

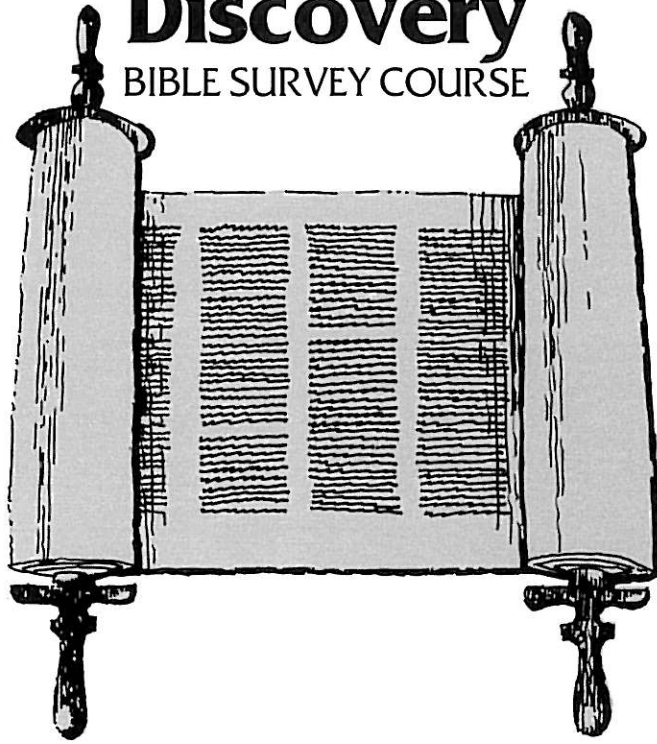
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Discovery

BIBLE SURVEY COURSE



Book 4

Discover the People of Faith

Maynard Shelly

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Open the Bible, and you find words. Taking meaning from these words and the sentences that they form, we've come to a notion of what the Bible has to tell us. An understanding of Scripture based on a reading of its words has served us well. Yet we are sometimes puzzled. Some words conceal when we want them to reveal.

We need not read far into the Bible before we sense that behind its words are people—men and women with, we suppose, feelings and fears much like ours. Yet they lived two to three thousand years ago. After such a long time, do we really share their view of the world? Can we brush aside the mists of the centuries that have passed and reach out to the people behind the words?

Can we flesh out the words of the Bible with the women and men who encountered the God of Scripture? To meet those people in their world brings the Bible right into experiences within our own lives.

So much to learn about the Bible people

Discoveries about the people of the Bible have exploded in recent years and decades. The fruits of these explorations have filtered down to us ever so slowly and in piecemeal form. Snatches of these studies have been cloaked in controversy and have been confounded by arguments about meaning and value. Too often, well-meaning leaders of the church have decided that people should be protected from knowledge which might be unsettling. Yet, for the most part, such information enlightens and enriches.

To the four books in this *Discovery* series, we have tried to bring the most important results of the revival of Bible research in our day. We want to share those findings that over the years are commonly agreed to be reliable without entering into all the technical details. Much of this material is still under study and future research may change or improve the insights about the people of the Bible and the ways in which the Bible came to be. Only as we enter into that ongoing journey, can we be part of that continuing search for the people of the Bible and their understanding of the God who met them on their pilgrimage.

What *Discovery* is not

This series of books is not a Bible study nor a study of the books of the Bible. Neither is it a commentary on the Bible to interpret its meaning and teaching. Here, we intend only to give you the people of the Bible and a piece of the world in which they lived. Having met them, you can enter into your own study of the Bible as you begin with the meaning that these writings first had for these Bible people.

We have not handled matters of doctrine or theology, not because we feel these have little value, but because we regard them as so important that all who come to discuss them should first know the witness of the Bible itself. As we broaden the base of our Bible knowledge, we are better able to understand what the Bible teaches and how to apply those doctrines to our day.

Yahweh in the Bible text

We have made one change in the text used for quotations from the Bible (RSV). From earliest times, the Israelite name for God was Yahweh. Yet, when the words of Scripture were fixed on paper, a time had come in the life of Israel when the name of God was no longer spoken,

Introduction

the syllables being regarded as too holy to be sounded on human lips. It was not even written, being recorded only in the form of a code which is translated and written in our traditional versions as LORD.

Knowing now the earlier form of the name of God in the life of Israel, we have chosen to use that title to recall the feeling for the power of the holy name. Yet we also want to remember the link between Yahweh and LORD, for when we come to the people of the New Testament, and we find them speaking of Jesus as Lord, we feel something more of their witness and conviction.

Themes that carry meaning

As you walk with the people of the Book; you will discover words and ideas important to them. Here are several that you will find.

Covenant. Abraham, Moses, David, and their people had a conviction of a special relationship with God, a feeling of being chosen. The covenant was their link to God. Much of their journey included a search for the meaning of this special bond. Whom did it include? What did it mean to be included? Was anyone left out? Through the covenant, they came to learn about God. And as they experienced God in their own lives, they began to see covenant in a new light.

Kingdom. King and kingdom sparked debate: should the people of God have a king or not? The question wasn't answered even after the people took a king and the king took them. Wasn't God their king? Was the kingdom the same as the covenant? And when the kingdom of God's people fell before a pagan empire, could they hope for a kingdom restored? When we meet the people of the New Testament, we find them still working with the meaning of kingdom.

Grace and salvation. The people of the New Testament moved on to talk about grace and salvation, yet they had not left covenant and kingdom behind. They only added new dimension to the former questions of belonging and response. They had found new ways of knowing God and understanding the plan of God.

Jerusalem. The convictions of the Bible people had important links with history, the most outstanding of which were related to Jerusalem. The two disasters that befell the holy city—the first fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. and the second in A.D. 70—bracket a most important era. Each fall of Jerusalem left its stamp on the soul of the people. The first gets much mention in their writings. The second receives no direct reporting at all, but its shadow hovers over much of the New Testament. We have entered into their lives when we wrestle with them about these watershed events which shaped so much of what they came to affirm about God and the way in which they responded to their God.

Revelation and history

In the Bible, we find a history, albeit, a special kind of history. In one sense, it is God's history, but it is also our history. That's what makes the Bible so special. It belongs both to God and to us. The Bible is the history of God's revelation—a revelation through history.

God entered into history, making it the arena of revelation: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father" (John 1:14); " 'his name shall be called Emmanuel'(which means, God with us)" (Matt. 1:23).

The faith that Jesus Christ is Lord of Scripture has special application not just when we come to study the teachings of the Bible. That faith also has a special meaning for revelation. The Christ-event confirms that history is God's arena and God's way of revealing. Through Jesus, God entered into the life of our world as Jesus "himself likewise partook of the same nature" (Heb. 2:14) and became a part of our life.

In the incarnation of Jesus, God shared our flesh and our history. If within the humanity of Jesus lies a profound understanding of God's revelation, the divine use of history has an equally important application for the way we study the Bible.

Since the Bible is history, we can come to it using the methods that we have learned for understanding our world. This makes this book different from many other surveys of the Bible which have seen history as less important.

The historical method opens up the Bible. It brings meaning to the words of the Bible by introducing us first of all to the people behind the words and the world in which they lived. This approach to the Bible is both simple and profound. It is simple because each living person is a historian and has a sense of his or her own history. Such a study is also profound because through it, revelation overtakes us. Within the sum of words, people, and events, we find God at work. Yesterday's people of faith called this revelation as do all believers today.

Discovery with inspiration and authority

The journey we undertake here promises many rewards. We will make new friends from an ancient time because we will have traveled with them. Our lives will be broadened by sympathy for their witness and their loyalty and by our own sharing in the rigors of their test of faith.

The inspiration and authority of Scripture will have new meaning for us for we will find it more than a proposition about the meaning of words, but something made real by the living witness of people who received a revelation from God and carried it faithfully from generation to generation. The power of this witness will be multiplied many times over as we discover how wonderfully God has worked.

How to Use This Series

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This study will require dedication and discipline from individuals and groups. The emphasis here is on learning. The mastery of facts requires careful reading and study, but the effort invested is small compared to the rewards.

As aids for learning, three features are included with each chapter: Journal, Inventory, and Discovery.

JOURNAL—For individual study at home

The journey begins with the reading of the portion of Scripture assigned in Journal. After that, follow the directions for making entries into a notebook. Putting your observations into words and writing them down is the first step in getting a firm grip on facts. What you write will stay with you many times longer than what you have only read and left unwritten. A notebook will help you keep your work together in one place for quick reference and encourage you to stick to the job.

In your readings, we want you to sample each type of literature and gain experience in making your own observations of the words read. At the same time, you will begin to make connections between the Bible people and the world in which they lived. Before long you will have a diary (or journal) of your journey into the world of the people of the Bible.

After your work with your Journal, you will be ready to read the chapter. You will find places where your observations will be confirmed. You may also come upon material that may differ from what you have written. Note these in your Journal. You may wish to report these items to your Discovery group meeting for testing and perhaps for further research and study.

INVENTORY—Measuring your factual knowledge

With each chapter, we have included Inventory, a review of some of the important items given in the chapter. This self-test will help you hold onto facts both old and new, and to store them in a ready place in your mind.

Make Inventory a part of your Journal. The answers to these questions are within the text of the chapter itself. If you find you have overlooked a particular item, a quick review of the chapter should turn up the needed data.

DISCOVERY—Sharing and learning from others

As writing helps us to learn, telling someone else about what we have found makes that discovery a nearly permanent part of our lives. Those who have studied the chapter and recorded their findings will profit from meeting together with others who have done the same. The purpose of the meeting will not be to hear a lecture on the material covered but to review what each person has learned in his or her individual study of the chapter.

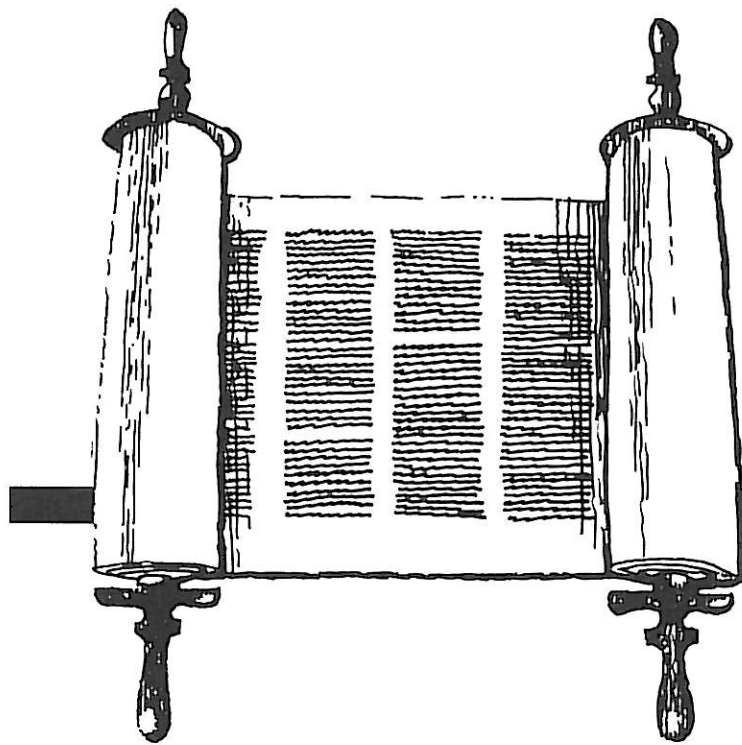
The leader of this session can be a fellow learner and does not need to be one who has mastered all the material. In this class of learners, the members will examine each other on what they have studied and learn from each other. Some groups may want to rotate leadership of the Discovery meetings among some or all of the members of the group.

Start each meeting by collecting each person's leading insight gained from the study of the chapter. Take time to discuss this list, which you may wish to post on a chalkboard or a large sheet of paper.

Then, list each person's chief unanswered question arising out of the study of the chapter. Help each other find answers to these questions. If no answers seem available, check the resource readings or other materials in your church or public library.

Then, discuss the questions and issues suggested in Discovery. Do not feel that you need to cover one chapter in each meeting. You may find it more profitable to spend two sessions on a particular chapter rather than to rush through the book.

Remember that the aim of this study is to learn about the Bible people and the world in which they lived. You will be tempted sometimes to discuss matters of interpretation and application of various biblical teachings. These are important and deserve treatment. But we are better able to deal with these issues once we have broader background in the experiences of the people who first received the revelations recorded in Scripture. Thus, there is value in keeping to the purpose of this particular series of studies.



PART X

The Faith of Paul

1 Thessalonians. 1 Corinthians. 2 Corinthians. Philippians. Philemon. Galatians. Colossians. Ephesians.

CHAPTER 26

Letters of Paul and His Disciples

2

Gist

With great zeal, Paul, an apostle commissioned by revelation from Jesus, carried the gospel of the crucified and resurrected Christ to the Gentiles in many of the major cities of the Roman Empire in the middle of the first century A.D. His letters to these new Christians in some of these new congregations, such as those in Corinth and Galatia, reflect the faith of this great missionary.

Paul rises like a giant over the New Testament. As we have seen, more than half of the pages of the Acts of the Apostles are given over to Paul's mission. The letters which he and his disciples wrote make up one-fourth of the New Testament.

Though he never met Jesus, Paul became the foremost of all the apostles in putting into words and deeds the faith of the crucified and risen Christ. He had not been one of the chosen disciples of Jesus, yet he carried the gospel proclaimed by Jesus in the villages of rural Palestine to the great cities of the Roman Empire.

Apart from Jesus, no one did so much to shape the Christian movement as did Paul. Though at first an enemy of the church and intent on stamping out this new belief, he became the one who made it a faith available to both Jew and non-Jew alike.

Three worlds in one person

Paul brought three worlds together in one person. He was a Christian, a Jew, and a Hellenist (a Greek-speaking Jew in touch with the culture of the world outside of Palestine).

He was born in Tarsus, an ancient city in Asia Minor in what is now Turkey, 350 miles from Jerusalem. Once a part of the old Hittite Empire, Tarsus was now a regional capital of the Roman Empire and a center of learning equal to Athens.

Paul's family was part of that large group of Jews called the Diaspora that had lived outside of Judea for generations. He was schooled in the Greek language and culture and well acquainted with the religions and philosophies of the Greek and Roman worlds. That he preferred to use *Paul*, the Greek form of his name, rather than the Hebrew *Saul* (Acts 9:4, 17; 13:9), shows his pride in the Greek side of his life.

But Paul was deeply saturated in his Jewish heritage. He spoke forcefully and directly about it in his letters (Phil. 3:5, 6; 2 Cor. 11:22; Rom. 9:3-5). He thought of himself as a good Jew, one who had studied the Torah in Jerusalem "at the feet of Gamaliel" (Acts 22:3), a well-known rabbi of the period.

Though well educated, Paul was also trained to work with his hands. (The rabbis felt that learning was best when combined with a worldly trade.) Paul was a leather worker skilled in making tents and other leather products (1 Cor. 4:12; Acts 18:2, 3).

Vision of Jesus for a zealot

Paul comes to the attention of the readers of Acts first as a bystander at the execution of Stephen (7:58). Shortly after that, he appears as a zealot intent on destroying the young Christian community in Damascus (Acts 9:1, 2; Phil. 3:6; Gal. 1:13, 14).

Why did Paul persecute the new Christians? It may be that he was already a missionary for Judaism. The Greek-speaking Jews, of whom Paul was one, were active in winning non-Jews into the covenant of Israel. With the birth of the church, the Jewish Christians began to win converts from the "God-fearers"—Gentiles coming to the synagogues to learn more about the religion of Israel (Acts 10:2, 22, 35; 13:16, 26). Paul may have been angered that the followers of Jesus were claiming for their cause the people whom he had hoped to lead into the family of Judaism.

An apostle commissioned by revelation

In his dramatic conversion, Paul changed from being a missionary for Judaism to being an evangelist for Christ (Acts 9:1-22; 22:4-16; 26:9-18). The other apostles had a commission as leaders of the church because they had walked with Jesus. This had not been Paul's experience. His conversion and his vision of Jesus on the Damascus road became Paul's authority for his mission to the Gentiles (Gal. 1:11-17).

Commissioned by Jesus in a special revelation (1 Cor. 9:1), Paul founded a large Christian community outside of Palestine. In his preaching, he appealed to this vision and encouraged his followers to imitate him in their conduct (1 Thess. 1:6; Phil. 3:17; 1 Cor. 4:15; 11:1).

But this teaching was not one of self-exaltation. To Paul, the essence of the gospel was the lowliness of the cross of Jesus Christ. God's power, he said (1 Cor. 1:10—4:21), lies in weakness, a strength to which he appealed over and over again. It is a power that finds its best expression in love (Philem. 8, 9).

House churches in the empire's great cities

Paul's conversion took place two or three years after the crucifixion of Jesus which was about A.D. 30. Thus, Paul's mission for the Gentiles had its beginning in about A.D. 32 or 33.

After his call, Paul spent three years in Arabia, the Gentile district east of the Jordan River, and in Damascus (Gal. 1:17, 18). He then visited with Peter in Jerusalem, always referring to Peter by his Aramaic name *Cephas*, showing that when Paul talked with the leading apostle, he spoke the common language of the Jews (Gal. 2:11). From Jerusalem, he went to Cilicia, his home province of which Tarsus was the capital. Here he began his service as a Christian teacher and evangelist (Gal. 1:21-23).

Under the leadership of Paul, the children of God entered a world strikingly different from the community in which Jesus had lived and taught. Instead of the rural villages of Galilee, they roamed the great

Journal

Read the following passages and note what kind of person the passage shows Paul to be.

1 Corinthians 12:1—14:25

2 Corinthians 10:1—13:14

2 Corinthians 11:1—2:13
and 7:15-16

Philippians 3:2—4:9

Philemon

Galatians 3

Seed

And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit; so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia (1 Thess. 1:6, 7).

For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we wake or sleep we might live with him (1 Thess. 5:9).

To the present hour we hunger and thirst, we are ill-clad and buffeted and homeless, and we labor, working with our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we try to conciliate; we have become, and are now, as the refuse of the world, the offscouring of all things (1 Cor. 4:11-13).

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 15:56, 57).

Have this mind among yourselves, which you have in Christ Jesus, who though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men (Phil. 2:5-7).

For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love be servants of one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Gal. 5:13, 14).

cities of the eastern Roman Empire. The language of their public lives was Greek rather than Aramaic. Their daily lives centered on trade and commerce rather than farming and grazing.

The believers in Paul's congregations met in "house churches" (1 Cor. 16:19; Philem. 2; Rom. 16:5). While many who were poor became members of these congregations, some people with property must have been prominent in these fellowships for only they would have had houses large enough to provide meeting space for a growing group (1 Cor. 1:26).

Finding sponsors in Antioch's Christians

Sometime during the fourteen years Paul was in Cilicia, Barnabas, a Christian leader in Antioch, called him to come to that city to help in the work of the church. Antioch was the capital of the Roman province of Syria, east of Cilicia. As a city of culture and commerce it was outranked only by Alexandria. Here the religions of Babylon and the cultures of Asia met the thoughts and lifestyle of Greek and Roman culture, making it a most exciting city.

The Antioch Christians became Paul's sponsors in a special way. From this home congregation, he went out as a missionary to other parts of the empire. Acts 13:3—14:26 tells about a missionary journey that took Barnabas and Paul to Cyprus and the southern part of Asia Minor, though no mention about this trip appears in Paul's letters.

Acts outlines Paul's mission work in the form of three missionary journeys. His letters give reason to believe that he made other trips and was involved in other adventures including a term in prison in Ephesus. In any event, his activities centered in Asia Minor and in the Greek provinces of Macedonia and Achaia.

Major crossroads at the Jerusalem Conference

Somewhere early in Paul's missionary career there was a major clash between the Palestinian (Aramaic-speaking) Jewish Christians of which the original disciples of Jesus were a part, and the Hellenistic (Greek-speaking) Jewish Christians from among whom Paul gradually rose to become a leading spokesman. As noted in chapter 25, we have two different accounts of this meeting: Paul's report (Gal. 2:1-10) and Acts 15:1-29 which was written many years later when the heat of battle had died away.

Both accounts agree that the matter had to do with Gentiles (non-Jews) joining the Christian fellowships. Did they need to become Jews first before they could become Christians? Did the Greeks and Asians in Antioch and Cyprus and Galatia need to enter the covenant of Israel through circumcision before they could be considered either eligible for membership in the house churches of Ephesus and Corinth or even be considered full-fledged members? This, after all, was the way that the disciples and even Paul had become Christians.

Uneasy compromise to open the door

Also at stake was the authority of Paul, whose influence was beginning to overshadow that of the original disciples. Paul had not walked with Jesus in Galilee and Judea—was he to be granted the rank of apostle? In his interpretation of the compromise reached at Jerusalem, Paul indicates that Peter was recognized as an apostle to

the circumcised and, he, Paul to the uncircumcised (Gal. 2:7-9).

It was an uneasy compromise that didn't work smoothly, but it did avoid a rift in the church. As an effort to repair the unity of the church, an agreement was reached that the Gentile churches would gather an offering for the poor Christians of Jerusalem, which Paul says he was "eager to do" (Gal. 2:10). He worked earnestly to raise just such an offering (2 Cor. 8—9).

The Jerusalem Conference did open the door of the church to non-Jews. It was a cautious opening, but the church prospered. Paul was largely responsible for leading the church into the world outside Palestine.

Fourteen letters in Paul's name

The letters of Paul contain not only the record of the expansion of the church but show how Paul fashioned the lines of faith for coming generations. In this chapter and the next, we will follow the trail of his ministry through nine of the fourteen letters associated with Paul's name, dealing with the other five in later units.

Because Paul's letters were written near the time when the events commented on were happening, they are a more immediate account of the history of the early church than is the Acts of the Apostles which was written many years later.

First Thessalonians—ready for hard times

Among Paul's letters, the earliest one went to Thessalonica (modern Salonika), one of the first cities in Europe to be visited by Paul. He and his companions left Thessalonica after being the cause of a riot (Acts 17:5-10) and went on to Athens. From there they sent Timothy back to ask about the welfare of the Christians they had left behind (1 Thess. 3:1, 6). When Paul got to Corinth, Timothy caught up with him bringing the good news that the young church was getting along well.

Paul then wrote his first letter to the Thessalonians expressing his relief that they had weathered the storm of persecution. But the real concern of the letter was to prepare them for the soon expected return of Jesus as judge and redeemer (4:13—5:11). He wanted them to be ready for difficult times. He closed his letter with an appeal to faith in "salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ" through whose death the believers are assured of life in both this world and the next (5:9, 10).

