians as an outline or model and added to it.

**Audience:** Gentile and some Jewish Christians in Colossae. The town is made up of Phrygians, Greeks, and Jews. Epaphras (founder of the church), Philemon, Apphia, Archippus, and Onesimus are church members named in Scripture.

## WHERE?

**Author:** Paul was in prison in Rome.

**Audience:** Church in Colossae, located 100 miles southeast of Ephesus in the district of Phrygia and was subject to many earthquakes. It was not a large city and was near Laodicea, which is another city in this area, mentioned in the Revelation of John.

## WHEN?

AD 60-64 while Paul was in prison in Rome.

## WHAT?

Colossians is similar in content to Ephesians

*Consult an outline in a commentary on Colossians.  
Discuss the first century principles and their application to the 21st century*

### **Ephesians**

1:1-2

1:15-17

2:5-6

3:1-13

5:19-20

5:22—6:9

6:21-22

### **Colossians**

1:1-2

1:3-4, 9-10

2:12-13

1:24—2:5

3:16-17

3:18—4:1

4:7-8

### **Special verses:**

1:15-20: Hymn on Christ as the image and fullness of God

3:1-17: Rules for holy living

3:18-4:1: "Household code" rules for Christian households: wives, husbands, children, fathers, slaves, and masters

## WHY?

To assure the Colossians and Laodicians (Col 4: 16) of Paul's interest and care.

To refute false teaching and teachers who are misleading some in the church.

To make assertions about Jesus Christ as the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all Creation, and the one in whom all things hold together.

The Colossian heresy included legalism (salvation based on works) and asceticism (harsh treatment of the body as a means of earning God's favor).

**Special verses:**

Colossians 1:9-17

Colossians 2:13-15

Colossians 3:1-3

Colossians 3:14-17

***Discussion: guiding principles***

- *What principles do you see Paul presenting in these books?*
- *How could they be applied today?*

**\*\* *Group activity: pastoral responsibilities***

Discuss in your groups and be prepared to share with the class about the New Testament teaching on **family** and **community** that are the pastor's responsibilities to address with his congregation.

***Lesson close***

***Journal or share with your discussion partner***

Choose **one** of the following questions as your journal prompt:

- What are issues contemporary churches have today that are similar to Corinth and how do you think Paul would address them?
- Which one of these three books—Galatians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians—speaks to issues you are facing in your spiritual walk?
- What would it mean to your church to have a general superintendent write a personal letter to them? What kind of a letter would it be?

***Assignment***

Complete your Book Study assignment (#7 in the Syllabus).

## ***PAUL'S LETTERS TO INDIVIDUALS***

### ***Introduction***

The letters we are talking about today are written to individuals, all leaders in the church.

- *If you were Paul, writing to individuals in leadership, what changes in style, content, or vocabulary would you make in contrast to a letter that would be read to the whole church? Why?*

### ***Objectives for this lesson***

By the end of this lesson, students should:

- gain an understanding of the types of letters written in the first century
- know the purpose and main content for Paul's letters to Philemon, 1 and 2 Timothy, and Titus

### **√ Letter to Philemon**

Philemon is a unique letter of Paul in that it is a pure letter of mediation. It is the first one we have encountered in which Paul addresses an individual, and it is the only letter Paul writes to an individual who is not an "overseer" or someone with pastoral authority over more than one church.

*Involve all the students in the discussion and exploration of the hermeneutical questions  
Write responses on a blackboard for all the students to see.*

**Types:** Friendship letter, *epideictic*, letter of mediation

### **WHO?**

**Author:** Paul, the apostle

**Audience:** Philemon, a man of means with a home big enough to host the Christian meetings. He owned slaves, one of which was Onesimus, who ran away.

### **WHERE?**

**Author:** Paul is in Rome in prison.

**Audience:** Philemon, Gentile Christian in Colossae; Onesimus is called a Colossian in Colossians 4:9.

Cultural Note: According to Roman law a slave could seek refuge at a religious altar and the person presiding over the altar could act as a mediator on the slave's behalf. Since Onesimus was converted under Paul, Paul became the "priestly mediator" with his master.

## **WHEN?**

AD 60-64

## **WHAT?**

*Consult an outline in a commentary on Philemon.  
Discuss the first century principles and their application to the 21st century*

Main purpose of the letter is to ask Philemon to accept Onesimus as a brother in Christ. Paul knows what society would demand, but he urges a new Christian relationship (15-16). Paul could command Philemon to accept Onesimus, but he chooses not to (8-9).

## **WHY?**

Onesimus, a runaway slave, was converted under Paul. Paul felt the right thing for Onesimus to do was to return to his master and straighten things out. Most likely Onesimus was a slave because he or his family owed money to Philemon.

Paul writes to urge Philemon to treat his slave with mercy, as he is now a fellow believer.

## √ **Letters to Timothy**

1 and 2 Timothy, along with Titus are referred to as the Pastoral Epistles. 1 and 2 Timothy are written to Paul's "son" in the faith and an able early leader, who organized and trained leadership in the churches Paul started. These Pastoral Epistles are unique in that they are letters written to individuals in administrative leadership over several churches or groups of churches.

**Types:** *Paraenetic* letters

*Involve all the students in the discussion and exploration of the hermeneutical questions.  
Write the responses on a blackboard for all to see.*

## **WHO?**

### **Author:**

- Paul, the apostle, is the traditional author.
- Pauline School: Many scholars today view these letters as products of a later age, so the author would be an unknown Pauline disciple. This is based on differences in style, vocabulary, and content.

- Argument for Paul: Due to the drastically different audience of these Pastoral Epistles (administrative leadership), it should not be surprising that Paul's style, vocabulary, and content is different from the letters he sent to individual congregations.

**Audience:** Timothy, pastor of the church in Ephesus, Paul's "son" in the faith is the traditional audience. If these letters were written later, then they would have been written most probably to young pastors.

## WHERE?

### Author:

- Paul in Rome, where he waited in prison for his execution.
- Anonymous author's place of writing unknown.