The Thessalonian Christians had come from a Greek and non-Jewish background (1 Thess. 1:9; Acts 17:4). They were persecuted by their fellow citizens for their change in lifestyle (1 Thess. 2:14). Paul speaks about receiving "great opposition" while in Thessalonica (2:2). Some of the resistance came from Jews who resented Paul's preaching of Jesus as Messiah and the fact that he won the "devout Greeks and . . . leading women" (Acts 17:4) whom the Jews must have considered potential proselytes for their synagogue.

Seven letters to Corinth

But it was the congregation in Corinth that caused Paul to write often and ever more intensely. We learn perhaps more about this congregation and city than about any of the other places in which Paul worked.

After a stop in Athens, Paul went to Corinth. He arrived in about A.D. 49 or 50 and stayed for about a year and a half. Here Paul formed a

Dates in Paul's Life

- A.D.
- ? Birth unknown; probably around A.D. 0
- 30 Crucifixion of Jesus, approximate date
- 32 Conversion and call of Paul, somewhere between 32-36
- 48 (or 49) Jerusalem Conference
- 49-51 Corinth; winter of 49/50 to summer of 51
- 52-55 Ephesus; about thirty months (Acts 19:1, 10, 22)
- 55/56 Last stay in Macedonia and Greece; winter season
- 56 Journey to Jerusalem and arrest
- 58 Taken as a prisoner to Rome
- 58-60 Imprisonment in Rome (Acts 28:30)
- 60 Execution by Nero; probable date

Letters to Corinth

Letter 1 (lost)

1. Paul leaves Corinth for Ephesus (1 Cor. 16:8) and writes back to Corinth (1 Cor. 5:9).

2. Paul receives a report from Chloe's people about strife in Corinth (1 Cor. 1:11).

3. He also receives a letter from Corinth asking a number of questions (1 Cor. 7:1).

Letter 2 (1 Corinthians)

4. Paul answers with First Corinthians and gives instructions about the collection for Jerusalem (1 Cor. 16:1-4).

5. Paul sends Titus to urge the collection be taken (2 Cor. 8:5, 6, 10; 9:2; 12:18).

6. Paul learns that Jewish Christian missionaries have challenged his authority in Corinth (2 Cor. 3:1; 11:4, 5, 13, 22; 12:11).

Letter 3 (2 Cor. 2:14—6:13; 7:2-4)

7. Paul writes a third letter; the church is loyal, but relations are confused.

8. Paul makes a "painful visit" (2 Cor. 2:1; 12:14; 12:21; 13:1) and is humiliated in debate (2:5; 7:12).

Letter 4 (2 Cor. 10-13)

9. Paul returns to Ephesus and writes a "tearful letter" defending himself (2 Cor. 2:3, 4; 7:8). It may have been delivered by Titus (2 Cor. 2:12, 13; 7:5-7).

10. Paul is imprisoned in Ephesus (2 Cor. 1:8-11) and during this time writes three letters to Philippi and a letter to Philemon.

11. Paul, released from prison, goes to Troas, and then to Macedonia. There he meets Titus who reports that things are now better in Corinth (2 Cor. 2:12, 13; 7:5-16).

6

Letter 5 (2 Cor. 1:1—2:13; 7:5-16)

12. Paul writes a letter of reconciliation and explains why he hasn't yet come to Corinth.

Letter 6 (2 Cor. 8)

13. Paul writes from Macedonia a letter about the collection which he sends with Titus.

Letter 7 (2 Cor. 9)

14. Leaving Macedonia, Paul writes again about the collection to all the Christians of Achaia (Greece).

15. Paul visits Corinth (Acts 20:2, 3).

congregation mainly of Gentile Christians. Their place of meeting may have been in the home of a man named Stephanas (1 Cor. 1:16; 16:15).

After Corinth, Paul went on to Ephesus which seemed to become the apostle's headquarters. It is from Ephesus that Paul wrote the first of a series of perhaps as many as seven letters to the troubled and troubling congregation at Corinth. (See chart: "Letters to Corinth.")

First letter to Corinth lost

Corinth, a city destroyed and then rebuilt by the Romans, had been the capital of Greece for more than seventy-five years when Paul made his first visit there. Located on an isthmus, it was a natural trading center with a western harbor called Lecheion and a seaport on its eastern side called Cenchreae (Acts 18:18).

The city was a crossroads community inhabited by Roman officials, merchants, traders, soldiers, and sailors. It came to be known as a city of sin, though it was also a religious center with temples to both Egyptian and Greek gods and goddesses and sanctuaries for the ever popular mystery religions.

Paul quickly discovered that the members of his Gentile congregation were prone to slip back into their pre-Christian life and to yield to the pressures of the popular ways of Corinth. His first Corinthian letter (now lost) carried a warning "not to associate with immoral men" (1 Cor. 5:9).

Letter 2—First Corinthians

Following this, Paul in Ephesus received two reports from Corinth. One came from "Chloe's people" (1 Cor. 1:11) and the other was in a letter from the congregation which addressed some questions to him (7:1).

The first part of Paul's letter responded to the information that he received from Chloe's people (1:10—6:20) calling four problems to his attention: factions in the church (1:10—4:21); incest and sexual sins (5:1-13); Christians going to pagan courts to settle their disputes (6:1-11); and a claim that spirituality could cover a multitude of sins (6:12-20).

The questions raised by the congregation in their letter take up the second part of the letter (7:1—15:58). These were really the practical problems faced by new Christians living in a pagan society: marriage and celibacy (7:1-40); eating meat sacrificed to other gods (8:1—11:1); the practice of Christian worship (11:2-34); the true nature of spiritual gifts (12:1—14:40); and the future resurrection of the dead (15:1-58).

Love, not knowledge, comes first

The root of almost all the problems at Corinth lay in the brand of religious enthusiasm which the members of the congregation had brought with them from their former Hellenistic religions to the practice of their new faith. They believed that baptism was a magical rite similar to those of the mystery religions: the person baptized received the power of the person who performed the ceremony (1:12-17).

The enthusiasts also thought they had been raised to such a high spiritual level that they could ignore the impulses of the body. Their sexual conduct, they felt, was no longer a matter of concern. They were free to do as they liked, even to visit Corinth's well-known houses of prostitution (6:12-20).

But Corinth had another form of spiritualism—one that tended toward a stern lifestyle and complete sexual abstinence. Some of the new Christians were denying sexual relations to their spouses which was becoming a source of stress in some families. Paul had to appeal for moderation (7:4, 5).

He also had to apply the same counsel to the enthusiasts in the matter of eating meat that had been first sacrificed to pagan gods before being sold in the public market. Paul allowed that an idol (in whose power neither he nor the Corinthian Christians believed) could not change the nature of any meat (8:8). But since the practice was offensive to persons of Jewish background and the church had agreed to abstain from such a diet (Acts 15:28), the concerns of others had to be considered. Love and not knowledge came first (1 Cor. 8:1-3).

The claims of the spiritualists and enthusiasts to special knowledge and freedom also caused trouble in the observance of the Lord's Supper where the rich were not considerate of the feelings of the poor (11:21). But it was most disruptive in Christian worship in the exercise of the gift of speaking in tongues, a gift that Paul did not deny, though he placed it at the bottom of the list of talents (12:28-31).

Yet another issue raised by the Corinthian spiritualists was over the resurrection. They felt that through their baptism they had already begun to take part in the resurrection life. The Greeks believed in the immortality of the soul but did not hold to the resurrection of the body for which Paul argues in chapter 15.

Power that flows from the "weakness" of God

Paul applied his understanding of the Christ-event to the practical issues of everyday living. He contended for the unity of the church and the power of the crucified Christ.

Most of the problems in Corinth flowed from those who felt they were superior because of their wisdom and their spiritual character. But Paul saw this as an example of the wisdom of the world which is folly to God. That which the world regards as foolish and weak—a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles—is really the power and wisdom of God: "Christ crucified" (1:23). Christian wisdom is held by those who know the meaning of the crucifixion—the "weakness" of God which is really the power of God to save (1:26-31).

Paul emphasized the importance of love, relating it to a number of the problems that he treated. Love is superior to knowledge, to freedom, and to spirituality: this is the theme throughout, and expressed most intensely in the tribute to love stated so eloquently in chapter 13.

Letter 3 to Corinth—sharp attack on peddlers

Things took a turn for the worse in Corinth after Paul had sent the letter we now know as First Corinthians. Another group of missionaries visited Corinth, contradicting many of the things that Paul had preached. They claimed special authority for the things they said. If the young Christians had not been confused before, they were then.

When word about this crisis came to Paul in Ephesus, he at once wrote a stiff letter to try to correct this situation, a part of which we have in 2 Corinthians 2:14—6:11 and 7:2-4. It is a strong defense of Paul's authority and a sharp attack on Paul's rivals whom he called "peddlers of God's word" (2:17).

The Letters of Paul

Paul's letters, according to some studies, may have been written in the following order:

1. First Thessalonians; probably written from Corinth (2:2; 3:1, 6; Acts 18:1)

2. First letter to Corinth, now lost (1 Cor. 5:9), probably written from Ephesus

3. First Corinthians, from Ephesus (16:8)

4. 2 Corinthians 2:14—6:13 and 7:2-4, from Ephesus

5. 2 Corinthians 10—13, "the tearful letter," probably from Ephesus

6. Philippians 4:10-23, from Ephesus

7. Philippians 1:1—3:1, from Ephesus

8. Philippians 3:2—4:9, from Ephesus

9. Philemon, from Ephesus

10. 2 Corinthians 1:1—2:13 and 7:5-16, from Macedonia (7:5)

11. 2 Corinthians 8, from Macedonia (8:1)

12. 2 Corinthians 9, from Macedonia (9:2, 4)

13. Galatians, sent possibly to north Galatia from Macedonia

14. Romans 1—15, written perhaps from Corinth (15:25, 26)

15. Romans 16, possibly written to Ephesus from Corinth (16:3)

Letter Pattern

Paul's letters followed a regular pattern. Here is how the pattern was applied to First Thessalonians.

Introduction: Salutation: sender, 1:1a; recipient, 1:1b; greeting, 1:1c

Thanksgiving: 1:2-10; 2:13; 3:9, 10 (Only Galatians has no thanksgiving section.)

Message: Body of letter: 2:1—3:8, 11-13

Ethical instruction: 4:1—5:22

Conclusion: Peace wish, 5:23, 24

Greetings (none in 1 Thess., but see 2 Cor. 13:13)

Kiss, 5:26

Apostolic command, 5:27
Benediction, 5:28

In spite of Paul's good intentions in writing this letter of defense, things in Corinth got worse. The church rose up in open rebellion against Paul. He had to make a quick trip from Ephesus, 250 miles across the Aegean Sea, to try to settle the dispute. The face-to-face meeting broke out into a bitter debate and Paul was shamefully treated (2:5; 7:12).

Letter 4—the tearful letter

Back in Ephesus once more, Paul, wanting to correct the bad scene, wrote a painful letter "out of much affliction and anguish of heart and with many tears" (2 Cor. 2:4). This has come to be known as the "tearful letter" and we may have a part of that writing in 2 Corinthians 10:1—13:14.

Here we learn more about Paul's opponents whom he called, with obvious sarcasm, "superlative apostles" (11:5). They claimed that they had been given visions and that they could do miracles. This was proof, they claimed, that Christ spoke through them. Paul appealed to the sacrificial service which he had given to his converts after the example of Jesus Christ who was "crucified in weakness" and who lives by the power of God (13:4).

Writing from prison to Philippi

It was while Paul was in Ephesus that he wrote to the congregation at Philippi, the first city in Europe that he had visited on his missionary journeys (Acts 16:11, 12). Paul formed a congregation here before he moved on to Thessalonica, Athens, and Corinth.

According to Acts, Lydia was one of the first converts in Philippi (Acts 16:13, 14). Other converts in the Gentile congregation were Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:25), Euodia, Syntyche, and Clement (4:2, 3). It is likely that Paul visited Philippi, the chief city of the Greek province of Macedonia, a number of times (Phil. 2:24; Acts 20:1-6). He may have written to the congregation at Philippi several times because the Letter to the Philippians seems to be not one letter, but a collection of several letters or parts of letters. It appears that Paul was in prison at the time of the writing of this and other letters. While we have no direct evidence, either in Paul's letters or in Acts, it is assumed by many that this imprisonment was in Ephesus.

Philemon—slavery and a plea for love

While Paul was in prison in Ephesus, he met Onesimus, a runaway slave, whom he converted to faith in Christ. He then sent Onesimus back to his master, Philemon, who was Paul's close friend. He explained his action in a letter that Onesimus carried with him. While this was a warm personal letter, Paul suggested that it be read to the church that met in Philemon's house in the city of Colossae, a hundred miles east of Ephesus.

Though the letter in no way attacked the institution of slavery directly, it still struck at the roots of that great evil. Paul appealed to Philemon to receive his former slave as a full equal (v. 17). The short letter is a simple and eloquent plea for an expression of Christian love in all human relations.

Letter 5 to Corinth—reconciliation celebrated

Sometime later, Paul left Ephesus and came to Macedonia. He may have been on his way to Corinth. But it was in Macedonia that he met Titus who had delivered Paul's tearful letter to Corinth and was now returning to tell Paul what happened after his note was received. He reported that the Corinthian Christians were now sorry that they had caused Paul so much pain by their rejection of him and wanted to be forgiven.

Paul was eager to put the unpleasantness behind him. He wrote a letter of reconciliation which is what we have in 2 Cor. 1:1—2:13 with a continuation in 7:15, 16.

All these letters and letter fragments were brought together in Second Corinthians when Paul's letters were collected many years after his death and some time after the fall of Jerusalem.

Galatians—faith and freedom take on the law

About this time, while still in Macedonia, Paul wrote his Letter to the Galatians. The specific location of these churches in Asia Minor is uncertain. Galatia was a large province whose borders had been enlarged by the Romans.

These seem to be congregations that Paul visited at some time during his career. As in the case of Corinth and Philippi, some other missionaries followed him to these congregations and contradicted his teachings. These Christian missionaries were "Judaizers," conservative Christians who insisted that the Galatians must be circumcised—that is, they must become Jews—before they could be considered full-fledged Christians.

This was the debate of the Jerusalem Conference all over again, and Paul launched into a full dress defense of his gospel, leaving us with a tightly argued statement of his doctrine.

The heart of Paul's gospel was faith and freedom—freedom from all restrictions of religion, nation, social class, and sexual status (3:28). By faith in Christ, the Christian had been delivered from all the shackles of "the present evil age" (1:4). Paul drew on a variety of proofs to make this point—human experience (4:1-7), the Scriptures (3:1—4:31), and the Jerusalem Conference (2:1-21).

In Galatians, Paul developed the doctrine of "justification by faith" which brings forth the image of a person standing before God's judgment seat and finding approval through faith in Christ and not through obedience to the law (2:15, 16). To Paul, the law meant "works"—represented by doing things commanded by the law, including circumcision. Such obedience could not win God's approval. Approval was only possible through faith in Christ. Therefore, circumcision, according to Paul, was not required of a Christian. In place of the old law, he holds up the "law of Christ" which he defines as "faith working through love" that reaches out to others, expressing itself in freedom and the "fruit of the Spirit" (5:6, 13, 14, 22; 6:2).

An influence multiplied by his disciples

One of Paul's goals was to extend his mission to Rome, the seat of the empire. In preparation for this visit, he wrote the longest of his letters that has come down to us, the Letter to the Romans. (See chapter 27.) But before going to Rome, Paul wanted to visit his congregations in

Paul and Colossians

The view, held by a minority of Bible scholars, that Colossians was written after Paul's death by a disciple of Paul is supported by Norman Perrin and Dennis C. Duling in *The New Testament — An Introduction* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982, pp. 209-212) and is itself an example of how different people examine the same material and come to opposite conclusions. The traditional view on the authorship of Colossians is supported by Kee, *Understanding the New Testament*, pp. 65, 236. So also does George Johnston in the *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Volume I, pp. 658-660.

Colossian Links

Out of the 155 verses in Ephesians, 73 have verbal links with verses in Colossians. Some examples:

Col. 3:12, 13 = Eph. 4:1, 2: "lowliness, meekness, patience, forbearing one another."

Col. 3:16, 17 = Eph. 5:19, 20: "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs . . . everything in the name of . . . Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father."

Col. 4:7, 8 = Eph. 6:21, 22: "Tychius . . . beloved brother and faithful minister . . . in the Lord . . . to encourage your hearts."

Other Letter Links

Ephesians contains over forty verses that echo verses from earlier letters of Paul. Some examples:

Eph. 1:4, 5 = Rom. 8:29

Eph. 1:10 = Gal. 4:4

Eph. 1:11 = Rom. 8:28

Eph. 1:13 = 2 Cor. 1:22

Eph. 3:8 = 1 Cor. 15:9, 10

Eph. 4:11 = 1 Cor. 12:28

Eph. 4:28 = 1 Cor. 4:12

Eph. 4:30 = 2 Cor. 1:22

Eph. 5:2, 25 = Gal. 2:20

Eph. 5:5 = 1 Cor. 6:9, 10

Eph. 5:23 = 1 Cor. 11:3

Paul and Ephesians

When we come to Ephesians, we find a majority of scholars attributing its authorship to someone other than Paul. The traditional view has been well defended by Markus Barth in the first volume of his commentary on Ephesians (*Anchor Bible*, [Doubleday, 1974], Volume 34, pp. 36-50). Both George Johnston (*Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. 2, pp. 108-111) and Nils A. Dahl (*IDB*, Supplement, pp. 268-269) find the same evidence weighted in the other direction.

Greece and in Asia Minor, and then go to Jerusalem. It was in Jerusalem that he was arrested and finally sent to Rome as a Roman prisoner.

But even while under guard, he achieved his goal of being able to preach the gospel in Rome. It is assumed that eventually he was brought to trial and executed, though the New Testament has no record of his death.

Giant that he was in life, Paul only increased in stature after his death. Having been taught by the rabbis, he certainly followed their tradition which was to train disciples. His letters are evidence of a teaching ministry that he carried on in person as well as in his writing.

Colossians—early meeting with a new heresy

These disciples carried on Paul's work in the decades following his death, even writing a number of letters in his name, including the Letters to Timothy, the Letter to Titus, and Second Thessalonians which we will examine in a later chapter. It is also the opinion of some scholars that the Letter to the Ephesians and likely also the Letter to the Colossians were the work of Paul's disciples. While it seems dishonest to us for disciples to use their teacher's name in their writing, this was a common practice in an earlier age and was regarded as honorable.

One reason that some scholars think these letters were not written by Paul himself is that all of them deal with ideas and issues which appeared after Paul's death. Thus, they reflect a later stage in history when the church was being tested by false doctrines of a kind not known during Paul's day. The Letter to the Colossians, for example, deals with a new heresy—Gnosticism.

The church at Colossae was about 100 miles east of Ephesus. Like most of Paul's other congregations, its members were from a Gentile background (1:27; 2:13). We have no record that Paul ever visited Colossae, though he visited other cities in the region.

The writer of the Letter to the Colossians was concerned about a philosophy being taught to the Colossians (2:8-23). This philosophy seemed to call for the "worship of angels" (2:18), a feeling of shame about the body, and a narrow lifestyle with many prohibitions (2:21). We also catch hints that this new doctrine had something to do with "wisdom and knowledge" (2:3) which suggests that this is the first sign of the coming of Gnosticism into the church. This heresy was to trouble the church for a long time.

The Gnostics saw the world as an evil place in which a person was trapped in an evil body and suppressed by evil powers. Salvation was only possible through a gift of special knowledge (called *gnosis* in Greek, hence the name for the group). This revelation would only come through the practice of certain mysterious rites.

To the writer of Colossians, Gnosticism was still a new teaching. He dealt with the Gnostic claim to revelation by saying that the revelations that Christians received through Christ were superior (2:2, 3, 20-23). "Mystery" and "wisdom" are words used a number of times in Colossians.

Ephesians—celebrating a newfound unity

Mystery is also used in Ephesians, which is another work of Paul's disciples written sometime after his death. Studies of the vocabulary and ideas of Ephesians indicates a sharp difference from the writings of Paul.

Ephesians is heavily dependent on Colossians and also reaches back into Paul's letters for other expressions and sentences.

The theme of Ephesians is the unity of the church, a concern in any age, but a special emphasis of the disciples of Paul. But it is the kind of unity that Ephesians celebrates that is noteworthy. The "mystery of Christ," we are told in 3:4-6, is the unity of Jews and Gentiles in the body of Christ. Here in Ephesians, the unity is cause for celebration. Gentiles have been accepted into the church and it is taken for granted. We will remember that in Galatians, the acceptance of Gentiles into the church was still highly controversial and was being stoutly resisted by Paul's opponents.

A preface for the letters of Paul

What makes Ephesians different is that it is really not addressed to a specific congregation. Most Greek texts of Ephesians note that the words "at Ephesus" did not appear in the earliest copies of this writing. Ephesians is really not a letter at all as compared to the earlier letters of Paul. It is rather an essay on the doctrine of the church.

Ephesians shows us the church on the way to establishing itself as an institution, accepting the fact that the return of Jesus on the clouds of glory may no longer be a matter of days or months. Therefore the church needs to prepare itself for the long haul which implies organization and teaching of future generations.

It was for this reason that the letters of Paul were gathered together and copied into scrolls and books in the period following the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Ephesians may have been written as a summary of the teachings of Paul to preface such a collection of Paul's writings, so that the value of his faith might be available to more people.

Discovery

1. Contrast the background, character, and skills of Paul with those of Peter and the original disciples of Jesus. How would the course of church history have been changed if Peter had been the apostle to the Gentiles?

2. Paul's authority arose out of a vision of Jesus and a revelation from God rather than out of a historical contact with Jesus. Has this made visions and revelations more important to the church than historical experience? How would the course of church history have been changed if Paul had had a historical contact with Jesus?

3. How do you evaluate the claims for authorship for the letters of Paul? Which did Paul write? Which did his disciples write? What difference does it make?

Resources

Kee, Young, and Froehlich. "The Message for the Gentiles," *Understanding the New Testament*. Chapter 9. Pages 191-213.

Inventory

1. List the letters of Paul written by Paul in the order in which they seem to have been written.

2. List the letters that may have been written by the disciples of Paul.

3. Locate the following cities and provinces:

Achaia
Antioch
Athens
Cenchreae
Cilicia
Colossae
Corinth
Ephesus
Jerusalem
Macedonia
Philippi
Rome
Tarsus
Thessalonica

4. Who were the Gnostics? What did they believe?

CHAPTER 27

The Gospel According to Paul

12

Gist

In the Letter to the Romans, Paul has shown us why the gospel was so important to him and why he gave his life to the cause of telling others about the death of Jesus on the cross and his resurrection from the dead. He found that both Jew and Gentile had fallen away from God, but in the cross of Christ, God acted to end the separation. The Christ-event was a new act of creation making possible the real life intended by God from the beginning.

Paul planted a number of Christian congregations in various cities of the Roman Empire. But one church that he could not claim as his own was the one at Rome. How it began we do not know. But it was a growing and active fellowship before Paul ever set foot in the capital city.

Paul had made it his practice not to go to places where other evangelists had gone ahead of him (Rom. 15:20; 1 Cor. 3:10). Yet he was drawn to Rome, eager to preach the gospel in that great city (Rom. 1:15). As the center of the empire, Rome had such a strong influence upon life almost everywhere else that it could not be overlooked.

A life given to the Christ-event

From Corinth, Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome (1 Cor. 16:3-5; Rom. 15:25-27). He had finally gathered up the offering for the poor at Jerusalem and was going to Palestine to deliver it in person. After that, he hoped to head for Rome.

Paul really has not given us a reason for his writing of this letter. He may have been aware that he might have to give a defense of his actions and preaching to the other apostles when he got to Jerusalem. Romans may have been his first draft of that statement.

Or he may have had fears that even though he had plans to go to Spain after his visits to Jerusalem and Rome (15:28), some danger might overtake him before he reached those goals. In a sense, he was writing his last will and testament. Here we have the benefit of all that he had learned from years of dealing both with Judaizers and with Christians who had brought Greek modes of religion into the church.

In any event, Paul felt the need to explain his faith to this congregation in Rome. In doing that, he showed us why the Christ-event was so important to him and why he gave his life to the cause of telling others about what had happened on the cross.

Christus dispute sent some into exile

Rome, as we know, had a goodly number of synagogues. Related to these synagogues must have been some clusters of Jewish Christians. We know of Priscilla and Aquila who were among the Jews

and Christians expelled from Rome by the Emperor Claudius in A.D. 49 (Acts 18:2).

The ban on the Jews, says a historian of the period, had grown out of a disturbance begun by someone named "Christus." More likely, the Jews and Christians had had a dispute about Christ which upset community life seriously enough that the government drove out all the Jews (and the Jewish Christians with them) as a means of restoring peace.

Nero canceled the decree of Claudius in A.D. 54, so that by the time that Paul was writing this letter a few years later, many of the Christians had returned home. Obviously, this Christian community was a vigorous group that took its faith seriously.

A gospel with details of the divine plan

The Letter to the Romans is the gospel according to Paul. To compare it with the Gospels that came later is to show how different was the time in which Paul lived from days of the later church. An inspired and inventive thinker, Paul was not primarily interested in recording the teachings of Jesus nor was he concerned about portraying the life of Jesus as a model for right living.

The key element in Paul's gospel was the Christ-event—the death of Jesus on the cross and his resurrection from the dead. That event, for him, held the meaning of God's divine plan and defined every part of human life.

The cross and resurrection fulfilled all of the ancient promises to God's people. In Christ, the blessings of the covenant—the blessings of being God's holy people—had been made available to all people, not just to Jews. This special Christ-event told Paul's readers all that they needed to know about themselves and about their world.

Paul's gospel had raised many disputes as he preached the good news of peace and freedom in Christ across the Roman world. He had to defend it against attack from both right and left. The Judaizers, with their roots in Palestine, wanted to limit the fruits of the gospel to the community of the circumcised. The Greek and Roman Christians, steeped in the enthusiasm of their religious backgrounds, were on their way to forming a church patterned after the mystery religions of the empire.

Gentile and Jew—two parts of Paul's world

With the opening words of his letter, Paul set the stage for meeting his opponents. He called his doctrine a gospel and the power of God. This, he said, was salvation for everyone, a salvation that came through faith in Jesus (Rom. 1:16). Having said that, he only had to fill in the details and prepare for the expected challenges that he knew would come.

The two parts of Paul's world were present in the statement of his theme: Jew and Greek (or Gentile). Paul was a Jew, but he knew himself as the apostle to the Gentiles (Gal. 2:7-9).

In the tradition of the Jews, a great gap existed between themselves and the rest of the people of the world. The Jews were God's people, the chosen ones, the people of the covenant. They were the special objects of God's grace: they had received the Law, the mark of their special hold on God.

Without the Law, the Gentiles were prone to sin. As the Jews saw them, they were unclean. Paul detailed their sinfulness in the first chapter

Journal

1. Read the Letter to the Romans.

2. Pick out one verse from each chapter that seems to sum up the main idea of that chapter.

3. From the 16 verses, select the verse that seems to be the key to the book.

4. Sum up in your own words the gist of the Letter to the Romans.

Seed

Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God. . . . But God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we are now justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were ene-

mies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. Not only so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received our reconciliation (Rom. 5:1, 2, 8-11).

Themes in Romans

Justification by faith alone and not by works of the Law is the leading theme of Romans (Rom. 1—4; 9:30—10:4; cf. Gal. 3—4; Phil. 3). Paul used Abraham as the model of this justification by faith (Rom. 4; cf. Gal. 3). As Adam represented the fall of humankind, so Jesus Christ is the head of a new humanity (Rom. 5:12-21; cf. 1 Cor. 15:22-28).

Apart from Jesus, the natural person is subject to Law, sin, and death (Rom. 7:7-25; cf. 1 Cor. 15:56-57). When Jesus, the Son of God, came in human form for our redemption that was a sign given by the Holy Spirit that we are children of God (Rom. 8; cf. Gal. 4:4-7).

Paul described the church as one body with many members (Rom. 12:4-8; cf. 1 Cor. 12). This is a theme that he needed to apply to the dispute of the "weak" and the "strong" over food (Rom. 14—15:13; 1 Cor. 8, 10).

of Romans which he concluded with a catalog of gross misdeeds to which the Gentiles had given themselves (1:28-32).

But he did not spare the Jews. They were sinful also. They should have known better because they had the privilege of the Law which revealed God's will to them. The power of sin had taken hold on them too (Rom. 3:9-20).

Found guilty by both Law and conscience

He summed up the predicament of both Jew and Gentile with a judgment that has become a classic summary of the condition of humankind apart from Christ: "For there is no distinction; since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. . ." (3:22b-23).

Paul showed that the Jews were under a greater condemnation because God's Law had shown them the right way to live. But, even here, Paul reduced the distance between Jew and Gentile. For he knew that many Gentiles were as sensitive on issues of right and wrong as were the Jews. And what was the source of their insight? If they did not have the Law written in the Scriptures, they did have an understanding "written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness" (2:15).

Each group had failed to live up to the light given to it: the Jews ignored the Law, and the Gentiles did not heed their conscience. Both had fallen into sin and were far from God.

But God did something about the separation: the cross of Christ. That was the saving act.

From stumbling block to stepping-stone

Here we come to Paul's main contribution to Christian faith: he made sense out of the seeming disaster of the crucifixion. "But we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles" (1 Cor. 1:23) was the way Paul put the problem in just a few words.

When he called the cross a stumbling block, Paul must have been speaking for himself before his own conversion. The thought that the Messiah, come to restore the kingdom of David, should be put to a shameful death by the enemy of God's people was unthinkable. Such a defeated and disgraced Messiah was in every way unlike the Messiah for whom the Jews had so long prayed.

The Greek mind had even greater problems. The heroes of the mystery religions were godlike figures, redeemers of great strength and power. The weakness and defeat which the Gentiles saw in the cross was folly.

Coming to terms with such a crushing riddle was not easy and it did not happen quickly. Even when Paul made his breakthrough, not everyone, even among the Christians, accepted his statement. They continued to hold to earlier beliefs and failed to grasp the truth that Paul declared.

For the cross, if not stumbling block or folly to the believers, was cause for much uneasiness and many incomplete explanations. Some of the Christians turned to the Old Testament Scriptures and after a renewed study showed that the crucifixion was in keeping with the purpose and will of God.

Other Christians, including Paul for a time, saw the crucifixion as a momentary setback. Though the kingdom of God had not been set up

Gentile Congregations

The first congregation in Rome may have had its beginning among the Jews from its many synagogues. We know that Aquila, a Jew, and his wife, Priscilla, were members of a church in Rome (Acts 18:2).

But by the time of Paul's writing, the Christians in Rome were probably mostly Gentiles (Rom. 1:5, 6, 13-15; 11:13; 15:15-33) and were organized into several congregations.

The subject of Romans was certainly one that would have been of special interest to Christians from a non-Jewish background.

during the first appearance of the Messiah, Jesus would shortly return in power and glory and in the second coming fulfill all the original expectations.

A third way of dealing with the scandal of the cross was to see it as the way in which Jesus was elevated to the status of a “divine man” with Godlike powers, an understanding that had an appeal to Gentile Christians and the Greek-speaking Jewish missionaries who won them to the church.

Elements of all three understandings of the cross continued to be part of Christian thinking, but they are the lower hills surrounding the mountain peak of Paul’s insight of the cross as good news about God, about God’s love, about the good life for God’s people, and about hope for the world.

Worldly wisdom shattered by faith

The “Christ-event” was a new act of creation, a force that re-created the human spirit and made possible the real life intended by God from the beginning. This is the good news of salvation made possible in Jesus Christ.

The unexpectedness of this great power cloaked in the weakness of the cross shattered the wisdom of the world. It was a mystery not easy to unravel: power in weakness; weakness that is power. But just a glimmer of the great truth opened the believer to the great gifts of the Spirit of God and the insight that the God who beckons is the One who freely pours out all of God’s love as completely and fully as Christ gave of himself on the cross.

The great secret of life lay open before the believer. To know the real greatness of living was to give of one’s self after the manner of the great giving-ness of the God of the Christ-event.

Paul’s gospel had such a salvation in view. But how could this become the possession of people—Jews and Gentiles—those who did not know that such a great gift could be theirs? How could these persons separated from God by their sin be lifted out of their isolation from God?

Faith—it all happened by faith. Paul was influenced in his statement on faith by the many long disputes he had had with the Judaizers who claimed that righteousness could be gained only by doing specific things in obedience to the Law, beginning with circumcision. That, as Paul saw it, was works, not faith.

Faith in our language means belief, trust, and obedience. Faith is like the Christ-event to which it responds. Just as Jesus gave himself fully to God and to humankind by accepting the cross, so faith is giving one’s self to the God of the Christ who gave himself to the cross, holding nothing back.

Made righteous by a word from the courts

Thus the person is accepted by God and recognized as righteous. This is the process known as justification, a word that Paul takes from the law courts.

According to this model, each person is judged by the standard given. The Jew had the Law; the Gentile had conscience. If either person had lived up to the standard, that person would have been judged as righteous. That would have been justification.

But no one, says Paul, can live up to such models, either of the

A Reason for Romans

While most studies of Romans find that Paul is giving a general statement of his teachings without direct reference to problems in the church being addressed, Paul S. Minear in *The Obedience of Faith* sees Paul dealing with a controversy raging over table fellowship between Christians from Jewish background and those from Gentile families. Romans 14:1—15:13, therefore, would apply to the arguments about the eating of non-kosher meats (14:2) and the drinking of wine (14:21) as expressions of Christian freedom. To resolve this many-sided debate, Paul needed to define the real meaning of freedom and call the Roman congregations to the “obedience of faith” (1:5; 15:18; 16:25-27).

Reasoning Like a Rabbi

In Romans 4, Paul shows that Abraham was justified by faith rather than by works of the Law.

He finds his proof in Genesis 15 where we read that Abraham “believed Yahweh; and he reckoned it to him as righteousness” (v. 6). It was not until Genesis 17:11 that circumcision was introduced into Hebrew life, thus showing that faith came before the Law and was better than the Law.

This was a way of interpreting Scripture often used by the rabbis.

Romans 16

Though opinions among scholars differ, it seems that Romans 16 is a separate letter (or part of a letter) written by Paul to Ephesus and carried there by Phoebe, a deaconess in the church at Cencreae, the eastern seaport of Corinth (16:1).

Romans 15 ends with a benediction which indicates the Letter to the Romans had come to a close.

In this letter, Paul addressed twenty-six persons by name. It is not likely that he would have known so

Law or of the human conscience. Therefore, God set up a new way to make the grade to righteousness: faith in Jesus (3:21-26).

Righteousness to Paul meant being in right relationship with God and under the lordship of Christ. But Paul observed that all people (both Jews and Gentiles) were under a different rule—under the lordship of sin (which is the gist of Romans 1—3). To enter into relationship with God, a person needs to be righteous, something that one under the lordship of sin doesn't have and cannot get. But God has righteousness (3:25), and it is this righteousness that God transfers to those who do not have it, allowing them to be part of the covenant people. Another word for this transfer so freely bestowed is *justification*.

The joy of justification is not only in a verdict about the quality of one's life. It is also in the reconciliation, the end of separation. For that is where we began—separated and estranged from God. But now that is over: “since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (5:1).

The great gift of reconciliation

Paul celebrated this end of separation with a great outburst of joy (5:6-11). Evidence that the end of estrangement is open to all humanity is in every fiber of the act of reconciliation: “But God shows his love for us that while we were yet sinners [enemies in v. 10] Christ died for us” (5:8).

If the Christ-event was for the saving of God's enemies and ownership of that salvation comes by a faithlike giving of self to God, then it follows that Christians live to give themselves for the welfare of their enemies. How completely the fulfillment of that vision would have ended the separation between Jew and Gentile: “So one man's act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men” (5:18).

It is in chapter 8 that Paul gives his longest and most elaborate celebration of the new life in Jesus and the full life under the blessings of the Spirit. It is also a life of great freedom; for, as children of God, the redeemed are no longer slaves to the passions of the flesh and to death: “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? . . . For I am sure that neither death . . . nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (8:35, 38, 39).

The agony of the mission that failed

So far, Paul's recital of the gospel carried a note of triumph as he celebrated the justification and reconciliation for all of humankind offered in the Christ-event. Yet there was, for Paul, in all of this, a note of deep regret. It related to the failure of the Jews, except for a few, to respond to the gospel.

He gave vent to his grief in a long and painful passage (Rom. 9—11). He debated with the long history of God's efforts to win these people who had carried the covenant from the days of Abraham and Moses. Through all the years of wandering and exile, they kept alive their faith in the ultimate fulfillment of the covenant. But now when the goal had been reached, all but a few rejected the gift of grace offered them in Jesus Christ.

What Paul was really confronting in these troubled paragraphs was the miserable failure of the Christian mission to the Jews compared to the grand success of the mission to the Gentiles. He might have had just cause to gloat, since he cherished his appointment as apostle to the

Gentiles. Yet, he was also a Jew and his love for his people ran deep as these passages illustrate in every sentence.

The good life in a time of good feeling

As with all of Paul's letters, the Letter to the Romans ends with an application of the proclamation to the life of the believers (Rom. 12:1—15:33).

The gifts of the Spirit realized by faith in Christ are to be used for the sake of peace within the Christian community (12:3-8). Here was the very practical side of reconciliation, the commitment and determination to live out the new life in everyday life.

The fruits of reconciliation had application to life in the world outside the church. Christians are to be sensitive to the needs of others and absorb hostility wherever it appears, even when this means feeding one's enemy (12:9-21)

In the chapter that follows, Paul touched on the Christian's relation to government (13:1-7). He was writing at a time when the church had no major conflict with the Roman rulers. Nero had just canceled the ban issued by Claudius which had, in any event, been directed against the Jews, but had been applied against Jewish Christians by a pagan state that did not understand the fine points of religious doctrine.

So, it was for the moment a period of good feeling. Christians were only a small body within the empire. The counsel of cooperation in the payment of taxes seemed appropriate for a group concerned to keep the peace (13:6). More difficult days were still in the future—but only by a measure of a few years as Paul himself would discover. Counsel for a sterner witness would grow out of the coming days of persecution.

Paul concluded with reference to his own plans to travel to Jerusalem and then to go on to Rome (15:22-29). He gave an indication of his own awareness that difficult days were coming when he requested prayer to "be delivered from unbelievers in Judea" (15:31).

Discovery

1. Paul, in writing the Letter to the Romans, concentrates on the Christ-event (the crucifixion and resurrection). Yet, he does not tell the story of the crucifixion and resurrection, nor does he report on the life and teachings of Jesus. Why?

2. Jew and Gentile are the people of Paul's world. How do they differ? What do they have in common? What is Paul's desire for each of these groups?

3. What is the gospel according to Paul? What changes has he brought to the traditions rooted in Abraham, Moses, and the prophets?

4. What was the role of justification by faith in making this change in the traditions of the Jews?

Resources

Kee, Young, and Froehlich. "The Death of Paul and the End of the Apocalyptic Age," *Understanding the New Testament*. Chapter 10. Pages 214-48.

many people in the congregation at Rome which he had not yet visited.

Among the first persons addressed are Prisca (Priscilla) and Aquila (v. 3), who had been with Paul at Corinth and later moved on to Ephesus (Acts 18:2, 18-19; 1 Cor. 16:19).

Since Ephesus had long been Paul's home, he may have sent this congregation a copy of his Letter to the Romans and thus the two letters became attached to each other.

Inventory

1. From what city did Paul probably write the Letter to the Romans?

2. What was the Edict (decree) of Claudius? Who repealed it?

3. What may have been some of the reasons that Paul wrote the Letter to the Romans?

4. What did Paul plan to do before he would visit Rome? What did he expect to do after visiting Rome?

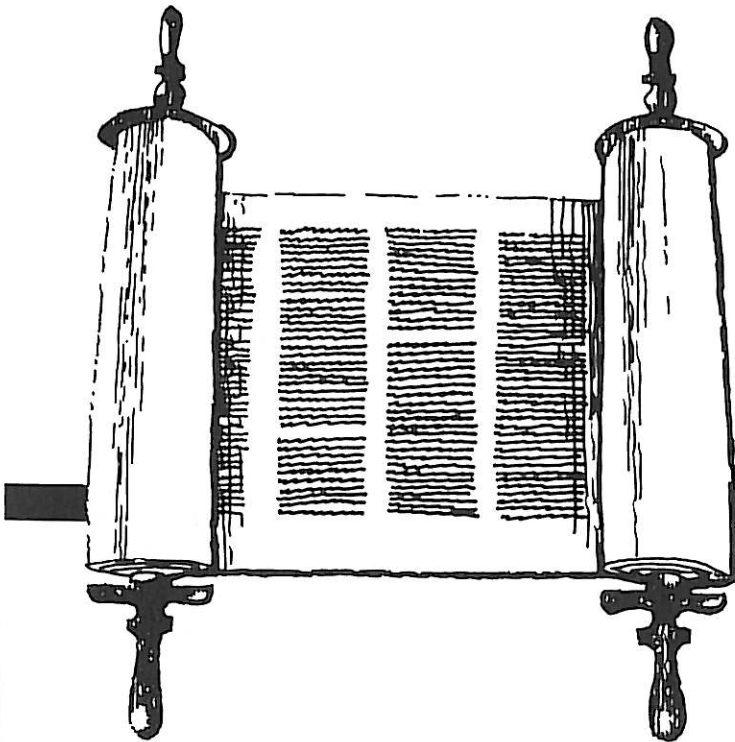
5. What are the main themes of the Letter to the Romans?

6. What was the stumbling block in the crucifixion for the Jew? What was the folly of Christ crucified for the Greeks?

7. What was Paul's great regret as expressed in Romans?

PART XI

**The Gospel
from Word
of Mouth to
Word on
Paper**



CHAPTER 28

Three Portraits for a Redeemer

20

Gist

In their sermons and in their teaching, the apostles repeated the words of Jesus and their remembrances of his ministry and passion. For many years, these words and reports were carried only in oral form for the church expected the early return of Jesus. After the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, the church needed to take account of all that had happened since the coming of Jesus. The Gospels of Mark, Matthew, and Luke responded to this need, each

Our readings in the letters of Paul have prepared us for a study of the Gospels by introducing us to the church that cherished the words of Jesus and its memory of his life. During those turbulent early years, the leaders of the church needed first to apply their faith in Jesus to the events of their day.

What was most real to the early church was the presence of the resurrected Lord in its midst. The believers expected that Jesus would return soon on the clouds of heaven “to judge the living and the dead” (2 Tim. 4:1). So, for many years, they had little interest in writing down the history of Jesus’ life and ministry. Once Christ would be fully restored to them, such information, they felt, would not be needed.

They rejoiced in their blessings—in forgiveness, in the fellowship of a new community, and in the gifts of the Spirit. As the people of Israel once heard the voice of Yahweh through the words of the prophets, so the early church heard the message of the resurrected Christ in the sermons of the apostles. When the congregations of Palestine and Syria heard the words of Jesus spoken to his disciples in Galilee or to the scribes from the synagogue, they heard not just the carpenter of Nazareth, but the risen Lord speaking with the authority of the Son of God.

The imprint of the historical Jesus

We tend to read the Gospels as though they were written within hours after the events took place and were addressed only to us by people with world views similar to ours. If we do this, we miss the adventure of meeting the pioneers of the faith and feeling their energy. As we get to know them, we also learn more about the Jesus who moved them and redeemed their lives.

What we find in the Gospels are sayings spoken by Jesus as he walked with his disciples and sat on the shores of Galilee. They are also the words remembered by the early Christians who walked through the streets of Ephesus and bargained in the bazaars of Corinth.

The broad outlines of the life of Jesus are present in the Gospels in the words and events recorded. Though many details about the life of

Jesus have been lost, we can find within the traditions passed on to us by the early church the imprint of the historical Jesus.

Gospels that see the whole together

We find the trail of this imprint most readily in the first three Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—which have been called the Synoptics (from the Greek word *synoptikos* which means “seeing the whole together”). If we should put the Synoptic Gospels side by side in parallel columns (as is done in a “harmony of the Gospels”), we would discover many likenesses among them. We would find places where they use the same material, often given in much the same order. This is not surprising since the Gospels took shape in oral form long before they were fixed on paper.

Even when we find striking differences among these three Gospels, it seems clear that they have some important links. As we study both what is held in common by these writers and what changes and additions each has made, we take our first step in unraveling the several threads of tradition that can give us a far more colorful picture than any that could be gained by reading each Gospel separately.