**Audience:** Ephesus in Asia Minor for Timothy, otherwise unknown location.

## When?

AD 60-64 for Paul as author

Late first century, early second for unknown author.

## WHAT?

These are handbooks for church leaders and discuss issues of qualifications for leadership, as well as the organization and administration of the churches.

*Consult outlines in commentaries for 1 and 2 Timothy  
Discuss the first century principles and their application to the 21st century*

### Special verses:

1 Tim 2:1-7

1 Tim 4:1-3

1 Tim 4:12: "Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity."

1 Tim 4:13-16

1 Tim 6:10: "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil."

1 Tim 6:12: "Fight the good fight of the faith."

2 Tim 1:8-12

2 Tim 2:3 "Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus."

2 Tim 3:14-17

2 Tim 3:16-17: "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."

2 Tim 4:2: "Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction."

2 Tim 4:7: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."

## WHY?

To encourage Timothy/pastors in face of opposition from false teachers.

To give Timothy/pastors a list of priorities for the local church: prayer, worship, high standards for leadership, sound teaching, and care for the church members.

## √ Letter to Titus

Titus is also a Pastoral Epistle written to a person Paul left in charge of organizing and training leadership for young churches.

**Type:** *Paraenetic* letter

*Involve the students in the discussion and exploration of the hermeneutical questions. Write the responses on an overhead for all to see.*

## WHO?

**Author:** Paul, traditional author or anonymous Pauline disciple.

**Audience:** Titus who is overseeing several other pastors on the island of Crete. Paul had left him to finish church organization and leadership training. If these letters were written later, they would have been written most probably to overseers of young churches.

*See information on 1 and 2 Timothy*

## WHERE?

**Author:** Paul is probably at Nicopolis, a port city about 140 miles northwest of Corinth. This is where he wants Titus to join him.

**Audience:** Titus is in Crete.

Unknown author/audience's location is unknown.

## WHEN?

- AD 52-60, sometime during Paul's last missionary journey, before his arrest in Jerusalem.
- AD 60-64, if it is placed during the period of Paul's supposed travel to Spain, which took place, according to some scholars, between his two Roman imprisonments.
- Late first century, early second century for anonymous writer.

## WHAT?

*Consult outlines in commentaries for 1 and 2 Timothy  
Discuss the first century principles and their application to the 21st century*

**Special issues** in Titus include

- Qualifications for elders
- Instructions for various age and gender groups

**Special verses:**

2:11-13: "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness . . . and to live self-controlled . . . while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ."

**WHY?**

The purpose is to give Titus practical direction until Paul's aides, Artemas and Tychicus, arrive.

Paul lists his qualifications for elders in 1:6-9, so Titus has an "objective" standard in choosing leadership as well as Paul's authority for the qualifications

Paul also gives Titus special instructions for his churches (2:1-2; 2:3-5; 2:6-8; 2:9-10).

***Discussion: guiding principles***

- *How do we interpret 1 Tim 2:11-15?*

This passage contains the key verses—along with 1 Cor 14:33b-36—for those who do not believe in the ordination or leadership of women in the Church.

The meaning seems plain enough. The problem is that it contradicts what we know of Paul's practice and beliefs in other letters. Those who do not believe in the ordination of women accept the apparent meaning of verse 12 over the examples and passages in Acts (i.e., 1:14, 2:14-17, 18:26, 21:9) and Paul's letters (i.e., Gal 3:28, 1 Cor 11:5, Rom 16:1,7) that indicate other practices and beliefs. But they do not accept the plain meaning of verse 15 over the statements found in Paul's writings (i.e., Gal 2:16, Rom 1:16-17).

This type of "selective" interpretation is not consistent or acceptable. We have to find a way to understand the passage that is consistent with all other Scripture, or admit we do not know what the author had in mind.

There are two main interpretation problems in this passage: (1) the role of women in the church and (2) how women are saved. The passage says plainly that women are to keep silent and not to teach or have authority over a man, and that a woman will be saved through childbearing, provided she continues in faith, love and holiness with modesty.

The interpretation of this passage is made even more difficult because of the divided opinion of scholars on when the passage was written and by whom.

If Paul did not write this passage, as many scholars believe, then perhaps this reflects the practice of the later, more established Church, which was anxious to establish its status and be considered respectable in the eyes of society. However, even if we relegate this passage to a later period, that does not relieve us of how to interpret this passage in the light of all other Scripture.

The one thing that seems to be true is this passage was written for a specific situation at a specific time. This position at least illumines verses 11 and 12, but verse 15 continues to remain a mystery in light of the plain teaching of other scripture on salvation.

The interpretation principle which best helps us to interpret this passage is to interpret obscure passages in light of those with clear and consistent meaning.

Thus, although we do not understand the circumstances in which Paul or the author of 1 Tim was writing, we do not interpret the passage to bar all women from speaking, praying, or teaching in church and we do not condition a woman's salvation on whether she has had a child or not.

Immediately after this passage in 1 Tim 3 there is a listing of the qualifications of bishops and deacons which emphasizes their need to be mature Christians. Considering the lack of educational opportunity for women in the first century, perhaps the problem Paul is addressing in 1 Tim 2:11-12 is their lack of education on religious issues and knowledge in general.

Verse 15 may be contextually understood in light of the hope of each Jewish woman (since the Fall) to be chosen as the mother of the Messiah. Thus, the mother of the Messiah is saved through the child she bears.

These suggestions are only guesses as to what the author was trying to say in these very obscure passages.

- *What principles do you see Paul presenting in this passage?*
- *How could they be applied today?*

### ***Lesson close***

#### ***Journal or share with your discussion partner***

Write in your journal. Imagine Paul was your mentor.

- *What are the things for which you would like him to give you advice?*
- *What do you think he might say?*

### ***Assignment***

Complete all assignments for this course and prepare for the final exam.