Four sources and three Gospels

Mark seems to be the first of the three to use the traditions that also appear in Matthew and Luke. When words or sentences differ, we find that either Matthew may agree with Mark against Luke or Luke may agree with Mark against Matthew. Hardly ever do both Matthew and Luke agree against Mark. Thus Mark seems to be the first to make use of the material appearing in one or both of the other two Synoptic Gospels.

But our comparison of the three Gospels will show us that Matthew and Luke have a great deal of material in common that does not appear in Mark. The first such block is in the preaching of John the Baptist (Matt. 3:7-10 = Luke 3:7-9). Other examples are Jesus' words on anxiety (Matt. 6:25-33 = Luke 12:22-31) and his saying on judging (Matt. 7:1-5 = Luke 6:37, 38).

These passages and others, almost all teaching material, must have come from some source to which both Matthew and Luke had access. But that document has not come down to us in separate or written form like Mark did. This unit has been called Q or Sayings Source Q from the first letter of the German word for source, *Quelle*.

Mark and Sayings Source Q are two of the paths of the Jesus traditions that came together in the Synoptic Gospels. But in addition to these two sources, we find material unique to Matthew, for example, much that is in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5—7). This is sometimes labeled M (a name for Matthew's special source). And Luke, in turn, has unique material, such as the parables in Luke 15. This is known as L.

Something more than biographies

Some of these sources came from the life of the early church where the sayings and stories were used in missionary preaching, in catechetical instruction for new converts, and in services of baptism, communion, and other experiences of worship. The Gospel writers took such material as they received it and organized it to bring the message of Christ to the churches of their day.

writer making use in his own way of the several strands of traditions about Jesus that had been kept by the believers, particularly by the church in Palestine. The Gospels give us a reliable outline of the life of Jesus and of the kingdom of God which made up the heart of his message.

Journal

Read the following sets of parallel passages. Note the parts of each passage that each Gospel has in common with another Gospel. Note new material, if any, in the parallel texts. Try to give a reason why material was inserted or left out in each case.

1. Peter's confession: Mark 8:27—9:1; Matt. 16:13-28; Luke 9:21-27

2. Feeding of the 5,000: Mark 6:30—7:23; Matt. 14:13—15:20; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-24

3. Feeding of the 4,000: Mark 8:1-21. (Compare this passage with those in 2.)

4. The Triumphal Entry: Mark 11:1-11; Matt. 21:1-11; Luke 19:29-44; John 12:12-19

A Synoptic Sampler

Compare the texts of the baptism of Jesus (Matt. 3:13-17 = Mark 1:9-11 = Luke 3:21, 22).

Some observation would include:

In Matthew and Mark, Jesus came from Galilee; omitted in Luke.

John is named in Matthew and Mark, but not in Luke.

The Spirit descends like a dove on Jesus in Mark and Luke, but also “alights” on Jesus in Matthew.

In Mark and Luke, the voice from heaven says “Thou art . . .” but “This is . . .” in Matthew.

Seed

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God (Mark 1:1).

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham . . . "my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 1:1; 3:17).

Jesus, when he began his ministry, was about thirty years of age, being the son (as was supposed) of Joseph, the son of Heli . . . the son of Enos, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God (Luke 3:23, 38).

"You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you. . ." (Luke 24:48, 49).

Each of the Gospels appears to take the form of a biography of Jesus with a summary of his teachings and with special attention to his trial, crucifixion, and resurrection. But these are not biographies like those written in our time, though they do carry information about the life of Jesus. They were written to deliver a special message to the church following the destruction of Jerusalem. As we find that message within their use of the traditions about Jesus, we discover more of what the Gospels can say to us today.

Looking for Jesus to return soon

The Synoptic Gospels bring us elements of tradition different from those found in the letters of Paul. Paul's writings reflect the life and thought of the congregations of the Gentile mission outside of Palestine. They were also written before the Jewish War and the destruction of Jerusalem. Sayings Source Q and much of the Gospel of Mark reflect the traditions of the Palestinian churches.

These Christians proclaimed the soon expected return of Jesus from heaven. This was the message of those who encouraged the believers to be faithful disciples of Jesus and to be prepared for his coming. They found the promise of this expected event in the kingdom of God which Jesus had proclaimed during his earthly ministry.

The sayings of Jesus and stories about him were words that spoke to the needs of the Christians of Judea and Jerusalem. These traditions were remembered and collected. Thus, they became the base for that special form of Christian literature that would be called a Gospel.

Source of Q in Palestine

The beginnings of the Gospel form may be seen in Sayings Source Q which makes up about one-third of the Gospel of Matthew and accounts for one-fourth of Luke. Of its some fifty passages, most are in the form of sayings of Jesus: parables, oracles, beatitudes, prophetic words, wisdom words, and exhortations.

Q contains only two narratives: Jesus' meeting with Satan (Luke 4:2b-12 = Matt. 4:2-11) and the healing of the centurion's slave (Luke 7:2, 3, 6-10 = Matt. 8:5-10, 13). It carries no account of the trial, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus, which indicates that its main concern is not on events, but on the words of Jesus. Thus the title "sayings source" as applied to Q is well deserved.

When the materials in Q are read together, it is clear that almost all of the passages carry a concern about the return of Jesus and the events and hopes of the days leading up to that expectation. Samples of such words are: Luke 11:30; 12:8, 9; 12:40; 17:24, 26, 30 (each with a parallel in Matthew).

Though the Christian community in which the sayings of Q were collected cannot be located with certainty, one guess is that they came from the church in Palestine which would have had special concerns arising from the fall of Jerusalem. The parables about the kingdom would have had special meaning to the disciples in that early church who nurtured the hope that Jesus would return in full authority as Son of Man to fulfill the kingdom (Luke 6:20-23; 46-49; 13:29; 14:26, 27, all with parallels in Matthew).

The collection of sayings in Q does not make up a Gospel. It lacks references to time and place and fails to give an account of Jesus'

passion as do the writers of the Synoptic Gospels and the Gospel of John. But Q does make a contribution to Matthew and Luke as do the other smaller collections of sayings and traditions of Jesus which became a part of the Gospels.

Outline of the life of Jesus

It was the figure of Jesus that shaped the Gospels; in fact, all of the New Testament. Without Jesus and the power that he imparted to his followers, there would have been no New Testament. The early church was the keeper of the Jesus tradition.

In this tradition, we find the broad outlines of the life of Jesus. He was born in 4 B.C., and lived in the home of Joseph, a carpenter in Nazareth of Galilee, and Mary his wife. He spoke Aramaic, the language of Palestine. He had brothers and sisters (Mark 6:3). One of his brothers was James who later became a leader in the Jerusalem church.

The beginning of Jesus' ministry was linked with John the Baptist, by whom he was baptized. Jesus called disciples and spent time teaching and training them. Some of them, most notably Peter, became leaders in the early church.

Jesus was successful as an exorcist, casting out demons in an age when people were much troubled by evil spirits. He also healed many who were sick.

He proclaimed the kingdom of God. To realize this new order, Jesus set out to unite the people of his community, including those who were hostile to each other. He gave special attention to the outcast, the poor, and the oppressed, making them part of the kingdom and inheritors of the covenant. He was willing to break with the accepted standards of legal and ritual purity to bring this new community into being.

Sharing a common meal became a special symbol for Jesus and his disciples, an experience that became a ritual in the church as the Lord's Supper. Jesus shared table fellowship with many different persons without regard to sex, economic status, or previous background, including "tax collectors and sinners," acting out an important parable of the kingdom.

Though some people expected him to lead a revolt against Rome, Jesus did not attempt such an uprising. But his preaching of the kingdom of God was radical enough for him to be arrested when he arrived in Jerusalem. The Jews accused him of blasphemy; the Romans, of rebellion. Though innocent, Jesus was executed by crucifixion. Soon after his death, his disciples reported his resurrection. They went from city to city proclaiming the success rather than the failure of his ministry.

These facts are well attested in the New Testament and can be accepted as historical. Though details within this outline of events may sometimes be in dispute, we are on sound footing in accepting the cardinal points from the witness of the traditions kept for us by the early followers of Jesus.

Kingdom of God words

Three short words: *kingdom of God*—these brought together all of the life and experience of the people of Israel from the call of Abraham up to the ministry of Jesus. It was a phrase embedded not only in the history of God's people (1 Chron. 28:5) but also in their souls. All their adventures and misadventures with human kings both before and after

Q Source Sampler

References to these sayings are from Luke; parallels can be located in Matthew.

Narratives: Luke 4:2-12; 7:2, 3, 6-10

Parables: Luke 6:43-46; 11:33-36; 12:6, 7; 13:20, 21; 14:16-23; 15:4-7

Oracles: Luke 10:13-15; 11:24-26; 12:4, 5; 17:23-37

Beatitudes: Luke 6:20-23; 10:23, 24

Prophetic Sayings: Luke 3:7-9, 16, 17; 7:18-23; 9:57, 58; 10:2-12; 11:29-32; 13:34, 35; 14:26, 27; 22:28-30

Wisdom Words: Luke 6:27-36; 11:9-13; 13:24; 16:13

Exhortation: Luke 11:2-4; 17:3, 4; 17:5, 6

Aramaic Words in Christian Worship

Words from the language of Jesus and the Palestinian Christians are still with us.

Abba ("Father" as an address to God): Galatians 4:6; Romans 8:15; Mark 14:36

Hallelujah ("Praise God"): Revelation 19:1, 3, 6

Amen: 2 Corinthians 1:20
Maranatha ("Our Lord, come!" spoken at the Lord's Supper): 1 Corinthians 16:20-22; Revelation 22:20

the Babylonian Exile could only leave the faithful with the conviction that only God could be their true king.

The hope for the kingdom of God was still alive when Jesus came to announce its nearness. Many still had dreams of a restored kingdom of David, a hope that had been renewed during the days of the Maccabees. Jesus made it clear that since it was God's kingdom it was of a different order than dominions put together by human hands. It had already come (Luke 17:20, 21). Because this was so, it could not be treated as a worldly kingdom and could not be hailed with special signs (Mark 8:11, 12).

Yet the kingdom met stiff resistance. Expecting people to live without resort to violence and to share their goods with those in need was a doctrine openly rejected. The death of John the Baptist was a sign that the coming of the kingdom had already moved the dark powers of the world to violence (Matt. 11:12).

A sign that Jesus gave to prove the presence of the kingdom of God was that he was casting out demons. The powers of evil were being brought under control (Luke 11:20).

Pointed parables not easily blunted

Nowhere did Jesus make the message of the kingdom clearer than in the telling of his parables. While the early church in its traditions quickly turned the parables into allegories, the parables with their pointedness could not be so easily blunted.

A parable carries a message both simple and profound. Like a good poem or a worthy picture, a parable is its own message. An allegory, on the other hand, carries a secret meaning and needs an interpreter. But after interpretation, an allegory's value has passed on to its interpretation. Not so with a parable, for its truth is embedded within its structure. It carries an image uniquely its own. A good example of an allegory is the interpretation of the parable of the sower (Mark 4:13-20).

While parables were often used by Jewish teachers, Jesus used the best of his parables to proclaim the kingdom. Among these, the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-35) is almost universally remembered. The early church in its interpretation tried to make the parable a teaching on the principle of neighborliness (10:25-29, 37). But its lesson strikes far deeper than such easy moralizing. If friendliness had been the point, then the hero of the tale could just as well have been a Jew and the victim a Samaritan. But the parable drove home the point to a Jewish audience that the good person at the center of the action was not only "good." He was also "Samaritan." Jesus lured his hearers into thinking the unthinkable about people that they despised on both religious and racial grounds. Such thinking is just what the proclamation of the kingdom leads all those within its hearing to do.

Proverbs of the radical kingdom life

The proverbial sayings of Jesus, more numerous even than the parables, carry a similar message about the kingdom—a kingdom that makes radical demands on its citizens: "Leave the dead to bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:60).

Even more demanding are the sayings in Matthew instructing one to turn the other cheek when struck, give one's cloak when the coat is

Proverbial Sayings

Samples of the proverbs spoken by Jesus include these:

Radical sayings: Luke 9:60; Matthew 5:39-41

Reversal sayings: Mark 8:35; 10:23b, 25, 31; Luke 14:11

Conflict sayings: Mark 3:24-27

Guidance: Luke 9:62; Matt. 7:13, 14; Mark 7:15; 10:15; Matt. 5:44-48

taken, and go a second mile when forced to go one (5:39-41). So the kingdom of God differs from the dominions of the world. The kingdom calls for a different style of life.

The radical meaning of the kingdom finds a summary in the Lord's Prayer (Luke 11:2-4 = Matt. 6:9-13). To be able to make this prayer a part of one's life is to be a living proclamation of the kingdom. As we hear these words from Jesus, we come to know him as the one who clearly and forcefully proclaimed the kingdom of God.

Discovery

1. What were the issues and events that gave rise to the writing of the Synoptic Gospels? Give examples of material from the Gospels that might have responded to the particular concern that led to the writing of these Gospels.

2. The gospel was a particular form of writing developed by the Christian church. What are the marks of this form that make it different from other kinds of writing such as history, biography, or epistle?

3. What do we learn by comparing each of the Synoptic Gospels with the other two?

4. How do you understand the meaning of the kingdom of God? How does it relate to the covenant of the Old Testament? How does it differ from the popular hope that the Jews had for the restoration of the kingdom of David? How is Jesus' teaching of the kingdom of God like justification by faith as stated by Paul?

Resources

Kee, Young, and Froehlich. "Jesus in the Gospels," "The Claims of Jesus," and "The Cross of Jesus," *Understanding the New Testament*. Chapters 4—6. Pages 74-144.

Inventory

1. Identify:
Synoptic Gospels
Sayings Source Q

M

L

Two-source theory

2. What is a parable? How does it differ from an allegory?

3. What was the native language of Jesus and the disciples?

4. Name three forms in which the sayings of Jesus were remembered?

CHAPTER 29

The
Heroic
Son of
God

26

Gist

Mark shows us that Jesus was the Son of God, though many people did not recognize him as such during his ministry. The disciples misunderstood him most of all because they did not know that sonship meant suffering servanthood. Jesus was also the Son of Man, the glorified and heroic redeemer who would return to establish God's kingdom with the authority foreshadowed during his earthly ministry.

The author of the Gospel of Mark wrote about Jesus and called what he had written "the gospel" (1:1). In that writing, he created a new form of expression. It was new for the Christian community, but new also for the larger world of literature.

This unknown author, whom we will call Mark, wrote a message for the churches of his day, likely sometime after the fall of Jerusalem and the burning of the temple in A.D. 70. In making what he called "the beginning of the gospel," he took the traditions of the church that contained the stories and sayings of Jesus and put them together to show who Jesus was.

Out of the mouth of his executioner

Mark gave his theme to his readers from the very first sentence: he would show that Jesus was the Son of God. He was so proclaimed by God at his baptism (1:11) and again at his transfiguration (9:7). And at the climax of the crucifixion, the Roman soldier and overseer of the execution exclaimed, "Truly this man was the Son of God!" (15:39).

Through his miracles, Jesus proved himself to be the Son of God. This is the theme of several major sections in the Gospel: 3:13—6:6a and 6:7—8:21: "even wind and sea obey him" (4:41); the Gerasene man released from demon possession by Jesus said, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?" (5:7); and when Jesus restored Jairus's daughter to life, the people "were overcome with amazement" (5:42).

Telling abroad the long kept secret

Even so, Jesus was misunderstood by his friends (3:21) and rejected by the people of his own country (6:1-6a). More painful yet, Jesus was misunderstood by his disciples: "Then are you also without understanding?" (7:18). The section ended with Jesus' lament to the disciples, "Do you not yet understand?" (8:21).

While the readers of Mark's Gospel were told from the very beginning who Jesus was, they knew that few people who met him during his earthly ministry recognized him. How could a fact so plain to

people decades later have been missed by people who were in the physical presence of Jesus?

Mark's answer was that it was a secret that Jesus kept from those around him until the very last hour. Whenever Jesus as a healer cured those with unclean spirits, the spirits cried out, "You are the Son of God" (3:11; cf. 1:32-34). But Jesus did not allow the spirits to tell the story, for this was the Messiah's secret.

But when the high priest asked Jesus at the trial before the crucifixion, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" Jesus replied forthrightly, "I am." The messianic secret was now out in the open—Jesus was both Messiah (Christ) and the Son of God (14:61, 62).

The Son of Man coming in great glory

It was also in this testimony before the high priest that Jesus defined another name given to him in this Gospel: "You will see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven" (14:62).

Son of Man was the resurrected Jesus whom the Christians of the first century expected to return shortly (13:26). This was the apocalyptic hope, a theme that runs through all of the chapters of the Gospel of Mark, becoming most specific and direct in Mark 13.

The title "son of man" came from Daniel:

I saw in the night visions
and behold, with the clouds of heaven
there came one like a son of man,
and he came to the Ancient of Days
and was presented before him.
And to him was given dominion
and glory and kingdom. . . (Dan. 7:13, 14).

The early church saw Jesus fulfilling this vision when he would return as "the son of man." Jesus would come with authority to judge and rule the world and establish the kingdom (13:27).

This future authority of Jesus was already foreshadowed in the first major section of Mark (1:16—3:6). Here Jesus as the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins (Mark 2:10) and he has power to change the laws about the Sabbath (2:28). Such power was the cause of much amazement: "What is this? A new teaching! With authority he commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him" (1:27).

Yes, Jesus had power and authority. Who needed to hear that message more than the believers who had suffered the loss of the temple and had been driven from their homes? Other Christians faced persecution. Where was their hope? The Gospel of Mark linked their future with Jesus as the heroic and glorified Son of Man. But how could they know? The answer was all in the three parts of the drama that was the Gospel of Mark.

Cycle of delivering up the preachers

Mark presented the drama in terms of the persons who preached and who were then delivered up: John the Baptist, Jesus, and the Christians.

In the first act of this drama, John the Baptist preached (1:7) and shortly after that, he was arrested (1:14). The story of John's imprison-

Journal

Read the Gospel of Mark and record your observations.

Look for the following: the use of "Son of God" and "Son of man." Define the difference in meaning as it appears to you.

List what might have been the questions that first-century Christians would have wanted answered by the Gospel of Mark.

Seed

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:14, 15).

"Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man will be delivered to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death, and deliver him to the Gentiles; and they will mock him, and spit upon him, and scourge him,

and kill him; and after three days he will rise" (Mark 10:33, 34).

"But take heed to yourselves; for they will deliver you up to councils; and you will be beaten in synagogues; and you will stand before governors and kings for my sake, to bear testimony before them. And the gospel must first be preached to all nations" (Mark 13:9, 10).

Mark's Mark

When first circulated, the Gospel of Mark did not carry the name of its writer.

When the church of the second century wanted to promote the reading of this Gospel, it associated the writing with John Mark, a companion of Paul (Philem. 24) who was also believed to have been with Peter in Rome (1 Pet. 5:13).

But the Gospel itself carries within its words no clue that would identify it with John Mark or any other person. The writer seems to have had strong ties with the Palestinian church, but is a person with a deep interest in the mission to the Gentiles. While we do not know the author's name, it is convenient to call him Mark.

ment and execution are noted later (6:14-29). But within a short space, these events set out the pattern of things to come.

Next, Jesus came preaching (1:14) and the second act was played out throughout the rest of the Gospel. The forces that beset John the Baptist now focused on Jesus who at the Gospel's midpoint makes a prediction, saying, "The Son of man will be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him. . ." (9:31).

As Jesus and the disciples set out for Jerusalem, he again said that "the Son of man will be delivered to the chief priests and the scribes" (10:33). The rest of the Gospel fulfilled the prophetic words.

Getting ready for the drama's third act

Then the drama arrived at its third act. The Christians proclaimed "the gospel of Jesus Christ" (1:1). That was the beginning of the mission to see that the gospel would "be preached to all nations" (13:10).

Would the Christians be treated any differently than had been John the Baptist and Jesus who had carried the same message? Not likely. Christians are warned that they would be brought to trial and delivered up (13:11) in much the same way as were Jesus and John.

The statement was forthright and direct: "They will deliver you up to councils; and you will be beaten in synagogues; and you will stand before governors and kings. . ." (13:9). The drama had played itself out to within a few minutes of the last scene.

Jesus supplied a preview of the ending expected: "And then they will see the Son of man coming in clouds with great power and glory" (13:26).

But before the drama could come to climax, the believers would need to prepare themselves for the times of testing. The lessons they would need to learn were in the passion of Jesus who was delivered to trial as the Christians would also be delivered up.

Heading down the road that Jesus walked

Mark 13 made this even plainer. This chapter parallels the passion of Jesus in the chapters that follow. The predictions of trial and testing for the Christians (13:9-13) were the very things that happened to Jesus.

The Gospel of Mark came to people living between the resurrection and the return of Jesus. They were like the women fleeing from the empty tomb of Jesus in Mark's apparent abrupt ending to the Gospel: trembling, astonished, and afraid (16:8).

Mark's readers were certainly living in highly charged days. Jerusalem had fallen to the Romans and the temple was desecrated and then leveled. All this happened at the end of the Jewish War of A.D. 66-70. During this war, Jews and Christians (who were counted as Jews by the Romans) had to flee for their lives from Jerusalem and Judea.

During these unsettled times, many Christians were sure that Jesus would soon return in glory and power and put all things right. But even this hope placed them in peril. For, when expectations were high, people were prone to being led astray by "false Christs and false prophets" who came proclaiming that the return of Christ had taken place (13:5, 6, 21, 22).

Candidates for a discipleship of suffering

They were undergoing persecution as well as tribulation (13:8-13). They had already seen the "desolating sacrilege" (v. 14). These words referred to the destruction of the temple by the Romans by recalling the "abomination of desolation" of the days of Antiochus IV Epiphanes, the Syrian king who had erected an altar to Zeus in the temple during the Seleucid Empire two centuries earlier. (See "Antiochus Puts a Pig on the Altar" in chapter 21.)

Mark wrote to prepare the Christians for the return of Jesus. He encouraged them to accept the discipleship of suffering even as Jesus took up the cross after being delivered up to the rulers in Jerusalem. If the believers would do this, they would be ready for the return of Christ.

The meaning of discipleship forms the theme of the central section of Mark's Gospel (8:27—10:45). Within these passages are three episodes in which Jesus forecast his coming death and resurrection (8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34).

Following each prediction, the disciples showed that they did not understand the meaning of discipleship and suffering. Jesus, then, carefully explained to them its true inner nature. Each prediction unit was tied to a particular place on the route that the traveling school of discipleship was taking.

Slow learners in the school of discipleship

The first prediction followed Peter's confession of Jesus as the Christ (8:29) while Jesus and the disciples were on the way to Caesarea Philippi (8:27). Then Jesus foretold that he as the Son of Man would "suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again" (8:31).

Immediately, Peter objected, showing that when he confessed that Jesus was the Christ he grasped neither the meaning of the Messiah's mission nor Jesus' understanding of it. Then Jesus gave a lesson on discipleship that began, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (8:34).

The next teaching came as the traveling disciple band passed through Galilee on its way to Capernaum (9:30, 33). "The Son of man is delivered up into the hands of men" (9:31, American Revised Version), said Jesus, repeating his former words, but moving the prediction from the future to the present tense.

Again there was gross misunderstanding from the disciples who thought only about honor for themselves. Jesus gave them an object lesson with a child put into the circle of disciples, "If any one would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all" (9:35).

Then, on the road to Jerusalem (10:32), Jesus made the prediction more specific and more intense. He told the disciples that the Son of Man would be delivered to the Gentiles and "they will mock him, and spit upon him, and scourge him, and kill him" (10:34).

Again, the disciples failed to grasp the seriousness of the situation, failed to see that they were involved. James and John, the sons of Zebedee, wanted the chief seat with Christ in glory. And once again, Jesus told them that discipleship is servanthood, and that it is servanthood according to his own example, "For the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many" (10:45).

Mark's Outline

The units in the Gospel of Mark include these:

Introduction: 1:1-13, with summary, 1:14, 15

Authority in Word and Deed: 1:16—3:6, with summary, 3:7-12

Rejected by His Own People: 3:13—6:6a, with summary, 6:6b

Misunderstood by His Own Disciples: 6:7—8:21

Discipleship and Suffering: 8:27—10:45, bracketed by symbolic giving-of-sight stories: 8:22-26; 10:46-52

Jerusalem: 11:1—12:44

Signs of the Coming: 13:5b-37, with introduction, 13:1-5a

The Passion of the Son of Man: 14:13—16:8, with introduction, 14:1-12

A Home in Rome?

An old tradition says the Gospel of Mark was written in Rome. No proof can be found within the Gospel itself to support that view, except that its writer reflects a strong interest in the mission to the Gentiles.

Rome, with many Gentiles as members of Christian congregations, would have been a place where such a person would have felt at home. But, then, almost any city in the Roman Empire at the end of the first century had such a congregation.

Mark 13

The discourse on the coming of the end contains the following parts:

Introduction: 1-5a

This Must Take Place: 5b-8

They Will Deliver You Up:

9:13

Signs of Tribulation: 14:20

Beware of False Christs:

21-23

In Clouds of Power and Glory: 24-27

Lessons to Be Learned:

28-37

Passion Pointers

Each unit in the Gospel of Mark ends with a sign that points to the coming passion of Jesus:

Plot to destroy Jesus, 3:6

Unbelief of his people, 6:6

Disciples misunderstand, 8:21

Cross as ransom, 10:45

Widow's sacrifice of everything, 12:44

Transfiguration as model for the expected return

Amid the grim forecasts of suffering, the transfiguration (9:1-9) provided a taste of the heavenly glory that belonged to Jesus. He appeared in a vision to the chosen disciples in fellowship with Moses and Elijah on a high mountain.

Within the transfiguration experience came the voice out of the cloud similar to the voice heard at the baptism of Jesus, "This is my beloved Son; listen to him" (9:7; cf. 1:11). At the baptism, Jesus responded to God's call and was commissioned as the Son of God with a choice phrase from the Servant Songs ("with thee I am well pleased" of Mark 1:11 = Isaiah 42:1, "my chosen in whom my soul delights"). Now at the midpoint of his ministry, when Jesus had said plainly that he was the Suffering Servant (Mark 8:31), the voice from heaven ratifies this choice made by Jesus.

The transfiguration may have been intended as a symbol of the future return of Jesus in glory. If so, this would have been the reason it was to be kept secret until after the resurrection (9:9). And while the resurrection, according to all three predictions, was to take place in three days after the crucifixion of Jesus (8:31, 9:31, 10:34), the account seems to suggest that the return of Christ would be "six days" (9:2) after the resurrection.

Looking for the place called Galilee

Where would the return of Christ take place? In Mark's Gospel, it seems that the appointed spot was Galilee (14:28; 16:7). Is the site literal or symbolic? If Galilee is to be taken literally, does this mean that this was a message written only for Palestinian Christians? What about the Christians outside of Palestine in cities stretching from Antioch to Rome through Ephesus and Corinth?

Mark's Gospel was written sometime after A.D. 70, when the mission to the Gentiles had brought many non-Jews into the church. By that time, a majority of Christians were of Gentile origin. Though the geographical site of Jesus' ministry was in Palestine, Galilee may have been used as a symbol to refer to the Gentile mission and to the place of non-Jewish Christians.

Mark's concern for the conversion of Gentiles seems implied by a number of references to other peoples, to the nations, and to the ends of the earth. He sees these as places in which the gospel needs to be preached (13:10, 27; 14:9). Mark also referred to many Gentiles who benefited from Jesus' teaching and healing.

The people known as Gerasenes were Gentiles (5:1). Jesus taught in the Decapolis, a series of Greek cities on the edge of Galilee (5:20). It was here that Jesus healed a deaf mute man (7:32-35). At another time, Jesus healed a Greek woman (7:26). The most important testimony about Jesus and the climax of Mark's Gospel was given by a Roman soldier (15:39).

Gentiles were part of Mark's vision of the church. They would not be overlooked in the coming of Jesus. Since to Mark, Galilee had come to mean the place of the Gentiles, it was likely a place of more symbolic than geographical meaning. The references to Galilee may be telling us that the place of glory was to be outside of Jerusalem, even outside of Palestine.

Old Testament Texts

The passion account contains a number of references to the Old Testament:

15:23 = Ps. 69:21

15:24 = Ps. 22:18

15:29 = Ps. 22:7

15:34 = Ps. 22:1

15:36 = Ps. 69:21

Radical service for those in sore distress

Mark was writing to Christian congregations who were distressed by the unsettled conditions of their day following war, the destruction of cities, and the loss of sacred landmarks. They were confused in their faith by the words of false prophets and they were disturbed by the delay of the return of Christ. They had seen the beginnings of the war as a sure sign that the end of their distress was near, but instead, life became more difficult.

Mark's message was a call to watchfulness and faithfulness. He could give no specifics about the time of Christ's return. But he was sure that it would be soon and that it would come without warning (13:32-37).

Mark also gave a call to faithfulness. As disciples, as preachers, and as healers, follow Jesus (1:39; 3:14, 15; 6:13). Yours will be a radical service. Abandon everything (10:28). Go on your mission with only the bare essentials (6:8, 9). Be prepared to be rejected (6:4), prepared to leave your families and join with your true family in the faith (3:20, 21, 31-35). This new family includes women (1:31; 10:30; 15:40, 41), children (9:33-37; 10:13, 16), and Gentiles (5:1-20; 7:24-30; 15:39). Wealth in this new community will not be greatly valued and, in fact, will be found to be a hindrance (10:17-27).

Such was Mark's message for a church in sore distress.

Discovery

1. What was the specific message(s) of the Gospel of Mark for the Christians of the first century? Does this message apply to us in our age?
 2. How do you evaluate the suggestion that the Gospel of Mark was written by an anonymous writer? What evidence would be needed to give a clue to the author's identity?
 3. Describe the congregation that the writer of the Gospel of Mark had in mind in writing this message.
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Resources

Kee, Young, and Froehlich. "The Community Confronts Major Crises," *Understanding the New Testament*. Chapter 11. Pages 251-70.

Son of God/Son of Man

Mark, in the first half of his Gospel maintains a balance between his use of Son of God with his use of Son of Man.

Son of God: 1:1; 1:11; 3:11; 5:7; 9:7; 14:61; 15:39

Son of Man: 2:10; 2:28; 8:31; 8:38; 9:9; 9:12; 9:31; 10:33; 10:45; 13:26; [13:32]; 14:21 [twice]; 14:41; 14:62.

Son of David: 10:47; 10:48; 12:35

Inventory

1. Identify:
Son of God
Son of Man
2. Who said, "Truly this man was the Son of God"?
3. Who is the person(s) in each era of church history to "preach" and then be "delivered up"?
4. When used as a symbol, to what do the following apply:
Galilee?
Transfiguration?

CHAPTER 30

The New Moses

32

Gist

The Gospel of Matthew addresses itself to a special time in the plan of God: the age of the church. In this era, the task of the believers was bringing the gospel to "all nations." For this mission, Jesus trained the disciples as a new order of teachers. Matthew shows Jesus as a successor to Moses with a command to love as a fulfillment of the Law. Jesus commissioned the church to act on earth for God. For this responsibility the church found strength in the presence of the resurrected Christ in its midst.

When the early Christians were looking over their collected writings, weighing the ones that should be included in the canon as sacred Scriptures, the Gospel of Mark appeared to them as a shortened version of Matthew's Gospel.

Though we now know that Matthew was based on Mark and not the other way around, Mark's connection with Matthew was certainly a good endorsement. For Matthew was a most popular book with the early Christian congregations and their leaders. They picked it to be first among the Gospels.

Matthew spoke of the Christian community as the church, and was the only evangelist to do so. Special teachings in Matthew were directed to the church. Matthew saw the time after the days of Jesus as the age of the church.

First in the hearts of the church

While we do not know who wrote this Gospel, we will, for the sake of convenience, call the writer Matthew. The author had a deep concern for evangelism to non-Jews. His Gospel ends with the Great Commission which opens up the work of the Christian congregations to "all nations" (Matt. 28:19).

Yet he was not unmindful of the Jews. It is in this Gospel that we hear Jesus speaking about the "lost sheep of the house of Israel" (10:6; 15:24). Matthew also gave a good bit of attention to trends in the synagogues. What is written in this Gospel about scribes and Pharisees may be responding to many things that were happening in the Jewish communities at the end of the first century.

Since Matthew drew much of his material from Mark, we know that he wrote after the time of Mark, perhaps a generation later. Both wrote after the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Matthew's reference to that

disaster appears in the parable of the marriage feast where the angry king burned down the city of the men who had murdered his son (Matt. 22:7).

Search for a temple substitute

The destruction of Jerusalem was a blow to both the Jewish and Christian communities. We get a measure of its impact in Matthew's Gospel. Deprived of the temple, the central and most holy symbol of their faith, the Jews needed to find a replacement for it.

Nothing since the first fall of Jerusalem to Nebuchadnezzar, in 587 B.C., had changed Jewish life as dramatically and suddenly as the destruction of the temple by the Romans. Yet it was also a continuation of the process that had begun in the Babylonian Exile.

Though even before its fall, the temple was no longer at the center of Christian community life, this shrine had been an expression of the traditions the followers of Jesus shared with the people of Israel. The Christians too had to find a substitute for the temple.

Pressed by a coming overdue

While Matthew and the Christian congregations for whom he wrote were concerned about the temple, they had an even more pressing concern. What were they to make of the delay of the return of Jesus as the Son of Man to judge and redeem the world? When Mark had written a generation earlier, the coming was already overdue, and Mark reassured the believers that Jesus would return in a short time.

But as Matthew was writing, it was perhaps twenty years later, and the answers and exhortations given by Mark no longer applied. A new interpretation was now due.

The church was coming to the place where it needed to take action about its own future. If the coming of Christ would be delayed for a number of years, then measures would need to be taken to provide for the leadership of the congregations and for the teaching of their members.

Jesus as sum of all law and prophets

Matthew began this task by pointing to Jesus as the fulfillment of Scripture—of the Law and of the Prophets. He filled his Gospel with a series of verses from the Old Testament showing how prophecy had been fulfilled in the life and ministry of Jesus. These quotations were original with Matthew. They were not drawn from either of his two major sources: the Gospel of Mark or Sayings Source Q.

In this way, Jesus fulfilled the Torah. Matthew used the organization of his Gospel to make the same point. He included in the Gospel five major discourses. Each concluded with a formula ending: "when Jesus finished these sayings." The number five in Hebrew piety referred most often to the first five books of the Old Testament, which to the Jews were known as the Torah.

The first of Matthew's five discourses was the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5—7) which carried the additional symbolism of a new revelation delivered from a mountain just as Moses brought the Law down from Sinai. Jesus must have appeared to Matthew as a prophet greater than Moses because as the Son of God he gave a new Torah

Journal

Read the Gospel of Matthew, writing down your observations.

Note the large blocks of material that appear in Matthew that are not included in the Gospel of Mark.

Mark or note the Old Testament quotations or references.

Compare Matthew 1:1 with Mark 1:1.

Compare the resurrection chapter of Matthew with the account in Mark.

Seed

“Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them” (Matt. 5:17).

And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes (7:28, 29).

“Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (18:19, 20).

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age” (28:18-20).

Judaism After the Fall of Jerusalem

During the days of Jesus, four parties shaped the daily life of Judaism: the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Essenes, and the Zealots. But only the Pharisees survived the Roman sword and torch in the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

The Sadducees had compromised with the Romans in order to maintain their control of the temple and the priesthood. When the Romans turned on them and all Jews, they lost their base of power.

The Essenes, the conser-

which replaced the Torah of Moses with a command to love, fulfilling all of the Law and the Prophets (7:12).

A new order of scribes for Jesus

Interpretation of this Law was the work of the Pharisees. Jesus agreed that they had a right to rule on the meaning of the Law: “The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat; so practice and observe whatever they tell you” (Matt. 23:2, 3a). But he objected to their practice, because he warned: “but [do] not [do] what they do; for they preach, but do not practice” (v. 3b).

For Matthew, the source of the Law for the Christian was Jesus. The new order of scribes were the disciples whom Jesus was training for ministry. But while they were disciples, they were not yet ready for the teaching task. First, they would need to be commissioned.

In Matthew’s Gospel, only Jesus taught. It was only at the end of the Gospel, when the disciples had graduated from their course of study that they were commissioned by the resurrected Christ to go and make disciples of all nations “teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.” That was their Great Commission (Matt. 28:19, 20).

In Mark’s Gospel, the disciples appear as dullards, always misunderstanding Jesus’ predictions of the passion. But Matthew saw the disciples as being prepared to take Jesus’ place as interpreter of the Law, so he treated them more respectfully. If they were to be the scribes of the kingdom (Matt. 13:52), they were as worthy of respect as the scribes of the Pharisees.

More time for the age of the church

Matthew, even more than Mark, had to face the meaning of the delay of the return of Jesus. Perhaps twenty years had passed since Mark wrote about Christ’s return. Matthew continued to believe in the eventual return of Christ, but he saw it as further off in the distance.

We note this in Matthew 24, where the author adapted the apocalypse of Mark 13 for his own writing. There he added a telling note in his version of Mark 13:10: “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached *throughout the whole world*, as a testimony to all nations; *and then the end will come*” (Matt. 24:14, italics added).

Matthew had extended the time for the coming of Jesus until the church had time to preach the gospel to the “whole world.” Thus, he projected an age of the church, a period when the church could fulfill the mission it had begun but which had not yet been completed. At the end of this period, the church would be judged on how well it had carried out its work (Matt. 13:36-43).

Now a church that acts for God

Getting the church in shape for this task was most important. Matthew gave a good bit of attention to the health of the body of Christ. It is only Matthew’s Gospel, in fact, that uses the word *church*—and it uses it twice. In 16:18, the word appears in Peter’s confession taken from Mark 8:27—9:1. Here, Peter received a blessing for his insight (Matt. 16:17) and then was commissioned as the founder of the church: “on this rock I will build my church” (v. 18).

This statement made clear the great authority that the church received: to act on earth in behalf of God. In the second use of the word

church, a similar emphasis is made. After speaking of the duty of the church to exercise discipline (18:17), Jesus says, "Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (v. 18). The church had been vested with a large responsibility.

Power in the presence of the risen Christ

While Mark called his book "the gospel," and identified Jesus as "Son of God," Matthew gave his message a different title: "The *book* of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham" (1:1). Jesus' descent from King David qualified him to be the royal Messiah.

Abraham, the father of Israel, was the one who received a promise for the nations. Matthew intended to show that the covenant had come to fulfillment in Jesus Christ, whom he also acclaimed as Lord and Son of Man.

The power of the church grew out of the presence of the risen Christ in the midst of its congregations. It was the high note on which Matthew ended his book: "Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age" (28:20).

That this was the power that belonged to the church was also noted in Matthew's chapter on church order where Jesus says, "For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (18:20).

They called the presence Emmanuel

The first note on the theme of the presence of Christ appeared in the name of Emmanuel, "God with us" (1:23). Jesus Christ is Emmanuel because he is God's Son (1:1, 18, 20).

In the temptation episode, Matthew showed his readers just what kind of Son Jesus proved to be. The wilderness test of Jesus (4:1-11) was contrasted with the wilderness experience of the Israelites through quotations from Deuteronomy that responded to each of the three temptations (4:4 = Deut 8:3; 4:7 = Deut. 6:16; 4:10 = Deut. 6:13). Where God's son, Israel, failed, Jesus as God's Son (4:3, 6) succeeded; therefore, Jesus is the faithful and obedient Son of God.

Jesus is also Emmanuel because he is the Wisdom of God. Wisdom was identified as part of the Torah by the Jews. Matthew included several passages which spoke of Jesus in the language of the Wisdom literature (11:18, 19, 28-30; 23:34-39).

Salvation for the people outside

The title that Matthew gave to his book suggested that he was writing the history of God's action in behalf of God's people. It is a report that might be called a history of salvation.

The part of salvation history that Matthew called to our attention is the chapter in which he played a role: extending the covenant to people outside the family of Israel. Matthew reported that Jesus limited his

vative sect opposed to the Sadducees, fared no better. They had withdrawn to their desert outpost at Qumran. When war came, they joined the forces fighting the Romans and saw their community destroyed by the soldiers of the empire.

The Zealots, as the revolutionists, took the lead in the Jewish War. Even after Jerusalem fell, they tried to keep up the resistance, but eventually retreated to their hilltop fortress of Masada where the Romans overpowered them.

The Pharisees survived as moderates who had given themselves singlemindedly to the teaching of the Law. Through the synagogues which they had fostered, they provided a vital center of life which helped the Jews to survive as a people with their faith intact. The synagogues made the Law ever more central in Judaism, filling the void left by the temple's destruction.

The church of the latter part of the first century confronted only the Judaism of the Pharisees.

Parts of Matthew I

1:1—4:17. God's new revelation

4:18—13:58. Jesus' ministry to Israel

14:1—20:34. Jesus' ministry to his disciples

21:1—25:46. Confrontation in Jerusalem

26:1—28:20. Trial, crucifixion, resurrection, and Great Commission

Parts of Matthew II

Another outline of Matthew finds the divisions of the material in the formula words in 4:17 and 16:21: "From that time Jesus began. . . ."

1:1—4:16. The Person of Jesus the Messiah

4:17—16:20. The Proclamation of Jesus the Messiah

16:21—28:20. The Trial, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus the Messiah

Formula Quotes

Matthew had a formula for introducing Old Testament quotations into his text, usually: "all this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet" (1:22).

1:22, 23 = Isa. 7:14
2:5, 6 = Mic. 5:2; 2 Sam. 5:2

2:15 = Hos. 11:1
2:17, 18 = Jer. 31:15

2:23 = ?Isa. 11:1
4:14-16 = Isa. 9:1, 2

8:17 = Isa. 53:4
12:17-21 = Isa. 42:1-4

13:35 = Ps. 78:2
21:4, 5 = Isa. 62:11; Zech. 9:9

27:9, 10 = Zech. 11:12, 13; Jer. 18:1-13; 32:6-15

Matthew's Matthew

The Gospel of Matthew, when first circulated, did not carry its author's name. The church of a later age attributed it to Matthew, one of the disciples of Jesus. It was a tribute of respect for a book that spoke with authority to the concerns of the church, but without proof that Matthew was the writer.

The writer seems to be a Greek-speaking Jewish Christian interested in the mission to the Gentiles but a person with a concern for the Jews as well.

The description of a "scribe who has been

mission to the "lost sheep of the house of Israel" (10:5; 15:24). But by the time we get to the end of his book, the risen Christ sends the disciples out to teach "all nations" (28:19).

Because Jesus was the giver of a new Torah, we may see Matthew's book as the revelation of Jesus, a revelation which he shared with his disciples. The sharing began with the calling of four fishermen (4:18-22) who were later called disciples (5:1).

Revelations from the books of Jesus

The first book of the new revelation was the Sermon on the Mount (5:1—7:29). It dealt with the personal and spiritual life. Salt and light demonstrated the important role reserved for the disciples as witnesses to the world (5:13-16).

The essence of the Christian faith is faithfulness to the new revelation (5:17-20). For Jews, obedience to the Torah was counted as righteousness. The disciples would have to be truer to the revelation imparted to them by Jesus than the scribes and Pharisees had been to the Torah.

To illustrate the new life, Jesus spoke of the commands to respect the sacredness of life, sexual purity and faithfulness in marriage, truth, and love. He showed that the new revelation was more radical and demanding than the old Law (5:21-48).

Almsgiving, prayer, and fasting were important expressions of faith in Judaism, acts of piety independent of the temple that had always been given special emphasis by the Pharisees (6:1-18). These are the points at which we feel the tension between Jesus and the Pharisees as well as the strain between the church and the synagogue.

Ministry that ends in rejection

The Sermon on the Mount is followed by a report of ten miracles that Jesus performed in Galilee (8:1—9:34). The miracles may have been intended to recall the ten plagues (or miracles) of Moses in Egypt (Exod. 7:8—11:10).

Jesus gave a missionary discourse (10:1—11:1) at the time that he sent the disciples out to preach and heal (but not to teach, a charge they would not receive until the revelation from Jesus was completed). This was a mission to the house of Israel (10:6).

The next installment of the revelation of Jesus came with the parables of the kingdom (13:1-52). These parables of the sower, weeds, mustard seed, and leaven interpret the ministry of Jesus as one of both rejection and acceptance. But they hold out the hope for eventual acceptance. This phase of Jesus' ministry ended with rejection by his own people (13:53-58).