## THE GENERAL EPISTLES

### Introduction

- *What types of issues do we as human beings find very hard to disagree with family members on and still remain a close family unit? Why?*
- *What is the relationship of the virtue of "integrity" to what a person says and does?*
- *Would you believe a person who says one thing and does another? Why or why not?*
- *In 1 John 2:8, John is writing about a "new" command, "to love one another." Why is it new? Why is it not new?*

### Objectives for this lesson

By the end of this lesson, students should:

- gain an understanding of the types of letters written in the first century
- know the purpose and main content for the General Letters, Hebrews, James, 1 and 2 Peter, Jude, and 1, 2 and 3 John.

### √ Letter to the Hebrews

Philemon is a unique letter of Paul in that it is a pure letter of mediation. It is the first one we have encountered in which Paul addresses an individual, and

Hebrews and James (as well as 1 and 2 Peter, Jude, and many add 1, 2, and 3 John) are called General Letters, General Epistles, or Catholic Epistles because their audience is not specific.

Most probably they were written to a certain type of people—Jewish Christians for Hebrews and James—but not to a certain local church. "Catholic" in this context means "universal" or general and does not refer to the Catholic Church as a specific denomination. "Epistle" is an old English word for "letter" and does not mean anything beyond that.

Hebrews resembles a sermon or speech to which a letter closing is added (13:22-25). Its style and oratory are remarkable as well as the author's grasp of the Jewish traditions and rituals.

*Involve all the students in the discussion and exploration of the hermeneutical questions. Write responses on a blackboard for all to see.*

## WHO?

### Author:

- Tradition claims Paul as author although his name is not found in the oldest extant (existing) manuscripts. But very few current scholars would accept this position.
- Some of the names suggested for the author of this letter are:
  - Barnabas, a companion of Paul
  - Luke because of the good style of Greek
  - Clement of Rome (suggested by Origen)
  - Apollos (suggested by Martin Luther)
  - Sylvanus, companion of Paul
  - Philip
  - Priscilla
- Probably the best suggestion was by Origen: "Only God Knows."

*Spend time looking at the scripture passages given*

The author's characteristics which we can discern from the text itself include:

- He or she was a second-generation Christian, not an eyewitness of Jesus (2:3).
- He or she was not an early leader (13:7).
- He or she uses Platonic thought.
  - (1) The material world is imperfect and changing, a copy of the true world (7:18-19, 8:5, 9:23, 10:1).
  - (2) Humans have access to the divine through the mind and reason (5:12, 13:15-16).
  - (3) Education of the soul-milk (elementary teaching) is for the immature. The soul seeks to be mature or perfect (5:12-6:3).
- Emphasis on the cultic ritual of Judaism which is inferior to what Christ has provided (7:22, 28; 8:6; 9:10-11; 13:9).

**Audience:** Jews, who believed in angels. This would indicate Pharisaic beliefs (1:1; 2:9; 16). They were very familiar with the Old Testament as indicated by the many quotation from the Psalms, 2 Samuel, 1 Chronicles, and Deuteronomy (1:5-14). They had heard of salvation as it was announced by Jesus, but it was delivered to them by eyewitnesses who personally knew Jesus (2:3).

## WHERE?

**Author:** Jewish Christian community. Location is unknown.

**Audience:** Jewish Christian community. Location is unknown.

## WHEN?

AD 40-60. Before the first Jewish revolt, but during a time of increasing tension between Jews and Romans, as well as between Jews who accepted Jesus as Messiah and those who did not.

The audience has faced persecution, but none had yet died for their faith. References to the cultic ritual of the Temple also seem to indicate the letter was written before the destruction of the Temple in AD 70.

Some scholars think Hebrews was written much later, sometime between 80 and 100 AD. These scholars emphasize the Greek thought, style, and language of the book. They point out how the writer emphasizes that neither the Tabernacle nor the Temple in Jerusalem was intended to be permanent. Instead they are copies of the heavenly realities (9:23-24)

In either case, it was during a period when the Jewish Christians were undergoing extreme pressure to turn away from Christianity and go back to their old Jewish ways.

## **WHAT?**

*Consult outlines in commentaries for 1 and 2 Timothy*

Hebrews is a General Epistle with no specific audience named, nor do we know who wrote the letter for sure. It does not follow the regular form of a letter. Rather it seems to be a sermon adapted to the letter form.

It follows the form of alternating from doctrinal teaching to practical application and exhortation (2:1-4).

The author is "legitimizing" Jesus as the promised one, Messiah, prophet, priest. That is, he or she is showing how Jesus fulfills the promises of the Jewish tradition while at the same time is even better than the old Jewish tradition.

### **Special verses:**

*Discuss the first century principles and their application to the 21st century*

2:17; 3:1; 4:15; 5:10; 7:26-27: Jesus as our High Priest  
1:1-3, 4; 3:2-6; 7:16, 19; 8:6; 9:13-14; 19:34; 11:16: Christ as better than . . .

## **WHY?**

Jesus is the fulfillment of Scripture, so there is no way one can go "back" to Judaism. These new Jewish Christians were beginning to experience persecution and were wondering if the pain was worth it.

The author of Hebrews tells them there is no forgiveness of sin WHILE we are denying Christ. There is no other way to salvation. So returning to the Temple ritual of sacrifice is equal to denying Christ and therefore their salvation.

True faith believes God even when His works are not seen. This reassures these persecuted Christians that just because things are not going well, does not mean God is not at work. The true Christian will believe even when everything looks like it is going wrong.

Post-Pentecost Christians face more stern judgment for disobedience than those in the Old Testament did because they have had the benefit of the revelation of Christ and the experience of the Holy Spirit.

## √ Letter of James

James is a letter written, not to a specific church, but to a specific group of people, “12 tribes in the Diaspora,” or better, Jewish Christians in the Diaspora.

It addresses issues that are important to the Jewish Christian Church, but are informative and useful also for the Gentile Church. Because of its very Jewish character with emphasis on “good works,” it took a while before it was accepted into the New Testament canon.

**Type:** *Paraenesis*

*Involve all the students in the discussion and exploration of the hermeneutical questions. Write the responses on an overhead for all to see.*

### WHO?

**Author:**

- James: A servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. The traditional author is James, “the brother of the Lord” or often referred to as Jesus’ half-brother.
- Eusebius (*History of the Church*) depicts James as a model of righteousness and devotion to God. His knees are calloused like those of a camel from praying for the sins of the people. James was taken to the pinnacle of the Temple on Passover where he was to deny Jesus. Instead, he confessed Jesus as the Son of Man and was cast down from there. Since he had not died but was praying for his enemies, James was stoned and then clubbed to death. Immediately after, Emperor Vespasian laid siege to Jerusalem (AD 69).
- From the text of James we see the author was a Greek-speaking, Jewish Christian who understood the significance of religion to be a worshiper of God and to have a commitment to superior moral conduct.

**Audience:** From the text itself the audience is described as the “12 tribes in the Diaspora” (1:1) who gather in a synagogue (2:2) and the community is guided by elders (5:14). They are most likely Jewish Christians.

### WHERE?

**Author:** Jerusalem

**Audience:** Unknown—Diaspora

### WHEN?

The traditional date would be sometime before James’ martyrdom in AD 69.

### WHAT?

*Consult an outline from a commentary on James.*

The theme of James could be "Salvation by Obedient Faith." Its technical rhetorical style is "paraenesis" or exhortation (encouragement and confrontation on issues of right and wrong) indicating James is not really telling his audience anything new, but encouraging them to follow what they have been taught by him and to keep that faith pure.

The development of the actual manuscript texts of James is an interesting history. Because of it being relatively unknown in the first few centuries, there is no Western text of James. Its history is far better known in the East with Papyrus 20 from the third century. This copy was written in Egyptian and is the earliest testimony to this letter. The best and earliest complete copy of the letter is Manuscript B from the fourth century which is also in Egyptian. No one knows why there were no citations of James earlier than the 400s.

This book was called "an epistle of straw" by Martin Luther whose fight was against the "rules and ritual" of the Roman Catholic Church and in favor of "faith and experience." So you can understand as you read this letter that in his particular context, he would have some trouble with James. Others have wanted to take it out of the Canon and it was one of the last ones to make it into the Canon. Perhaps more than anything this shows the resistance of the Early Church against Jewish ideas and the Early Church's emphasis on salvation by faith.

### **Special verses:**

*Discuss the first century principles and their application to the 21<sup>st</sup> century.*

- 1:2-3: The attitude we are to have in temptation
- 1:22-25: Hearing and doing the will of God
- 2:14-26: The relationship between faith and obedient works
- 3:5-13: The control of the tongue
- 4:1-17: The source of division and problems in the Christian life
- 5:13-16: The place of prayer in the Christian life

### **WHY?**

True faith will be reflected in our actions and lifestyle, including social and economic justice.

Violence and anger is not a "faith" response to trials and persecution.

### **Special verses:**

*Discuss the first century principles and their application to the 21<sup>st</sup> century*

- 2:18: "Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do."
- 3:1-12: Taming the tongue.
- 4:7 "Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you."
- 5:14-16: The prayer of faith.

### **Discussion: faith and works**

- Does James' view of faith and works ultimately contradict Paul's teaching?
- Why or why not?

## √ **Letters of Peter**

These two General Epistles are the only direct writing we have of the apostolic hero Peter. They address the situation and needs of the Early Church from a primarily Jewish standpoint, although Peter does not narrow his audience to just Jewish Christians as James did.

*Involve all the students in the discussion and exploration of the hermeneutical questions. Write the responses on an overhead for all to see.*

### **WHO?**

#### **Author:**

- Traditional position: Peter, the apostle, grew up in Bethsaida and lived in Capernaum with his family. Both of these towns were on the Sea of Galilee. He was a fisherman by trade, became a disciple of Jesus and a leader in the Early Church. He was a Jewish Christian who recognized Gentiles did not have to become Jews to be Christians.
- "Peterine tradition": This position, developed in the 19th and 20th centuries, argues that differences in style between 1 Peter and 2 Peter indicate different authors.
- These differences can easily be explained by reading the letters themselves. 1 Peter 5:12 says "With the help of Silas, whom I regard as a faithful brother, I have written to you briefly . . ." 2 Peter does not acknowledge any help in writing. 1 Peter is considered to have "better" Greek than 2 Peter.

#### **Audience:**

**1 Peter:** "God's elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia" (1 Pet 1:1). These cities were in Northern Asia Minor.

**2 Peter:** "To those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours" (2 Pet 1:1).

### **WHERE?**

**Author:** "Babylon" (1 Pet 5:3), which was alias for Rome. This was probably the location for both letters. (Unknown for "Peterine tradition" author.)

**Audience:** Northern Asia Minor for 1 Peter, anywhere for 2 Peter (Unknown for "Peterine tradition" audience).

## WHEN?

**1 Peter:** Before AD 64-66 (AD 100+ for "Peterine tradition")

**2 Peter:** Around AD 68 (AD 100+ for "Peterine tradition")

These dates in the 60s would indicate a time of great unrest and tension, especially for the Jewish Christians. They fit the setting of the letters, which talk about suffering for doing good and being a Christian. The command to submit to "every authority" would also fit this difficult time when the Jews were in revolt against the Romans.

## WHAT?

*Consult outlines from commentaries on 1 and 2 Peter.  
Discuss the first-century principles and their application to the 21st century.*

### Special verses:

- 1 Peter 1:7: "[Trials] have come so that your faith— . . . may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed."
- 1 Peter 1:15-16: "But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: 'Be holy, because I am holy.' "
- 1 Peter 1:18-23: By whom and at what price were we ransomed?
- 1 Peter 2:11—3:13: Conduct codes for Christian aliens and exiles, specifically slaves, wives, husbands and everyone
- 1 Peter 3:14-17: The attitude we should have when suffering for righteousness' sake
- 1 Peter 5:5-6: God and humility
- 1 Peter 5:7: "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you."
- 1 Peter 5:8: "Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour."
- 2 Peter 1:5-7: With what should we support or add to our faith?
- 2 Peter 2: 1-22: Description and fate of false teachers
- 2 Peter 3: 3-18: Second Coming of Christ
- 2 Peter 3:15-16: Indicates Paul's letters are known and authoritative.