Lessons learned on the way to Jerusalem

Denied a hearing from his own people, Jesus turned more directly to his disciples, instructing them in the meaning of his new revelation (14:1—20:34). The crowds continued to follow Jesus, and he had compassion on them and healed them. On one occasion, he fed

5,000 (14:13-21). It was in this great work that Jesus gave the disciples the task of distributing the loaves (v. 19), involving them in the ritual of the broken bread which would mean so much for the later life of the church.

In teaching the disciples, Jesus began to tell them about his coming trial and death that would be followed by resurrection (16:13—20:34). This was also the time to teach them the meaning of life in the Christian community that would be formed following the resurrection (18:1-35).

When Jesus and his disciples arrived in Jerusalem, he gave his final instructions to the disciples. At this time he became entangled in heated controversies with the Jewish leaders (21:1—25:46). As a result, woes were pronounced against the Pharisees (23:1-36). In Matthew's hands, these became a carefully framed diatribe against the synagogues of the first century. The charges leveled against them were not aimed at their teachings, but at their practice.

This was followed by the lament over Jerusalem (23:37-39) which is a Christian interpretation of the fall of the city. Its people rejected the gospel and its messengers and thus brought disaster down upon themselves.

Last was the teaching on obedience

This set the stage for Matthew's version of Mark 13's end times discourse (24:1-36). Matthew extended Mark's interpretation by adding a series of parables—the Ten Maidens, the Talents, and the Last Judgment (25:1-46).

The third of these parables was the last teaching from Jesus to be given in Matthew's Gospel, and in a special way summed up many of the themes of his previous words. Those who would enter the kingdom would need to have a righteousness grounded in obedience (25:31-46). At the time of judgment, the Son of Man will repay each one according to that person's deeds. Those found to be righteous were those who aided the weak and oppressed. The unrighteous were sent "into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life" (v. 46). It was a sobering conclusion to the teachings of Jesus.

In his account of the trial of Jesus (26:1—27:66), Matthew followed Mark quite closely but with some minor changes. In 27:19, he added a note on the innocence of Jesus which heightened the guilt of the Jews who had brought the charges against Jesus. He makes this even more plain in the dialogue of Pilate with the people (27:24, 25).

Commission for a greater group of disciples

It is in the resurrection account (28:1-20), that Matthew extended his reporting beyond that of Mark's. The Great Commission given in Galilee is the climax of the Gospel as the risen Christ empowered the disciples to go into the world and make new disciples (28:16-20).

The commission was addressed to a larger body of disciples than those who had gone to Jerusalem with Jesus. This charge was also delivered to the church. And these believers did not set out by themselves or even in their own strength for the presence and power of the risen Christ went with them.

trained for the kingdom of heaven" (13:52), may be the writer's description of himself. He may have had background as a scholar in the Scriptures.

While we do not know this writer's name, it is convenient to refer to the author as Matthew.

M Source in Matthew

Matthew has a great deal of material that he did not draw from the Gospel of Mark or from Sayings Source Q. This is his special M Source (or Matthew's material).

3:14, 15
10:16-33: Persecution of Disciples
10:16—11:1: Discipleship
12:5-7: Sabbath Laws
13:24-30, 36-43: Parable of Tares
18:15-35: Forgiveness
19:10-12: Singleness
20:1-16: Parable of Vineyard
22:1-14: The Wedding Feast
23:2, 3, 8-39: Pharisees/hypocrites
25:1-30: Coming of the Kingdom
28:16-20: Great Commission

Return Address

The city from which the Gospel of Matthew was written is not mentioned in the book. Clues are few.

Antioch in Syria has been suggested as a place that might match the interests of its message—the place where the mission to the Gentiles made its beginning, but a place with a sizable Jewish community also.

Antioch was also close to Palestine, close enough to have strong ties with the Jewish Christian church.

Five Discourses

Matthew arranged the teachings of Jesus into five major discourses, each of which ended with a formula like “when Jesus finished these sayings.”

5:1—7:27. The Sermon on the Mount [7:28]

10:5-42. Missionary Instructions [11:1]

13:1-52. Kingdom Parables [13:53]

18:1-35. Christian Community [19:1]

24:3—25:46. Signs of the Coming [26:1]

Inventory

1. Identify:

Essenes

Pharisees

Sadducees

Sayings Source Q

Torah

Zealots

2. Name two of the five major discourses in the Gospel of Matthew.

3. Name two ways in which Moses is recalled in the ministry of Jesus.

Discovery

1. What kind of person was the author of the Gospel of Matthew? In what ways was he like the author of the Gospel of Mark? In what ways was he different?

2. Was the writer of Matthew more interested in the mission to the Jews or the mission to the Gentiles? What evidence can be given to support either view?

3. What was the nature of the congregation in which this Gospel was first read? Where might it have been located? What might have been the background of its members? What were the issues discussed at their meetings. What things were mentioned in their prayers?

Resources

Kee, Young, and Froehlich. “The New Way of Righteousness,” *Understanding the New Testament*. Chapter 12. Pages 271-93.

The Gospel of Luke

As the church grew, Gentiles soon began to outnumber Jews. A book written for these congregations would reflect the life of the non-Jewish majority in the Christian community.

From its opening words, the Gospel of Luke claimed to be an "orderly account" (1:3), meaning that it would follow a form of writing known in Greek and Roman circles. This carefully composed report was addressed to a person with a Greek name (Theophilus, v. 3), a Christian otherwise unknown, but one who belonged to the growing body of believers from Gentile ranks.

Thus, the writer in presenting the Sermon on the Mount (which in Luke became the Sermon on the Plain, 6:17-49), omitted those items referring to the Mosaic law (Matt. 5:21-48). He passed over the debates about ritual cleanliness so common to Jewish life (Mark 7:1-23). Touches common to Greek and Roman city life were added to the stories from rural Palestine. Roofs had tiles (5:19) instead of plaster (Mark 2:4). Houses had foundations (6:48, 49) instead of a simple base set on the earth (Matt. 7:24-27). Jewish titles like rabbi (Mark 9:5 mg.; 10:51 mg.) and scribe (Mark 12:28; Matt. 23:13) were turned into more common Greek forms (9:33; 18:41; 10:25; 11:52) even as our modern English translations of the Bible have done for us. The Hebrew place name for Golgotha (Mark 15:22) became The Skull (23:33).

Two volumes for two cities

Luke and its companion volume, the Acts of the Apostles, were written about the same time as the Gospel of Matthew, about a generation after the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. The church was taking on the

CHAPTER 31

Liberator

39

Gist

The Gospel of Luke came to a church with members mostly from non-Jewish backgrounds. These new believers who faced toward Rome as their cultural home were still concerned about the fallen city of Jerusalem and their own roots in Judaism. As Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, had made a pilgrimage to Rome, Jesus with his disciples had sojourned to Jerusalem. Now Jesus, by way of the Gospel of Luke, came to this Gentile world with a program of action and a commission to the

church to witness from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth about the acceptable year of the Lord. Such a year was good news especially to the poor and the lost, to the sinners and the outcast. Those were the persons to whom the Savior-Liberator brought salvation and membership in the covenant of Israel.

Journal

Read the Gospel of Luke, and make notes of your observations. Look for material not found in Mark or Matthew. Note new ideas that Luke introduces.

List questions about the Gospel of Luke that you would want to have answered in this chapter.

Compare the birth narratives of Luke with those of Matthew. What things do they have in common? What new material does Luke introduce?

Compare Luke's Sermon on the Plain (6:20-49) with Matthew's Sermon on the Mount (5-7).

Compare the resurrection account of Luke (chap. 24) with that of Matthew.

form of an institution, recognizing that Christ would not return on clouds of glory as soon as Mark had expected.

The Christian congregations were still concerned about the religion of the Jews in which their faith would always have its roots. But now they faced the growing might of the Roman Empire and the nearly overwhelming power of Greek culture. They had to find ways of living in such a world.

Two cities loom large in Luke-Acts: Jerusalem and Rome. Both were goals for major journeys. Jesus set out for Jerusalem, a journey that took over ten chapters to record (Luke 9:51—19:27). In the same way, Paul made a long trip to Rome (Acts 19:21—28:16), a journey filled with adventure. Though Rome is not mentioned in the Gospel of Luke, it is a city that hovers over all that is written there, for it was a city equal in importance to Jerusalem for the Gentile Christians.

Jerusalem is mentioned seventy-four times in Luke-Acts. A city holy to the people of Israel, it was also a place with special meaning even for the believers of non-Jewish background because it was here that Jesus was brought to trial and crucified. But at the time that the Gospel of Luke was being written and read, Jerusalem was a blackened ruin and its temple defiled.

The Gospel of Luke remembered the city for its link with Jesus who "set his face to go to Jerusalem" (9:51) because "it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem" (13:33b). It was in Jerusalem that the resurrected Christ taught the disciples and from here that he ascended to heaven (24:50, 51; Acts 1:9).

Themes in two long trips

It was from Jerusalem that the Christian mission set out. After the ascension, the thrust was ever outward away from Jerusalem (Acts 1:8). All three accounts of Paul's conversion placed the beginning of his witnessing in Jerusalem (Acts 9:28; 22:17; 26:20).

Paul's journey from Jerusalem to Rome implied that the center of gravity in the life of the Christian congregations had now shifted to Rome. Paul had already preached there "about the Lord Jesus Christ quite openly and unhindered" (Acts 28:31, the last words of Luke-Acts).

The image of the road to Jerusalem and the path to Rome were major themes for Luke-Acts, touched off by an early quote from Isaiah 40:3-5: "Prepare the way of the Lord . . . and all flesh shall see the salvation of God" (Luke 3:4, 6).

Acceptable year ahead of clouds of heaven

Like Matthew, Luke had to deal with the delay of the long expected return of Jesus on the clouds of heaven. Luke still remembered the promises (3:9, 17; 10:9, 11; 18:7, 8; 21:32). But since the return of Christ would apparently take place at an indefinite point in the future, the church had more time to work and witness. Luke wanted to be about that task.

This aim shaped the way that Luke presented Mark's material. For Mark, the message of Jesus was, "The Kingdom of God is at hand" (Mark 1:15). Taking the same material, Luke left out the message and only noted the event (Luke 4:14).

Then, Luke took the sermon at Nazareth, an episode that Mark and Matthew had placed later (Mark 6:1-6; Matt. 13:53-58), brought it

Seed

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative . . . it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the truth concerning the things of which you have been informed (Luke 1:1, 3, 4).

He opened the book and found the place where it was written, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the

forward, and made it the setting for the opening proclamation of the ministry of Jesus. In Luke's treatment, the goal of Jesus' mission is to "preach good news to the poor . . . release to the captives . . . liberty [to] those who are oppressed . . . the acceptable year of the Lord" (Luke 4:18, 19, based on Isa. 61:1, 2; 58:5, 6). The apocalyptic theme had become less pressing. Jesus was savior of all and he had a program of action to be carried out in this world.

Adding the time of the Gentiles

Luke, like Matthew, carried the material from the apocalyptic chapter of Mark 13, making changes to fit his own era. Matthew had already adjusted the time of the end to allow that the "gospel of the kingdom [be] preached throughout the whole world" (Matt. 24:14). For Luke, the end would not come "until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled" (21:24).

This meant that time, according to Luke, had been allotted in God's scheme of things for the mission to the Gentiles which would include Matthew's vision of preaching the gospel of the kingdom to the whole world. Luke was not one of those who expected the return of Christ to be soon. In fact, he labeled those who said, "The time is at hand!" (21:8) as false prophets.

Many things had to take place before the end. And when Jesus says, "Truly . . . this generation will not pass away till all has taken place" (21:32), the generation in view was not that of Jesus or even that of Luke, but a generation in the future. Meanwhile, the church had work to do: "You shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8b).

Luke's view was one of a movement outward from Jerusalem into the surrounding countryside of Judea, into the neighboring provinces, including Samaria, and then to the end of the earth. Rome was certainly an important way station on that route.

Christian witness set for the long haul

This meant that discipleship was no longer geared for a crisis that would shortly erupt. Rather, it was Christian witnessing for the long haul. The disciples could now expect to have to take up their crosses "daily" (9:23). Calculation of the time of the end was really impossible (21:34-36; 12:35, 40-48). The only way to be ready for the coming of Jesus would be to stay ready.

In the meantime, they could expect that they would experience a time when the word of God would increase, would grow and multiply, and prevail mightily (Acts 6:7; 12:24; 19:20), because as disciples, they would be empowered by the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8; 2:4).

The life of the disciples would give evidence of the gracious reign of God, being marked by joy (Luke 2:10; Acts 2:46; 8:8; 13:52; 15:3) and freedom from anxiety (Luke 8:14; 10:41, 42; 12:11, 22-26; 21:34). When the end would come, believers who knew the goodness of God's kingdom could "look up and raise [their] heads, because [their] redemption is drawing near" (Luke 21:28), being "times of refreshing" and "time for establishing all" (Acts 3:19, 21).

poor . . . to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord" (4:17-19).

"Today salvation has come to this house, since [Zacchaeus] also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of man came to seek and to save the lost" (19:9, 10).

When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognized him; and he vanished out of their sight. They said to each other, "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures?" (24:30-32).

While he blessed them, he parted from them. . . . And they returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple blessing God (24:51-53).

The Parts of Luke

1:1-4: Luke-Acts: an Introduction

1:5—4:13: Ministry of the Spirit Through Jesus: an Introduction

4:14—9:50: Ministry in Galilee

9:51—19:27: Journey to Jerusalem

19:28—21:38: Jesus in Jerusalem

22:1—23:49: The Passion Narrative

23:50—24:53: Burial, Resurrection, and Ascension

Luke's Luke

A tradition going back to the second century has identified the author of the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles as Luke, a follower of Paul and a physician (Philem. 24, Col 4:14).

While some have found hints in the language used in Luke-Acts that might have been that of a medical person, the evidence is far from conclusive. Comparisons between the letters of Paul and Acts seem to show that the writer of Acts was not personally acquainted with Paul.

So, as with the Gospels of Mark and Matthew, we are left with an anonymous author, whom we may, for the sake of convenience, call Luke, knowing that the person so named is probably not the historical Luke mentioned by Paul.

Coming to terms with the powers that be

As the Christians of the days of Luke-Acts settled in for the long pull, they saw that they had to come to terms with the powers in the world—which, for them in the first century, meant the Roman Empire. If the Christians had thought that the world would soon pass away, they could have been indifferent to the world powers, even have reviled and taunted them.

But this was not the posture of Luke-Acts. In Acts, we hear Paul speaking proudly of his Roman citizenship, an asset that often saved him from disaster. The officers of the Roman army and even its governors and kings are treated with respect and appreciation. A Roman administrator in Cyprus believed (Acts 13:12); Gallio, the Roman agent in Achaia, defended Paul against the Jews (Acts 18:14, 15).

So also was it in Luke's Gospel. Pilate found no fault in Jesus (Luke 23:4). Though he was in reality Jesus' executioner, Pilate, as sketched by Luke, comes through almost as a kindly father figure.

Jews first and then the Gentiles

Within the Gospel of Luke, we find the Gentile church confirming its ties with Israel. It was clear that salvation had been offered first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles (Acts 13:46). Salvation belonged to the Jews because of the promise to Abraham (Luke 1:73; 16:24-31; Acts 7:2). The meaning of salvation, in fact, could be stated as being a "son of Abraham" (Luke 19:9). The missions of both John the Baptist and of Jesus were directed to the Jews (1:16, 17; 2:25, 26, 32). All of the early converts to the church were from among the Palestinian Jews (Acts 2:41; 4:4; 6:7; 21:20).

But the Gospel of Luke foreshadowed the claim of the covenant on the Gentiles as well. Simeon spoke of "salvation . . . prepared in the presence of all peoples" (Luke 2:30, 31). The text from Isaiah that introduced John was enlarged by Luke to include the passage promising that "all flesh shall see the salvation of God" (3:6; cf. Mark 1:2, 3; Isa. 40:3-5). When speaking about the coming great banquet, Jesus noted that "men will come from east and west, and from north and south, and sit at table in the kingdom of God" (Luke 13:29), signaling the coming of persons from outside Israel. For another feast, the master finding his first invitations rejected called in guests from the poor in "the streets and lanes of the city" (the Jews) and from "the highways and the hedges" (the Gentiles) (Luke 14:21-23).

And thus it happened in Acts that the non-Jews and Gentiles do come into the church beginning with the Samaritans (8:5, 6) and with Cornelius the centurion (10:1). Salvation could be offered to these people because this was a part of salvation history from the beginning.

Three parts for salvation's history

Luke saw history divided into three eras which he outlined in Luke 16:16: the time of "the law and the prophets . . . until John" was one period. Then came two periods for the preaching of "the good news of the kingdom of God." One was the age of Jesus and the other was the age of the church (Acts 28:31).

The age of Jesus began with the descent of the Spirit on Jesus at the time of his baptism (Luke 3:22) and ended when the Spirit returned to God (23:46). Before the era of the church could begin, there was an

interim period when Jesus, risen from the dead, instructed the disciples in the mysteries of the kingdom of God, after which he ascended into heaven (Acts 1:1-11; Luke 24:51).

The period of the church, like the era of Jesus, was marked in its beginning by the descent of the Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2:4), which Jesus had described as a baptism (Acts 1:5). A reassuring symbol of the period of the church was Paul's arrival in Rome where he began "preaching the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ quite openly and unhindered" (Acts 28:31).

This third era will end with the return of Jesus (Luke 21:25-28) though no one knows the precise time when this will take place (Luke 17:20, 21; 19:11; 21:8, 9; Acts 1:7).

Law and prophets in days of old

The era of the Law and the Prophets was the time before the preaching of the kingdom of God (Luke 16:16). This was the period that was marked by prophecy. God spoke to his people by the prophets, beginning with Moses, the giver of the Law.

In the first fall of Jerusalem and the Babylonian Exile, the people became aware that the time of the prophets had come to an end. But, as the author of Luke-Acts saw it, prophecy was restored in the later eras of Jesus and the church (Acts 2:17, 18).

Luke made the careful distinction of an interim period between John and the beginning of the preaching of the kingdom of God by Jesus. To Luke, John seemed a representative of the past era, "a prophet of the Most High" (Luke 1:76). He was vested in the tradition of the prophets of the former age. Yet he was also part of the age to come because he did preach the good news (Luke 3:18).

The middle age for Jesus

But when the Spirit descended on Jesus, the middle age of the three eras of Luke's salvation history began. It was through the Spirit that Jesus was singled out as the Son of God (3:22). When he was "full of the Holy Spirit," Jesus was led by the Spirit (4:1) into the wilderness where he was tested as the Son of God (4:3, 9). Jesus then returned "in the power of the Spirit into Galilee" (4:14), where he began his public ministry.

And when he announced his ministry, it was with the use of a Spirit prophecy from Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me" (4:18; cf. Isa. 61:1). The Spirit of Isaiah's prophecy, Jesus says, had fallen on him and thus the prophecy had been fulfilled "today" (4:21).

Liberating words for poor and lost

Those words in the Nazareth synagogue had special meaning. In them, Luke found one of the main themes for the rest of his Gospel. The rejection at Nazareth came because Jesus announced through his references to Elijah's and Elisha's ministries to non-Jews that the good news would eventually be preached to Gentiles (4:25-30).

Another important thread was in the definition of the "acceptable year of the Lord" as the time when the oppressed and suffering would be restored (4:18, 19). This good news was the liberating word for the poor and outcast, persons to whom Jesus was drawn. Note the parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son (Luke 15); the outcast tax collector who beats his breast and cries out "God be merciful to me a

Luke's Special Source

Luke's special source, called L, accounts for over 400 verses of material besides the unique material in the infancy narratives of Luke 1—2.

A sample of some of this special material which Luke drew from a source not available to the other Gospel writers:

5:1-11: Call of Disciples

7:11-17: Widow of Nain

7:36-50: Woman of the City

10:25-37: The Good Samaritan

10:38-42: Mary and Martha

12:13-21: The Rich Fool

15:1-32: Three Parables of the Lost

16:19-31: Rich Man and Lazarus

17:11-19: The Ten Lepers

18:9-14: Pharisee and Tax Collector

19:1-10: Zacchaeus

23:27-31: Women of Jerusalem

24:13-53: Road to Emmaus

Jesus at Prayer

At important times in the life of Jesus, the Gospel of Luke shows Jesus at prayer:

3:21: Baptism

6:12: Choosing disciples

9:18: Teaching disciples

9:28: Transfiguration

11:1: Teaching prayer

22:41: Mount of Olives

Teachings on Prayer

6:28: Pray for enemies

10:2: Pray for evangelists

11:1-3: The Disciple's

Prayer

18:1-8: Pray and don't lose heart

21:36: Prayer to escape

Salvation History

Luke-Acts sees the history of salvation in three eras or ages (Luke 16:16):

First Age: The time of the Law and the Prophets, from Adam to John the Baptist.

Interim: The time of the birth and infancy of John and Jesus, and the ministry of John.

Second Age: The time of the proclamation of the kingdom of God by Jesus, from the descent of the Spirit at his baptism to the return of the Spirit to God from the cross.

Interim: The interlude between resurrection and ascension, Jesus gives special teaching to the disciples.

Third Age: The time of the proclamation of the kingdom of God by the church, from the descent of the Spirit at Pentecost to the return of Christ.

sinner!" (18:13); the poor widow who won the attention of an unjust judge (18:1-8) and the repentant thief who gained a berth in paradise (23:43).

Jesus, said Peter, was the savior who "went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil" (Acts 10:38). Luke added even more to this description of Jesus. He was the Son of God whose genealogy went all the way back to Adam (Luke 3:38), thus linking the Savior-Liberator with all humankind. But, as the Acts passage shows, he was also the Servant-Messiah.

The cross as the Messiah's service

The quality of servanthood was carried over into Luke's portrayal of the crucifixion. To Mark, Jesus gave "his life as a ransom for many" and his cross was a sacrifice in which his blood was "poured out for many" (Mark 10:45; 14:24). Luke did not carry these texts over into his Gospel. In his version of the ransom text, Luke showed the cross as an act of service: "I am among you as one who serves" (Luke 22:27), says Jesus.

The time of Jesus was the center of time. It gave meaning to the past and revealed the course for the future. In this period of history, God's effort on behalf of humanity's salvation was being worked out.

Resurrection interludes for teaching disciples

Between the era of Jesus, which ended with the crucifixion, and the era of the church which began with the descent and baptism of the Spirit at Pentecost, there was a brief interim. Luke made more of the resurrection than either Mark or Matthew because he saw it as an important interlude.