## WHY?

### 1 Peter:

- To encourage the believers in face of persecution.
- To keep their eyes on eternal salvation and not on the temporal persecutions.
- He contrasts life as a foreigner or "Pilgrim"—citizen of heaven—versus the life of the world.

#### **The life of the pilgrim**

Be obedient to God (1:14, 22)  
Be holy (1:15)  
Live as servants (2:16, 4:11)

#### **The life of the world**

Rebellion against God  
Unholiness  
Live selfishly

Be prayerful (3:7, 4:7)  
 Live openly, transparently (2:16, 3:16)  
 Do what is good (2:15, 3:16-17)  
 Be gentle and respectful (3:15)  
 Love one another deeply (1:22, 4:8)  
 Exercise self-control (1:13, 4:7, 5:8)  
 Live humbly (5:6)  
 Reject evil (2:11)  
 Accept human rule (2:13, 17)  
 Control sinful desires (2:1, 11)  
 Do God's will (4:2)  
 Share with others (4:9)  
 Use our gifts for others (4:10-11)

Reject God  
 Live deceitfully  
 Do what is wrong  
 Live harshly and insolently  
 Hate one another  
 Live excessively, wildly  
 Be proud and arrogant  
 Embrace evil  
 Reject human rule  
 Give desires free rein  
 Reject God's will  
 Hoard one's possessions  
 Refuse to share

- He concludes that the Christian's main goal is to follow Christ, wherever that leads.  
 -- From *ENT*, 365

## 2 Peter:

- Christians are to grow in grace and he lists the virtues that will help do that (1:5-8).
- Believers can have confidence in the Old Testament and in the apostolic teachings (1:12-21).
- Believers must beware of false teachers and doctrines (2:1-22).
- Peter gives an explanation as to why Jesus had not returned: God's time is not like our time and delay indicates God's patience. He also explains the day of the Lord will come like a thief, so we must be ready by living holy and godly lives (3:8-13).

## √ Letter of Jude

Jude is a short, one-chapter letter which is very similar to 2 Peter 2. It reflects the same, tension-filled time as Peter's letters and a similar concern for how to identify and deal with false teachers.

*Involve all the students in the discussion and exploration of the hermeneutical questions. Write responses on a blackboard for all to see.*

### WHO?

**Author:** "Servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James." Most likely, the half-brother of Jesus and brother of James the patriarch of the Church in Jerusalem.

**Audience:** "All chosen and loved by God the Father and kept safe by Jesus Christ." The text seems to point to Jewish Christians who have a background in the Old Testament and Jewish apocryphal writings of Enoch (Jude 14-15).

### WHERE?

**Author:** Unknown, probably Jerusalem

**Audience:** Unknown, perhaps Jewish Christian Churches of the Diaspora

## WHEN?

AD 66-80, a time of increased tension between Rabbinic Judaism and Jewish Christianity. Christianity is facing persecution from Judaism and the Roman government.

## WHAT?

*Consult an outline from a commentary on Jude.  
Discuss the first century principles and their application to the 21<sup>st</sup> century.*

### Special Verses:

4, 8-19: False teachers; Compare these verses with 2 Pet 2:1-22. *What are the similarities, what are the differences?*

24-25: "To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy—to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen."

## WHY?

Some principles which come out of this little letter include:

- Believers must fight for the doctrine of the deity of Jesus because this is fundamental to the Christian faith.
- Salvation involves moral transformation.
- False teachers can be identified by their lifestyles, which do not live up to their teachings.

Jude urges the believers to build one another up and resist evil, false teachers, and doctrines (Jude 4, 8, 10-16).

### **Discussion: false teachers**

- *What are the main characteristics of false teachers as described in 2 Peter and Jude?*
- *Can we use these characteristics/principles to identify false teachers today? Why or why not?*

## √ Letters of John

The first two letters were written to congregations and the third letter was written to an individual, who was probably part of one of the congregations in Asia Minor. They are written in very simple and clear Greek and express the concern of an aging pastor for his people.

*Involve all the students in the discussion and exploration of the hermeneutical questions.  
Write responses on the blackboard for all to see.*

## WHO?

### Author:

- Textual evidence: No identification of author in 1 John. The author calls himself an “elder” in 2 and 3 John.
- Traditional position: The Apostle John who grew up in Galilee, probably in Bethsaida. His father was Zebedee and his mother was Salome, who accompanied Jesus and His disciples on their journeys. His brother was James. John was a disciple of John the Baptist and after John’s arrest was called by Jesus to be His disciple. He knew the high priest, took care of Jesus’ mother, Mary, and was one of the first men to see the empty tomb. He ministered in Jerusalem from AD 30 to 68 and in Ephesus from AD 68 to 98 when he died. Part of this time he was on the Island of Patmos in exile.

### Audience:

- **1 John:** “My children,” believers—children, parents, young people
- **2 John:** “*The elect mistress or lady (eklekte kuria)* and her children.” Some interpret this to refer to a Church patroness or woman pastor and those who met in her house for church. Others see the phrase as a personification of the local church, since the word “church” in Greek is feminine.
- **3 John:** “Gaius,” convert of John who had the gift of hospitality and with whom John plans to stay.

## WHERE?

**Author:** Ephesus in Asia Minor, most likely

**Audience:** Unknown, but probably in Asia Minor

## WHEN?

Somewhere between AD 68 and 98, but probably in the 90s

## WHAT?

*Consult outlines of 1, 2, and 3 John in commentaries.*

The themes of **1 John** include right belief and right living. These both directly confront the incipient Gnostic teachings apparently trying to take over in the church(es) John was writing to.

John contrasts these false teachings with Christian belief:

### Gnosticism

#### wrong belief

- 1:6: Believes a lie
- 4:6: Spirit of falsehood
- 2:22-23-4:3: Denies Jesus
- 1:10: Denies sin

### Christianity

#### right belief

- 2:20-23: Believes the truth
- 4:6: Spirit of truth
- 4:2: Confesses Jesus
- 1:9-2:1: Accepts forgiveness

**excuses sin: a sinning religion**

1:6: Walks in darkness  
 2:19: Division comes from the spirit of the anti-Christ  
 2:4: Disobeys Christ God's  
 3:8: Sins continually  
 5:19: Under the control of victory the devil

**victorious Christian living**

1:7: Walks in the light  
 1:9: Has fellowship with God and others  
 2:3, 17: Obeys Christ and does will  
 3:4-6: Freedom from sinning  
 3:9-10, 4:4, 5:4-5 Has God's by faith

**2 John** was written to the "chosen lady," which is an unusual Greek term for the New Testament, *kuria*, or the feminine form of *kurios*, which is translated "Lord, master, or Sir." This letter is only one chapter long and is really an announcement that John wants to come and visit. He wants to explain his position and reinforce "the truth." His two main "commands" are to "love one another" and to watch out for the deceivers who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh.

**3 John** was written to "my dear friend Gaius." This short, one-chapter letter is also an announcement of John's desire to come for a visit. He commends Gaius for his hospitality to "brothers" who were strangers to Gaius. Following the tradition of a praise and blame letter, he praises the behavior of Gaius and Demetrius and "blames" or states his disapproval of Diotrephes' behavior.

**Special verses:**

*Discuss the first century principles and their application to the 21st century.*

1 John 1:7-8; 2:1; 3:4-5, 8-9; 5:16-17: Sin  
 1 John 2:5, 15; 3:1, 11, 14-18, 23; 4:7-21; 5:2-3: Love  
 2 John 1:1, 3, 5-6: Love  
 3 John 1:1: Love

**WHY?**

- **1 John:** So their joy might be full, so they will not sin, so that they will love one another, and to assure them of their victory in Christ.
- **2 John:** Similar to 1 John, adds the concern about those who might deny either the humanity or deity of Christ.
- **3 John:** Gaius is commended for his hospitality to traveling Christian evangelists, discusses the vices of Diotrephes and the virtues of Demetrius.

**Exploration of the false teachings**

These three letters of John were written late in the first century and to people who were probably facing Gnostic or pre-Gnostic teachings as well as Docetic teachings, which were surfacing in the church. Let's briefly define these two early heresies.

**Gnosticism:**

The Church Fathers compared Gnostic teaching to the many-headed hydra of Greek legend. In other words, it was hard to pin down what the Gnostics believed.

There was no Gnostic church or normative theology, no Gnostic rule of faith, and no dogmas of exclusive importance.

Gnostic systems attached themselves to "host" religions, so they did not have their own tradition, sacred books or stories, but borrowed ones from the host religion or a mixture of host religious ideas.

The essential features of Gnosticism consist of:

- Their name comes from the Greek word "gnosis," which means knowledge. The Gnostics claimed to have special knowledge. They were "gnostics" or knowers, people of understanding. This "gnosis"—special knowledge—had a liberating and redeeming effect. It was given by revelation only to the elect who were capable of receiving it.
- In each person there is a divine "spark" which comes from the divine world and has to be awakened. For some people this is very easy to do, because the spark glows brighter; for others it takes more effort.
- They believed in dualism on the cosmological and anthropological levels. So there are good and evil gods/goddesses or heavenly beings as well as good and evil people. Good and evil forces or beings tend to be of equal strength in pure dualism, so the question of who wins in the end is still to be determined.
- Angels and other heavenly beings played an important role in the creation of the world, and they explain why things are the way they are.
- Soteriology: God/god/goddess and his/her helpers open up a way in which the soul can escape to heaven. This is where the special knowledge comes in. Those with special knowledge know how to get the God/god/goddess and his/her helpers to "reveal the things that are difficult to interpret and the things that are secret."
- Eschatology: The deliverance of the heavenly soul has cosmic significance. So when a soul is liberated from its earthly body and condition, this will affect the gods/goddesses as well as the rest of the heavens.

-- From *Trimorphic Protennoia*, XIII, 35, in *The Nag Hammadi Library*, trans. John D. Turner, ed. James M. Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1981).

## **Docetism**

In brief, this is the belief that Jesus was not truly human; He just *seemed* to be human. And if Jesus was not human, then He was not the "Messiah" ("Christ"), since by definition the Messiah was an anointed human being and He was not the Son of God, but God himself.

Greek thinking found it very difficult to understand how a truly human person could reveal the character of God. Contrary to Old Testament Jewish teaching, they believed the human world was quite separate from the heavenly world, and the goal of every human soul was to escape this world (or the body) for life in the supernatural world. Note how Gnostic ideas of finding the secret of escape fits also into this perspective.

The religious/philosophical issue Docetism tried to solve was how an all-powerful God could be imprisoned in a human being. Since this was thought to be impossible, Jesus must have only *seemed* to have been human. One of the

prominent Docetists who lived at the same time as John (according to Irenaeus in *Against Heresies* 3.3.4) was Cerinthus. Irenaeus tells us the apostle John went to a public bathhouse in Ephesus, but refused to take a bath because Cerinthus was there. Some have suggested 1 John was written in reply to Cerinthus himself.

### ***Group activity: facing false teachings***

In small groups you will discuss the following passages and questions. Select a recorder/reporter who will report to the class. Read and discuss how John deals with the ideas of Gnosticism and Docetism in the following passages:

1 John 2:22-23

1 John 4:1-3, 15

1 John 5:1-5, 10-12

- *What do John's concerns tell us about the churches in Asia Minor at the end of the first century?*
- *What similarities do they have with 21<sup>st</sup>-century churches?*
- *What differences?*

### ***Lesson close***

#### ***Journal or share with your discussion partner***

Write in your journal. Choose **one** of the following questions:

- *How significant would it be to know the authorship of the Book of Hebrews? Why?*
- *Reflect on the characteristic of the "Life of the Pilgrim" you would most want people to see in you. Which is the most difficult?*
- *What thoughts or arguments have you gained from John that will be helpful to counter the false teachings you encounter?*

#### ***Assignment***

Prepare for the final exam.