After the resurrection, he reports on the ascension of Jesus into heaven. Between the resurrection and ascension, Jesus appeared to the disciples a number of times. Jesus used these periods to teach the disciples. All these appearances took place in or near Jerusalem, showing the importance of the Holy City.

Best known of the resurrection teaching episodes is the appearance on the road to Emmaus (24:13-35). But there was also a time spent with Peter (24:34) and an encounter with the eleven in Jerusalem (24:36-43). And that wasn't all. The risen Jesus met the disciples on other occasions (Luke 24:44-49; Acts 1:6-8).

It was in these meetings between the resurrection and ascension that the themes of Luke-Acts were lifted up: the preaching of repentance and forgiveness of sins, beginning from Jerusalem and going to the ends of the earth.

Many models for the time of the church

Following the ascension came the time of the church. It was the age in which the church preached the message of the kingdom given to them by Jesus. The time of the church will continue until the hour that Jesus returns. Acts ends with the triumph of Paul reaching the imperial city of Rome where he openly preached the gospel. Thus Luke put before his congregations the unlimited opportunities of the age which reached out to the ends of the earth.

By way of further encouragement to the believers, Acts drew many parallels between the ministry of Jesus and the ministry of the

church. Both were empowered by the Spirit. The martyrdom of Stephen closely resembled that of Jesus, even in the charges brought, in the trial, and in the last words spoken.

If the believers needed an understanding of what they should be doing, they had only to look at the work that Jesus did. If they wanted to know how to go about those tasks, they also had instruction in the example of Jesus as well as in the model of the leading apostles in the second volume of Luke-Acts. Thus, the Christians found their place in salvation history.

Building a church for all people

Luke was writing to a church that had already become an institution. It had regular leaders who had authority and who were able to make plans and carry them out. Its officers had assigned duties (Acts 8:17; 9:17; 19:6) and they had a system to select workers for new tasks (6:1-6; 14:23).

This was a church that understood its mission as being one that included all people. The Gospel of Luke kept the poor and outcast, as well as women and children, Samaritans and Gentiles, within view. It always expressed concern for the outsiders and the neglected.

The vigor with which this issue was treated in Luke-Acts must show that there were both rich and poor within the Christian congregations. The counsel for the rich to share with the poor was clearly needed and Luke urged it on the wealthier members of the church in forceful fashion (18:22). Sharing of resources was one of the outstanding marks of the early church (Acts 2:44-47; 4:32-35) so that "there was not a needy person among them," a fulfillment of the sabbatical law of the Old Testament (4:34; cf. Deut. 15:4-9). In the Sermon on the Plain appeared a series of woes directed at the rich and happy (Luke 6:24-26)

Special concern for outsiders and outcast

Luke showed his concern for other outsiders, outcasts, and neglected people in the parables and sayings that he selected. The healing of the centurion's slave highlighted the faith of a Gentile (a Roman soldier, in fact) (7:1-10). The story of the widow of Nain illustrated Jesus' concern for women, as does the incident of the woman with the ointment (7:36-50). Jesus was willing to help women and be helped by them (8:1-3).

Luke is the only evangelist to carry the account of the mission of the seventy (10:1-20). It appears that this was a mission to the Gentiles, one of Luke's concerns. The clue comes with seventy, the number of the non-Jewish nations.

Jesus' deep interest in the lost is represented by the parable trilogy in Luke 15: the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son. But all the lost are found, a sign of God's love and concern.

The value of the message of the Gospel of Luke was greatly extended by the Acts of the Apostles, a feature which neither of the other two Synoptic Gospels had. Acts doubled the worth of the Gospel of Luke for its readers. After learning about the era of Jesus in the Gospel, they were brought into the present era of the church by Acts.

The Gospel portrayed Jesus as the model for disciples. In Acts, the early Christians learned how Peter, Stephen, Paul, and others fol-

Words for the Poor

Luke's Gospel is good news for the outcast and forgotten. An example of one such group given attention in this book is the poor.

Good news: 4:16-20; 7:22

Blessing: 6:20

Parables for the poor: 12:13-21; 16:19-31

Criticism for exploiters of the poor: 16:13-15

Changes from Mark

Luke follows the outline of the Gospel of Mark, but with five major exceptions:

1. Adds an infancy narrative (1—2)

2. Sermon on the Plain (6:20-49), but shorter than Matthew's Sermon on the Mount

3. The Great Omission, leaving out Mark 6:45—8:26, mostly miracles

4. Adding the Long Journey to Jerusalem, 9:51—19:27

5. Added resurrection and ascension accounts (24:13-53)

Inventory

1. Name two parables or events from Luke that show Jesus' concern for the poor.

2. How did Luke feel about the Romans? Give an example from both the Gospel of Luke and from the Acts of the Apostles that reflect Luke's opinion of the Romans.

3. How did Luke feel about the Jews? Give an example from his Gospel and from Acts that reflect his opinion.

4. What changes did Luke make to Matthew's Sermon on the Mount in adapting it to his Sermon on the Plain (6:20-49)?

5. What are the three ages in Luke's history of salvation?

lowed the Lord's example in their own lives. Thus, Luke-Acts brought them and us a fully-rounded portrait of the Christian witness.

Discovery

1. What are the questions that you wrote in your Journal to which you found answers in this chapter? What questions weren't answered?

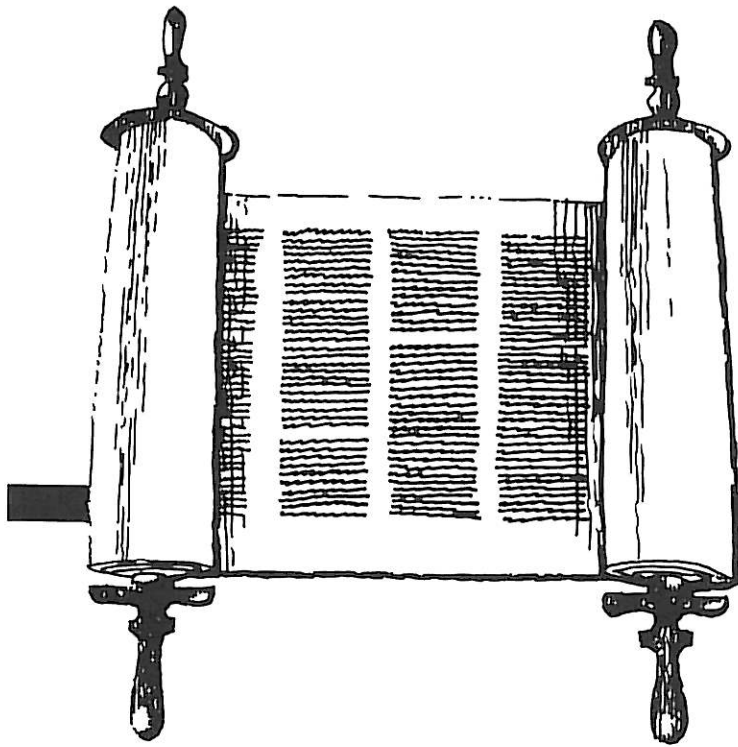
2. How does the Gospel of Luke help us understand the Acts of the Apostles? How does Acts help us to understand Luke?

3. How does the Gospel show Jesus to be the liberator described in the Nazareth synagogue proclamation (Luke 4:18, 19)?

4. How does this Gospel show that it was influenced by the Greek community?

Resources

Kee, Young, and Froehlich. "The Epoch of the Church in the Redemption Plan of God," *Understanding the New Testament*. Chapter 13. Pages 294-322.



PART XII

**Now the
World
Becomes
Our Home**

CHAPTER 32

Faith Faces the World

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Gist

Beyond the doctrine and history that the letters of Paul and the Gospels brought to the Christians, attention had to be given to instructing converts in right ways of living. The Pastoral Epistles and related writings of the period show the disciples providing for their leadership and worship, forming creeds, and collecting their writings. At the end of the first century, they were spurred on in this task by the threat of false doctrines.

In the beginning, few people expected that the church would survive for even a hundred years. Jesus, they were sure, would return shortly and a new age would begin.

But when years were added to still more years, the leaders who grew up in the movement began to see that something needed to be done. The letters of Paul, the Synoptic Gospels, and the Acts of the Apostles brought together the words of Jesus. These words told them who they were, from where they had come, and what was expected of them. But beyond doctrine and history, they needed some practical help. They had to become serious about forming congregations ready for the long haul.

The church had started out as a part of Judaism, almost as an annex to the synagogue. Was it then just another Jewish sect, or was it something more than that?

Farsighted leaders took steps

As more non-Jews and Jews with Greek backgrounds came into their congregations, the believers met more and more Greek ideas. Most Christians were speaking Greek and listening to the many different teachers of the day. Would the Christians become just another one of the many religious groups in the Roman Empire of that first century?

Farsighted leaders took steps to prepare the church to survive in just that kind of a world. We find evidence of what they did in the later writings of the New Testament: in the Pastoral Letters (1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus) and in such other writings as James, Jude, and 2 Peter.

By the turn of the first century A.D., expectations for the return of Jesus to bring in a new age had changed. Had these believers given up hope? By no means. They just knew that matters of organization, leadership, and teaching could no longer be put off.

The Christian hope had survived the conquest of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple. The center of their religious life was no

longer fixed on a holy city or on a holy place. They drew their strength from the remembrance of the sacred time when Jesus had walked with his disciples on earth.

The bitter controversies with the Judaizers which had so absorbed Paul had lost their fire. The issues were no longer over circumcision or over food laws. New issues had arisen. The stirrers-up-of-trouble were now people other than Judaizers concerned about rules.

Looking for a survival kit

So the church began to pay attention to the nuts and bolts of forming an institution. For many years they had been guided by the collected writings of the Jews. But as they turned more and more toward the Gentile world, they looked for other resources. Did they need their own set of sacred books? While the letters of Paul and the Synoptic Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles were known to some congregations, they were still not all available everywhere. Which writings should be included? Should any be left out?

And there were questions about leadership. With the passing of the apostles and with the martyrdom of Paul, who were the ones who could speak for them? Where were the people with apostolic authority?

Heresy makes them pay attention

The church might never have answered these questions or put its house in order except for the threat of heresy. A group that is sure it has a body of good ideas has no greater enemy than bad ideas that threaten to corrupt its treasure.

While we do not know all we'd like to know about the false teachings that threatened the church toward the end of the first century, we know that its leaders viewed the heretics in their midst with great alarm. They had no time for calm debate. Since the life of the church was at stake, church leaders attacked the false teachers most forcefully. Name calling, a common tactic in the controversies of those days, was their first weapon of defense (2 Tim. 3:2-5).

The words of these heretics have not come down to us in any of our texts, so we cannot be sure what were the ideas that they tried to spread within the church. Quite likely they were notions popular in the other religions of the day.

Chatter falsely called knowledge

We know that a system of thought called Gnosticism was widely followed in both Jewish and Greek circles. This system offered salvation through special revelation of knowledge (*gnosis* in Greek, which gave rise to the name of Gnostics). The Pastor of 1 Timothy may have had the Gnostics in mind when warning against "the godless chatter and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge" (1 Tim. 6:20).

The disciples of Paul dealt with the first signs of Gnosticism in the Letter to the Colossians. (See chapter 26, p. 10.) But their arguments that the Christian faith was superior to Gnostic revelation were not enough to put it down. The false teaching that said the created world and the physical bodies of persons were tainted with evil continued.

Gnosticism claimed to free people from the shackles of an evil world. Gnostics expressed this freedom either by giving themselves over to a way that set no limits on conduct or by denying themselves all

Journal

Read the six short books being discussed in this chapter: 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, James, Jude, 2 Peter.

For each of these books, make the following notes:

Main idea or theme;

Main problem or concern;

Remedy or solution being promoted.

Seed

Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by giving heed to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, through the pretensions of liars, whose consciences are seared, who forbid marriage and enjoin abstinence from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth (1 Tim. 4:1-3).

But as for you, teach what befits sound doctrine (Tit. 2:1).

But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, without uncertainty or insincerity. And the harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace (James 3:17, 18).

joys and pleasures in life. Those who followed the second way prohibited marriage and forbade the eating of certain foods. For them, salvation meant avoiding contact with a corrupt world and with creation and procreation. A number of passages in the Pastoral Letters took aim at these bans (e.g., 1 Tim. 2:15; 4:3; 5:14, 23; Tit. 1:15; 2:4).

Yet for others in this same sect, almost any conduct was allowed, since in an evil world no such thing as goodness existed (1 Tim. 1:8; 2 Tim. 3:6, 7).

These heretics moved in and out of Christian congregations. If their teachings had been allowed to continue, the Christian movement would have broken apart. It would have become just another one of a dozen sects in the empire that flourished for a while and then disappeared. The church was in peril: "Their talk will eat its way like gangrene" (2 Tim. 2:17).

So the church responded. Strong steps were taken. In some cases, the offenders were "delivered to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme" (1 Tim. 1:20), that is, they were put out of the congregation. The body of believers gained new strength and a new hold on life.

Coming to the end of the golden age

Another reason for developing a more organized church was the political and social situation in which they now found themselves. The Jews had been recognized as a legal religion within the empire. Because of their strong belief in one God, they were exempt from the demands of emperor worship.

In the early days, the Christians were spared persecution because the Romans and their governors saw them as part of the Jewish family. But when Christians drew in non-Jewish members and increased in size, they were seen as a new religious group. Then, the church needed to reach out to government and to make peace if possible with a force that was often hostile and suspicious of people who set themselves apart from others.

The church at the end of the first century knew that the good old days had gone. They were living in a time different from the era of the early church when apostles had carried the authority of having been chosen by Jesus.

In looking back, those times seemed like a golden age. Now, they had come to what they called "the last days" (2 Tim. 3:1; 2 Pet. 3:3; Jude 18) and they were without the leadership of any apostles. Who would take the place of the apostles? How would they know that authority had been invested in these new leaders?

The Holy Spirit came into the picture to affirm their new leaders (2 Tim. 1:14), assuring the believers that the faith once delivered to the apostles (Jude 3) was still with them even in those latter days.

True faith made clear

In taking a stand against heresy, these leaders in the apostolic tradition had to clearly state the true faith of the church. We find fragments of early creeds in the writings of the period. These articles of faith referred most often to the church's belief in Christ:

He was manifested in the flesh
vindicated in the Spirit,
seen by angels,

preached among the nations,
believed on in the world,
taken up in glory (1 Tim. 3:16).

Such confessions were probably used in the meetings of worship in those early congregations. These affirmations of faith were often introduced in the writings of the church by the words "The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance." In 1 Timothy 1:15, the confession that follows says: "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners."

As faith was put into words to be used in worship, so the form of worship itself was given shape. In 1 Timothy, we find one of the earliest instructions for a proper service of worship beginning with "supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings" (2:1).

Included among the subjects suggested for prayer were prayers for kings. This showed a church concerned about its relation to the powers in the world in which it lived. (See also 1 Pet. 2:13-17; Titus 3:1, 2, verses which express a concern that the church maintain a good reputation in the community.)

Clear faith but less lively

During this period of organizing, offices of leadership began to appear. We hear of bishops (1 Tim. 3:1-7), deacons (1 Tim. 3:8-13) and elders (Tit. 1:5-9). A rite of ordination took shape, referred to as the laying on of hands (1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6).

This shows that a way had been developed to provide for responsible leadership. Duties were being carefully defined, and an effort was being made to maintain the apostolic traditions.

Equipped with apostolic authority, the new leadership tried to stem the invasion of heresy into the church. Yet as duties in the church were being drawn more clearly, something was being lost. Faith had once meant a lively relationship to the risen Christ. Now it had slipped into being acceptance of tradition and beliefs about God (James 2:19; 1 Tim. 1:5).

New Testament still in the making

The emerging leaders of the church knew they had to pass on the apostolic tradition. Eventually, help would come their way in the form of a collection of sacred Christian books. But at the end of the first Christian century, the New Testament was still in the making.

Christians had already formed a high view of Scripture. They had accepted the sacred books of the Jews (in the Old Testament) according to standards they would apply to their own writings then taking shape. These were not the results of human undertaking but the work of persons who "moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" (2 Pet. 1:21). To them, this meant that "all scripture is inspired by God" (2 Tim. 3:16).

The letters of Paul had already been collected and would in time form the nucleus for the New Testament. The writer of 2 Peter spoke about these letters and already granted them a measure of authority referring to them as Scripture (2 Pet. 3:15, 16).

Paul's letters set the standard for many of the later writings of the New Testament. Almost all of the New Testament books that came out of the period when the church was organizing itself were written to resemble letters even though they were really sermons or declarations.

Paul and the Pastorals

Studies of vocabulary show that of 848 words (not counting proper names) found in the Pastorals, 306 are not found in any of the other writings of Paul or his disciples. Of these 306 words peculiar to the Pastorals, 175 are not used elsewhere in the New Testament, while 211 are used by Christian writers from the second century. For this reason as well as because of content and the way issues are treated, many scholars believe that the Pastoral Letters were written by someone other than Paul, someone who felt himself a part of the tradition of the missionary apostle. He wrote sometime in the first half of the second century, maybe about A.D. 125. The Pastor, as he is often known, was perhaps a second- or third-generation member of the school of Paul's disciples. For the case for the Pauline authorship of the Pastoral Epistles, see the commentaries by Donald Guthrie (*Tyndale New Testament Commen-*

Author of James

A tradition from the early church identifies the writer of the Letter of James as the brother of Jesus and one of the early leaders of the Jerusalem church. Yet the book carries no specific references to Jesus such as one might expect from a person who knew him personally. Though James was known as a conservative in terms of Jewish tradition, this writing says little about the Law. In addition, its scholarly use of the Greek language and Greek styles of writing make it doubtful that it was written by a Palestinian Jew.

Chapters in cultivation not in planting

The Pastoral Letters—1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus—deal not with the missionary period of the mid-first century when Paul was a traveling evangelist, but with the time about a half century later when the new congregations had established themselves. These are not adventures in church planting, but chapters in cultivation and in conserving the gains of the first generation.

Though the three essays take the form of letters addressed by Paul to two of his co-workers, Timothy and Titus, they are really challenges to the church to resist the spread of Gnosticism. The Pastor, as we may call the writer of these three epistles, encouraged his disciples, the Timothys and Tituses of the day, to fulfill their duties as good ministers of the church, following the example of Paul, in whose name he spoke. Above all, they were to avoid the bad examples of the false teachers.

1 Timothy: Varied the people in the early church

The First Letter to Timothy leads off with an attack on the doctrine of the false teachers (1:3-20). A well-ordered and organized church would serve as the best defense against heresy (2:1—3:16). Proper worship and an ordained ministry were the ingredients for this model church. A sketch of the model Christian minister followed (4:11—5:2).

These words reflect the interests and concerns of a church that had the goal of being an institution that would be able to thrive and grow.

The last chapter of 1 Timothy shows the wide variety of people who were a part of that early church from slaves (6:1, 2) to those who were rich (6:17-19). The first group received support and encouragement; the second group was given a warning. In between is the man of God (6:11-16) who was praised as an example of "righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness" (v. 11).

Congregations on their best behavior

The same themes appear in 2 Timothy, but this time with a more personal dimension given to Paul and to the disciples addressed. Central in the writing was an exhortation to the true minister of God to be an example of good behavior in every way (2:14—4:8). It was a heavy charge, but a most necessary one if the church was to defend itself against the false teaching that had festered so long within its membership (3:1-9). False teaching was "godless chatter" (2:16). It held that "the resurrection is past already" (2:18). And it specialized in "myths" (4:4).

Titus deals with the same themes treated in the other two Pastoral Epistles. Good character for the leadership of the church was still at the top of the list of needs: "Show yourself in all respects a model of good deeds" (2:7). Members of the congregation were also expected to be on their best behavior as well as good witnesses to outsiders: "submissive to rulers . . . obedient . . . ready for any honest work" (3:1).

James: Time to bear down on right living

The young church, now with many members from non-Jewish background, needed to bear down on right living. The writer of James could draw on many examples for this instruction beginning with such Jewish sources as Proverbs and Sirach (Ecclesiasticus). From the Greeks, the Christians borrowed ethical lists known as household codes.

The Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5—7) is the most familiar example of Christian ethical teaching. The writer of James either knew the Sermon on the Mount or had access to a collection of ethical teachings available to Matthew and other teachers in the church.

Though James starts out with a greeting as though it is a letter, it is really a moral lecture which moves on from one idea to another. It can hardly be called a sermon because it carries no proclamation of the gospel. Yet the writer bases his teaching on a full commitment to Christian doctrine, identifying himself from the beginning as a “servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ” (1:1).

Fruits of faith for James

In one of the best known passages from this book, the writer discusses the matter of faith—faith as related to works (2:14-26). These verses seem to show that he was aware of what Paul had written about faith in Galatians 3 and Romans 4. But Paul would not have argued with James about the need for works as an expression of Christian faith for he had affirmed them as “fruit of the Spirit” (Gal. 5:22).

And it is fruitless faith that the Epistle of James laments most of all, making a distinction between an allegiance that is dead and one that is alive. Faith has to be more than assent to a body of beliefs (James 2:19, 20). It has to give real evidence of commitment to the “royal law” (2:8), the law of love, which in Paul’s words was “faith working through love” (Gal. 5:6).

So the author makes a plea for genuine righteousness in the place of pretense. He gives a long list of practical examples of the kind of conduct that he saw as real: endurance (1:2-18), obedience (1:19-27), integrity (2:14-26), discipline (3:1—4:10), humility (4:11—5:6), patience (5:7-11), prayer (5:12-18), and love (5:19, 20). These were fruits of faith for James.

Jude: Single-minded attack on false prophets

Where James took one of the emphases of the Pastorals—the exhortation to right living—and gave his whole essay over to it, Jude took the other point—the denouncing of false teachers—and made that his sole concern.

Once again, the heretics were at work within the church where they were causing confusion and division (v. 19). The writer of this tract did not debate the issues with these false teachers. Rather, he abused them with words. And he attacked them with the threat of God’s punishment.

These false prophets seem to have been Gnostics. The Greek word behind the word “worldly” (v. 19) was a term which the Gnostics used to identify themselves. They held that since the flesh was the source of evil, it didn’t matter what a person did whether to “defile the flesh, reject authority” (v. 8) or “boldly carouse together” (v. 12).