Lesson 10

**REVELATION**

**Introduction**

- *How important is a person's view of his or her eternal destiny to his or her everyday life?*
- *Are fear and hope legitimate "emotions" to live our lives by? Why or why not?*

**Objectives for this lesson**

By the end of this lesson, students should:

- gain an understanding of the Jewish apocalyptic literature
- know the purpose and main content for Revelation

√ **A summary of Revelation**

*Involve all the students in the discussion and exploration of the hermeneutical questions. Write the responses on the blackboard for all to see.*

**WHO?**

**Author:**

The Apostle John

**Audience:**

Seven churches in the province of Asia—Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea

**WHEN?**

AD 95-96, during the reign of Emperor Domitian. This emperor launched the first official persecution of Christians. In the 60s Nero had instigated an organized persecution of Christians, but Domitian’s persecution was empire-wide and intense.

**WHERE?**

**Author:** John received visions on the island of Patmos, but probably wrote from Ephesus.

**Audience:** Ephesus, Laodicea, Pergamum, Philadelphia, Sardis, Smyrna, Thyatira—Western Asia Minor

## WHAT?

*Consult an outline of Revelation in a commentary.*

“Apocalypsis Jesu Christus”: A Revelation of Jesus Christ. This is the first line of Revelation and Vernard Eller, in *The Most Revealing Book of the Bible: Making Sense Out of Revelation*, says

In his title John also has given us the primary principle for interpreting his book . . . his desire to proclaim and expound the person of Jesus Christ . . . John has given us a revelation of Jesus Christ which is to be harmonized with the larger revelation of Christ which is the New Testament itself—this, RATHER THAN as a revelation of future history to be correlated, now, with ‘signs,’ i.e., whatever can be observed in today’s world and in the political events of the twentieth century.  
--(Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 12.

“Apocalypsis” is a Greek work which means to uncover or unveil something hidden. It is a highly symbolic book which uses the language of Jewish apocalypticism to express its message. We know the meaning of some of the symbols and can guess at others, but the meaning of some of the symbolism has been lost over the centuries.

It is also a book of “apocalyptic” prophecy. As prophecy, the future is described in broad strokes, taking symbolic language from the prophecies of Ezekiel, Daniel, and Zechariah. As an “apocalyptic” book it focuses on the end times, when God will break into human history and change is forever. It talks of judgment as well as of preparation of God’s people for the suffering and persecution they will face.

## WHY? Interpretations of Revelation

Oldest known interpretation (second to third century): Montanists announced the revelation that the heavenly Jerusalem would descend near a certain village. The movement began in Phrygia, just east of the seven cities of the apocalypse. This is called a literalist interpretation.

The classical theories of interpretation of Revelation include:

- **Idealism:** This view interprets Revelation as a purely symbolic story of the ongoing struggle between good and evil. It is not interpreted as prophecy, but simply as a picture of the battle between good and evil. The story ends with the final triumph of God or Christianity over evil or paganism.
- **Preterism:** This view interprets Revelation as a message of hope for those persecuted by the Romans in the late first century. It does not see the book as prophecy and focuses on the situation of the probable audience for clues to the meaning of the book.
- **Historicism:** This view interprets Revelation as a symbolic description of Church history from the first century to Christ’s second coming and the Last Judgment. It divides the book and Church history into time periods. The explanation of the various symbols in terms of historical events is extremely varied. Historicists tend to be *postmillennialists*, or amillennialists. We will discuss these two terms in a few minutes.

- **Futurism:** This view interprets Revelation as dealing with future events, i.e., as a book of prophecy. This is a popular view in the 20th and 21st centuries and there are several versions of this view. Futurists tend to hold that Revelation describes the "Tribulation" which will be followed immediately by Jesus' second coming and the last judgment. They tend to be:
  1. *premillennialists* and hold to pretribulationism (Christians are raptured before the tribulation)
  2. *mid-tribulationism* (Christians raptured in the middle of the tribulation)
  3. or *post-tribulationism* (Christians raptured after the tribulation)

There are many versions and combinations of views. Some of these versions include:

-- Adapted from *ENT*, 380-81

### **Premillennial view**

This view dates back to the Early Church fathers, Papias, Irenaeus, Justin Martyr, and Hippolytus. It holds that the book relates to the life of the Church.

The various persecutions are to be experienced by the believers up to the time of the end, when they will be delivered from the power of antichrist by the return of Christ. There will be a resurrection of believers at the time of Christ's coming, followed by a millennium, and then a final judgment of unbelievers at the 'great white throne.' After that, a new heaven and new earth are instituted, and the eternal day dawns.

-- Ibid., ch. 19 and Depicted in Rev. 20:11-15.

### **Amillennial view**

This view dates back to the early days of the Church and was defended by Origen and Augustine, and was also held by Luther and Calvin. It is probably the majority view throughout Church history.

It rejects the idea of a literal thousand-year reign of Christ after his return at the end of the age. It sees the millennium as being fulfilled in a spiritual fashion in the ministry of the church during this present age. The Book of Revelation is understood to be a description of the life of the persecuted church that will end with Christ's second coming, at which time there will be a general resurrection of everyone, the saved and lost alike. The last judgment takes place and a new heaven and a new earth are inaugurated as the home of the believers. The lost are cast into the lake of fire.

### **Postmillennial view**

This view dates back to the 18th century and postulated that through the preaching of the gospel the world will gradually be won to Christ. In this way the idea of the millennium is fulfilled. The age of the church is the millennium, where righteousness and justice reign and good prevails throughout the earth. After the world has thus been made worthy of Christ, he returns in glory to the world he has saved . . .

It understands the events in Revelation to refer to John's time, and not future prophecies.

### **Dispensational Premillennial view**

This view is of relatively recent origin. It believes:

The first three chapters of Revelation deal with the church (or church age), after which the saints are raptured (removed) from the earth . . . The middle section of the books (ch. 4-19) deals with Israel on earth during a seven-year period of great tribulation that does not affect the church because it is in heaven with Christ. At the battle of Armageddon in chapter 19, Christ brings with him the raptured Christians and establishes a Jewish millennium in fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies. The Christian saints rule with Christ during this thousand-year period. At the end of this time, Satan is released from his confinement for a final rebellion and at the great white throne, he, and his angels, and all the lost are cast into the lake of fire. A new heaven and a new earth are created and we enter into our eternal state.

This theory comes in three versions:

- Pre-Tribulation Rapture (as described before)
- Mid-Tribulation Rapture (Church raptured in the middle of the seven years of Tribulation)
- Post-Tribulation Rapture (Church raptured after the seven years of Tribulation)

## √ The nature of Apocalyptic literature

### Modern historical critical approach

In the 19th century Revelation came to be seen, not as a prophecy of the modern reader's future, but as a literary response to the Roman persecution of Christians near the end of the first century. Therefore, primarily a preterist view.

### The sociological approaches

These grew out of the historical critical approach and suggest ways of looking at the book. These developed in the late 20th century. These approaches are a quest for the *meaning* of the book. These different sociological models provide different viewpoints or ways to look at the scripture. They are not taken as definitive or absolute within themselves.

**Elements of social crisis.** The conflict with the Jews, the mutual "hatred" or fear of the Jews and Christians toward the ruling Gentiles, and conflict over wealth are elements of social crisis which were the occasion for the writing of the book. So the meaning of the book from this perspective is that the multiplicity of conflict which existed in the lives of these Christians needed a literary outlet which would sort through what was happening in their lives and brings comfort and meaning to the situation.

**Experience of trauma.** The destruction of Jerusalem and the Christians becoming the scapegoats in Rome for Nero's burning of Rome all led to a feeling of "relative" deprivation. In other words, Christians were being deprived of their status, property, and lives in contrast to fellow non-Christian Jews and Gentiles. These conditions could also occasion the need for this book. So the purpose of the book from this perspective would be to provide a rationale for their situation and a future resolution which would bring justice.

**A call for social radicalism.** Because of the social crises and trauma, the danger of accommodation to avoid persecution, and to adapt to the demands of business associations and social relationships, became very real. So the purpose of Revelation is to call the Church to radical Christianity. There is no middle ground. It is all or nothing.

- John adapted oral and literary anti-Roman tradition: his use of Babylon as a symbol of Rome into a fierce image of the opposition between the servants of God and the servants of Rome.
- Chapters 3 and 13 advocate social, political, and economic withdrawal from the life of the cities. The mark on the forehead and the arm symbolize the opposite of the Jewish practice of wearing phylacteries.
- The extreme lifestyles of martyrdom and virginity are valued (14:1-5).

## **Jewish Apocalyptic symbolism**

The imagery drawn from the Jewish apocalyptic literature allows the feelings of fear and resentment in the people to be verbalized. So the purpose of the book from this perspective is to purge the emotions of the audience, in the sense that their feelings of fear and pity are intensified and given objective expression without fear of censorship by the Roman government.

1. Similarities between Revelation and Jewish apocalypticism
  - Use of images: Prophecies are clothed in the language of symbol.
  - The expansion of evil toward the end. The end is a cosmic catastrophe and a time of world judgment.
  - The division of time into periods.
2. Differences with Jewish apocalypticism
  - No attempt at pseudonymity. The author uses his own name and not the name of a famous person; The Assumption of Moses is the name of a Jewish apocalypse written in the first century AD and not by a person named "Moses."
  - Not as intense a pessimism in Revelation as we find in, for instance, The Assumption of Moses, where the enemies are totally annihilated and the victors gloat over the destruction of their enemies. Revelation has some of that, but it is quite muted compared to contemporary literature.
  - The prophesied event is not from the vantage point of the seer (John), but from the viewpoint of the exalted Christ.

The sociological approaches would see the purpose of Revelation as a resolution of the tension aroused by a perceived social crisis. The primary focus of this resolution is hope.

Committed, born-again Christians have held all of these views. The Church of the Nazarene holds no particular view on the interpretation of Revelation, except that:

- It is the inspired Word of God.
- It encourages us to remain totally committed to God through persecution, because Jesus is coming back soon and God has already won the war against evil.

-- *Bibliography for Sociological Approach:*

- Perkins, Reading the New Testament;
- Adela Yarbro Collins, Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the

- Apocalypse (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1984);
- Bruce Metzger, *Breaking the Code* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999).

You may want to read Article XV from the Manual.

## Theology of Revelation

### God

- Exists
- Created the universe
- Guides the course of history
- Has overcome evil
- Will bring a triumphal end in "his own good time."

### Son of God

- Jesus is to return as "King of kings" and "Lord of lords."
- Jesus is the Divine Being with the same divine qualities as God, the Father.
- Jesus is the "Lamb" who was slain and is the Savior of the World.

### People of God

- Individual churches have their strengths and weaknesses.
- As a whole they are victorious over the beast, his image, and his followers.
- They are referred to as: servants of God, a kingdom, priests, saints, the blameless, the called and chosen, the bride of the Lamb, the redeemed.
- Their job is to keep believing in the testimony of Jesus and the Word of God. They do this by being alert, keeping God's commands, being pure, and doing the work God has asked them to do.

### Eschatology

- Personal eschatology (what happens at the end of our lives)
- Certainty of life after death
- Comfort of the believer in the presence of God and Christ
- Resurrection and reward of the saints
- Cosmic eschatology (what happens at the end of the world)
- Second coming of Christ
- Assignment of all to eternal reward or punishment
- Creation of a new heaven and a new earth

The symbolic language or code used in Revelation should caution us *not to be dogmatic* when it comes to the interpretation of Revelation. It is important to realize the primary message of Revelation is HOPE. There are two things we know for sure: *Jesus is coming again and God triumphs over evil.*

### **Discussion: Revelation**

- *What do you think is the primary message of Revelation? Why?*
- *What is the best way to teach or preach on the message(s) of Revelation?*
- *How do you respond to people in the church who are caught up in reading popular fiction literature on end times and believe it to be true?*
- *Do you have any questions about anything pertaining to this module on the New Testament?*