The writer listed the various kinds of judgments that God might bring down on the false prophets starting with the fire that destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah and surrounding cities (v. 7). Cain, Balaam, and Korah, all examples from the Old Testament (v. 11), were also summoned to underline the sureness of swift punishment.

This brief essay reflects the life of the young church taking on the shape of an institution. Faith is related to the traditions received from the

James and Jesus

The church must have had a collection of sayings about right conduct. Parts of the Sermon of the Mount came from this tradition as did much of the Letter of James. A common source may have been behind the following verses in James and the sayings of Jesus.

5:12 and Matt. 5:36, 37

1:5, 17 and Matt. 7:7-12

1:22 and Matt. 7:24-27

4:12 and Matt. 7:1

1:6 and Mark 11:23, 24

The writer of 1 Peter also dipped into the same source:

1:2, 3 and 1 Pet. 1:6, 7

4:1, 2 and 1 Pet. 2:11

Active James

The Letter of James majors in instructions for right living. With 108 verses, it has 60 imperative verbs—words that command action.

Jude's Writer

The writer calls himself Jude, the brother of James. Church tradition said he was the Jude who was the brother of Jesus (Mark 6:3). However, the writer looks back on the apostolic age as past. He identifies the time of writing as being in the last days (v. 18). The issues discussed belong to the life of the church at the beginning of the second century A.D. For these reasons, scholars have concluded that the letter was written by an unknown person who wrote in the name of Jude.

Notable about this writer is that he dips into the Apocrypha and into the Pseudepigrapha for illustrations about the archangel Michael fighting the devil for the body of Moses (v. 9, from the Assumption of Moses) and the judgment inflicted on Adam's descendants (v. 14, from the Book of Enoch).

Inventory

Identify:
Apocrypha
Elders
Gnostics
James
Jude
Last days
Ordination
Pastoral Letters
Pseudepigrapha
Synoptic Gospels
Titus

apostles (v. 3). The worship life of the congregations was being enriched by special words of confession and prayers. The most poetic words in this attack on the false prophets are in the benediction addressed to "him who is able to keep you from falling" (vv. 24, 25) which must have come from the worship services of the maturing church.

2 Peter: Getting ready for the New Testament

The Second Letter of Peter continued the attack of the Pastoral Letters and Jude on false teachers. This shows something about the long-term nature of the problem that these Christians faced.

The letter also intended to restore faith in the eventual return of Christ, a hope that was being denied by the heretics still active in the congregations. For the Gnostics taught that persons would soon be translated out of their sinful bodies and out of the evil world into the heavenly realm. For them, a return of Jesus to earth to establish a new order and a new age contradicted every part of their doctrine.

The writer of 2 Peter recognized in his last chapter that the passing of time had been a test of the hope in the return of Jesus. But the apostles predicted that such a challenge would come (3:2-4). He reminded his readers that God's time was different from time as humans reckon it. He affirmed that the "day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud voice" (3:10).

It is from this book that we garner a few clues about the movement toward the canonization of the New Testament. In 3:15, 16, the writer spoke about the letters of Paul as being part of Scripture. But he also showed us that the Christians had taken note of the action of the rabbis of the first century in fixing the canon of the Old Testament. For 2 Peter repeated in its second chapter the main portion of Jude (vv. 4-16) removing all references to the non-canonical books of Enoch and the Assumption of Moses, and expanding the allusions to the books approved for the Old Testament.

At the same time, the church was deeply troubled by the Gnostics who had their own written revelations. Church leaders were beginning to see the need for a collection of their own certified writings that could nurture the life of the church.

Discovery

1. What was the kind of world in which the Christian church found itself in A.D. 100?
2. How did the delay of the expected return of Christ change the church? How did the church make up for the loss of the apostles, the leaders of the first generation?
3. Did the definition and understanding of faith change as the church became an institution? What has happened since the first century to help the church understand the faith of the early church?
4. How did the New Testament come to take shape? What were the signs in the early church that a collection of certified writings was needed?

Resources

Kee, Young, and Froehlich. "Ethics for Exiles" and "The Growing Problem of Faith and Order in the Community," *Understanding the New Testament*. Chapters 15 and 16. Pages 355-425.

For many years, the Christian church was almost free from persecution. Here and there the new community suffered briefly from attacks, sometimes from a hostile Jewish community, other times from the governor of a city or province who applied with unusual rigor a law requiring worship of the emperor or of Roman gods.

Only once were the Christians singled out for severe persecution in the apostolic period and that was during the reign of Nero (A.D. 54-68). The mad emperor chose to make the Christians the scapegoats for a great fire that destroyed part of the capital city. It is widely believed that it was during this short and intense period of persecution in Rome that both Paul and Peter were martyred.

As the Christian movement began to expand, the potential for persecution grew as the church became more visible. Many times the persecution was local and unpredictable. Nevertheless, it became a part of Christian experience, mentioned in several books in the New Testament.

Signs of a scheme in 2 Thessalonians

When facing persecution, the Christians used the language and symbols of the Jewish apocalyptic writings to understand their situation. The apocalyptic visions had their roots in the oppression experienced by the Jews during the reign of the Seleucid kings. Visions written in Daniel promised that God would enter into history, end the reign of injustice, and restore the kingdom of David.

Such visions became linked with the Christian hope for the return of Jesus to establish the kingdom of God. We find this happening in 2 Thessalonians which responded to a time when persecution was being experienced by one community.

During the days of the apostles, the hope for the return of Jesus was a simple and uncomplicated expectation. Since it was expected that it might happen shortly, no special explanations were needed. In 1 Thessalonians, Paul only needed to remind the Christians that "the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night" (5:2).

But the longer the return of Jesus was delayed, the more elabo-

CHAPTER 33

Hope in the Hour of Persecution

Journal

Read 2 Thessalonians and 1 Peter. Select and read six chapters from Hebrews and ten from the Revelation to John.

Record the following observations from each of these four books:

References to persecution and suffering, if any.

Counsel given on how to endure persecution and suffering.

Make a list of symbols of the power of God exercised for the help of God's people.

The Thessalonian Letters

Its apocalyptic vision sets 2 Thessalonians apart from 1 Thessalonians, the first of Paul's letters. Nowhere in the other writings of Paul do we find even a hint of such an elaborate scheme to identify the return of Jesus. While it may seem that this second Thessalonian letter comes shortly after the first, 2 Thessalonians seems to come from a generation or more after the death of Paul. In 1 Thessalonians, Paul expected the return of Christ in his lifetime (4:15). In 2 Thessalonians, the writer argued that the end would not take place immediately, because many other things needed to happen first.

For these reasons, many scholars say that the Second Letter to the Thessalonians appears to have been written toward the end of the first century A.D. by a second or third generation member of the school of Paul. (The reference to the temple in 2:4 seems to indicate knowledge of the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.)

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First Peter's Peter

The believers addressed in First Peter were singled out just because they were Christians (4:14-16) which seems to point to the time of Emperor Trajan (98-117) who brought on the first widespread persecution of Christians in the Roman Empire. If this was the period during which the letter was written, the author could not have been the Apostle Peter who is generally believed to have been martyred during the reign of Nero (A.D. 54-68). Then, too, the text has been written in good Greek

rate the explanations became. And then when the Christians met persecution and suffering, they were sure that the coming was drawing near—perhaps had even passed.

The Second Letter to the Thessalonians developed a far more complicated scheme of signs to signal the actual event. First, the "man of lawlessness" would come "proclaiming himself to be God" (2 Thess. 2:3, 4). This would all be part of a general rebellion during which the lawless man would take his seat in the temple of God. This recalled the "desolating sacrilege" which was part of the apocalyptic visions of Daniel and the visionaries who proclaimed these plans to the Christian community (Dan. 9:27; 11:31; 12:11; Mark 13:14).

This state of distress would end when Jesus would kill the lawless man "with the breath of his mouth and destroy him by his appearing and coming" (2 Thess. 2:8; cf. Isa. 11:4; Rev. 19:15). Then the Christians would be saved from their suffering and the persecutors would in turn be persecuted (1:5-10).

The writer of 2 Thessalonians wrote to combat false ideas about the return of Christ: that the return of Jesus had already taken place (2:2) and that, as a result, it was no longer necessary to work (3:6). He wanted to remind the congregation that the coming of Christ was still in the future and that in the meantime, they should be about their business (3:7-13).

A roaring lion in 1 Peter

The suffering of Christians during a general persecution was the theme of the First Letter of Peter. While reminding his readers that the return of Jesus was still in the future, the writer did not appeal to an apocalyptic vision as did the writer of 2 Thessalonians.

The first part of the book deals in a general way with the theme of suffering (1:3—4:11), the ideas being shared coming from a baptismal sermon that the writer may have frequently used. Though the believers suffered, they had hope in the work of God revealed in Jesus Christ (1:3-12) and the example of Jesus who endured suffering for them (2:11—4:6). They also had the comfort of knowing that they were God's people who were loved by God (2:9, 10).

It was in the second part of the sermon that the description of suffering became more vivid (4:12—5:11). Here the writer spoke of the "fiery ordeal" (14:12) that his people needed to endure. Their persecutor was given a dramatic and sinister description: "Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking some one to devour" (5:8).

Comfort in controversy from Hebrews

The Letter to the Hebrews was also written to bring comfort to the believers though not because they found themselves in the crisis of persecution. It was written to show that the Christian faith was superior to the religion of Judaism out of which it had grown. Such conviction provided support in the controversies with the Jews and also in explaining Christian beliefs to those outside the fold.

Within the text of Hebrews is an appeal to the believers to endure through testing and not to fail as did the people of Israel in the wilderness (3:7—4:13). The parade of the heroes of faith in chapter 11 is followed by an encouragement for all who have received the promises of God to "run with perseverance the race that is set before us" (12:1).

Hebrews is a sermon and not a letter. It carries no address to tell us who its intended readers might have been. The only mark of a letter that it holds is its closing greeting and benediction (13:22-25). Its writer is not identified, and we have little evidence that would help us discover who he might have been.

Drawing heavily on Psalm 110, the writer presented Jesus as the Son of God and Savior of humankind (1:1—3:6). He portrayed Jesus as a high priest who fulfilled that role more completely than did the priests of Israel who ministered in the tent of meeting (4:14—5:10; 7:1—10:18). Jesus was also the perfect sacrifice, and the pioneer and perfecter of the believer's faith (11:1-39).

In between the proclamation of its themes, the writer encouraged the Christians to apply these convictions to their lives and to be true witnesses: "Let . . . no one fall by the same sort of disobedience" (4:11); "show the same earnestness in realizing the full assurance of hope until the end" (6:11); "let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works" (10:24); "let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us" (12:1).

If Hebrews is a model of the instruction and preaching in the early church, then the believers were being well prepared for the testing of their faith.

Revelation addressed to the victims

The Revelation to John is the only apocalyptic book in the New Testament. Apocalyptic writing, a style commonly used in the centuries before the New Testament period, gave its message through visions and symbols that interpreted history and spoke of its outcome. The Greek word "apocalypse" means "revelation."

In this book, placed last in the New Testament, we join the story when the "hour of trial" (3:10) had already begun to claim its victims: "Antipas my witness, my faithful one, who was killed among you" (2:13) and "under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne" (6:9).

All this was taking place during a time when the Roman emperor was demanding worship as a god and punishing those who refused (13:4, 12-17; 16:2; 19:20). For Christians to submit to such a demand would have been to deny Christ, a sin with fearsome consequences (14:9-12).

The persecution took place in Asia Minor for that was the home of the seven churches addressed in the opening letters. The emperor, though not identified by name, may have been indirectly noted in John's reference to seven kings, "five of whom have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come" (17:10). This would indicate that the writer was living during the time of the sixth king. The Roman Senate had declared six kings to be divine, beginning with Julius Caesar. The last of these deified emperors was Domitian (A.D. 81-96).

Domitian pressed his claim to divinity with ruthless energy. Thus, believers loyal to Christ were exposed to the fury of this "beast" who required that his image be worshiped. According to tradition, it was Domitian who exiled John to the island of Patmos in A.D. 95 where he remained for eighteen months until the emperor died.

using quotations from the Greek text of the Old Testament, which makes it less likely that the writer was a Palestinian Christian from an Aramaic-speaking background.

Hebrew's Author

Though the name of the writer of Hebrews is known only to God (as said Origen, a church leader in the third century), we can tell that this person was a Jewish Christian from Greek-speaking background who grew up in one of the Jewish communities outside of Palestine. This believer wrote to people in a kindred group who may have been living in Rome, according to the greetings sent from "those who come from Italy" (13:24).

Revelation's John

The John who wrote Revelation was a preacher of courage, power, and confidence. He dared sign his name to a book that challenged the mighty forces of his day. The language, style, and ideas of his Revelation when compared with the Gospel of John seem so different that many scholars feel that the two works were not written by the same person and that John of Patmos cannot be linked with any other New Testament John, neither the disciple John, son of Zebedee, nor the John of the fourth Gospel.

Revelation in 7 Parts

With seven as the most commonly used number, the structure of the book is thought to be in seven parts. One effort to find those units also sees them move to a central point and then return:

A. Prologue like a letter, 1:1-8: blessing, greeting, and vision.

B. Judgment in the church, 1:9—3:22: vision, letters to seven churches.

C. Judgment in the universe, 4:1—9:21: God on the throne, seven seals, glory to the martyrs, seven trumpets.

D. The church and its oppressors, 10:1—11:14; 12:1—14:20; 15:2-4: enduring the attacks of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet; the return of Christ, praise for salvation.

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CC. Judgment for Babylon, the antichurch, 15:1; 15:5—19:12: seven bowls, praise for salvation.

BB. Salvation for church and world, 19:11—22:9: the return of Christ, judgment of the evil powers, destruction of the beast and false prophet, the reign of Christ and the martyrs for 1,000 years, the end of death and Hades; the new creation, the new Jerusalem.

AA. Epilogue like a letter, 22:10-21: blessing; prayer for the return of Christ.

Hope from the brother of the persecuted

All of the Jewish apocalyptic books were written in the name of some noted person from past history: Daniel, Enoch, and others who were thus pressed into service to prophesy of things far in the future from their own times. But the writer of Revelation declared himself to be "John," a servant of Jesus Christ (1:1) and a "brother" of those persecuted believers in tribulation (1:9). He did not claim to live in another age other than the one that he was writing about. Rather than keeping his identity a secret, as did the apocalyptic writers of the past, he was open and entered into the life and danger of the members of Christ's church. He was indeed a brother.

John also saw himself as a prophet: "I was in the spirit on the Lord's day" (1:10). He was exiled for the "testimony of Jesus." And he explained what this meant: "For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy" (19:10). He did prophesy after he had eaten a sweet and bitter scroll (10:10, 11), just as Ezekiel had done at the beginning of his prophetic ministry (Ezek. 3:1-3).

While John was a prophet, he was also a superb visionary and a master apocalyptic writer. The series of visions in his Revelation which grow out of each other and weave together have mystified and puzzled readers for centuries. But no one can overlook the masterful craft of it all even when understanding fails. For John intended to overpower the persecuted Christians of his age with the strength and might of his visions. He wanted to wrap them up in the glory of the power of God and in his hope for the future so that they might lose all dread of their fearful present.

Pagan Rome's end in the lake of fire

Most dramatic was the elaborate vision of the final triumph (19:11—22:9) when Christ with eyes aflame, mounted on a white steed, clad in white linen, his head crowned with many crowns, rode out at the head of the armies of heaven, who like him were clad in white linen and riding white horses. The name that their leader bore was the Word of God and King of Kings.

Arrayed against the host of righteousness was the Antichrist, known as the beast who bore the mysterious number 666 (13:1-10, 18), leading forth all the kings of the earth and their armies. Moving out with this sinister force was the false prophet who was the beast's helper, himself the second beast (19:20; 13:11-17).

The Antichrist and the false prophet were quickly captured and thrown into a lake of fire, a place of everlasting punishment, while the soldiers of the dark army were slain by the sword that issued from the mouth of Christ. Defeated were the forces of pagan Rome and the Antichrist.

Satan also was bound and thrown into a bottomless pit. The martyrs who lost their lives during the persecution came to life again and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. At the end of the millennium, Satan escaped from his prison and deceived the nations once more. With a large army, he surrounded Christ and the martyrs in Jerusalem, their beloved city.

But fire fell from heaven and destroyed the invaders. Satan was captured and thrown into the lake of fire that earlier received the beast

and the false prophet. Later, death and Hades were also consigned to this same fiery lake.

Escape to a heaven planted on earth

Then appeared the great white throne, the leading symbol in this book of symbols. All the dead were raised and the book of life was checked. Those whose names were found were saved from the second death, that lake of fire, and became part of the new age that followed.

The drama came to its fulfillment on earth and not in heaven. The new Jerusalem descended from heaven and the voice from the throne said, "Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people" (21:3). The glory of all the power in the book of visions was not of an escape into heaven but a claim staked on an earth renewed as the dwelling of God with his people.

The focus of Revelation is not on the future but on the present. John of Patmos was an evangelist as well as a seer. His was a proclamation of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ through which the power of evil on earth had been limited. The Christian community was the sign of the victory wrought by Christ. The kingdom of God and the rule of Christ show that this has already begun to happen and will eventually be fulfilled. The symbol of the great white throne does guarantee the hope.

Courage to choose the Lord of the world

John set out in Revelation to answer the question, Who is Lord over the world? The community to which John wrote knew the choice: God and Christ or Caesar and the gods of Rome. They knew which they should choose, but did they have the courage and the will?

The Christians represented the kingdom of God on earth (1:6; 5:10) but if they rejected the kingdom of the beast they would be shut out from the wealth of the world and might even lose their lives (13:10, 15-17). Yet, John preached resistance to the cult of Rome. He opposed the Gnostic false prophets (the Nicolaitans of 2:6, 15) who allowed for compromise with the Roman ceremonies claiming they could worship the emperor and still not deny Christ.

John believed that the power of God would prevail. He saw the movement in three stages. First, God's power was assured in heaven through Christ's death and enthronement (5:1-14). As a result, Satan was thrown down to earth (12:2-12).

The forces of Christ and Satan were pitted against each other on earth, but with the return of Christ, the beast and false prophet were destroyed and Satan was imprisoned so that Christ and the martyrs ruled the world (19:11—20:6). This was the second stage.

Though God's power had now been assured over heaven and over earth, there was in John's understanding of the universe still the underworld. So, a third contest ensued until Satan, death, and Hades were overcome (20:7-15).

The victory was finally complete and the new heaven appeared on earth (21:1—22:5).

Roman Emperors

* Julius (49-44 B.C.)

* Augustus (27 B.C.—A.D.

14)

Tiberius (A.D. 14-37)

Caligula (37-41)

* Claudius (41-54)

Nero (54-68)

Galba; Otho; Vitellius (68-69)

* Vespasian (69-79)

* Titus (79-81)

* Domitian (81-96)

Nerva (96-98)

Trajan (98-117)

[* Acclaimed god by Roman Senate.]

Worship Sentences

Revelation carries a great deal of material from the worship services of the early church:

Hymns: 4:1-11; 5:9-12

Doxologies: 1:6; 4:9; 5:13b, 14; 7:12

Acclamations: 4:11; 5:9b, 10, 12

Thanksgiving: 11:17, 18

Responses: 19:1; 22:20

Oracle of woe: 12:12b

Lament: 18:1-24

Curse: 22:18-20

Inventory

1. Identify:

Desolating sacrilege

Daniel

Domitian

Emperor worship

John of Patmos

Man of lawlessness

Martyrs

Nero

Trajan

2. What do the following numbers generally signify:

4

7

12

666

3. List seven symbols from the visions of the Revelation to John

Discovery

1. How did Paul's scheme for the end times differ from that of John of Patmos? Why?

2. What is the best way to unravel the so-called mystery of apocalyptic visions?

3. What are the appropriate and biblical attitudes toward the end times?

4. Is the focus of the Christian hope in heaven or on earth? Why?

Resources

Kee, Young, Froehlich. "The Community and the City of God," *Understanding the New Testament*. Chapter 17. Pages 426-53.

The New Testament has given us four Gospels. Three we called Synoptics, because they together saw the same form of the ministry of Jesus. But the Gospel of John drew out of the life of the Savior new lines of revelation. Where the other evangelists spread out the great events of their Lord, John lifts up selected themes and develops them more fully.

It is clear that the Gospel of John followed a course far different from the outline followed by the Synoptic Gospels. Did John have the texts of the other three Gospels available to him? It seems that he did know the Gospel of Mark because a few sentences from that writing appear in John's Gospel. He may even have been in touch with Luke, but no evidence is at hand that he had contact with Matthew.

Special source in a book of signs

But knowing about one or more of the other Gospels, he still decided to follow a different pattern in his writing. We know that John had some important resources available to him that the other Gospel writers did not have. Most striking is his "signs source" or "book of signs."

A series of miracles, beginning with the episode of the wine at a wedding feast in the first half of the Gospel, are held up as special events: "This, *the first of his signs*, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory; and his disciples believed in him" (2:11). The healing at Capernaum of an official's son is noted as the second sign (4:54).

Other signs are mentioned frequently until John 12:37-50, where a summary statement is given about the meaning of these events: "Though he had done so many signs before them, yet they did not believe in him" (12:37). The remainder of the Gospel is taken up with the passion of Jesus and events associated with it.

The closing words of the Gospel return to the theme: "Now Jesus did many other signs . . . but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name" (20:30, 31).

Up to 12:37, John seems to be following a source with a record of a number of miracles, none of which appear in the Synoptic Gospels except for the feeding of the multitude and the walking on water (6:1-21). The miracles presented here are told with more drama than the miracles reported in the other Gospels. These miracles aimed to win people to

CHAPTER 34

The Gospel for All the World

Gist

The Gospel of John, even more than Revelation, fuses the life of heaven and earth in the great work done by Jesus, God's Son even before the creation of the world. Drawing material from a Book of Signs, the fourth evangelist shows Jesus doing mighty works aimed at instilling faith in the people. The disciples believed, but many of the Jews did not. Here are meditations on the glory that came to Jesus who in being lifted up brought eternal life to the believers.

Journal

Select and read ten chapters from the Gospel of John. Using the material read, answer the following questions:

Who is Jesus?

What kind of persons are the disciples?

Who are the opponents of Jesus?

Compare John 12:25, 26 with Mark 8:34, 35. How do the purposes of Mark differ from those of John?

Read the Letters of John. List the main concern of each letter.

faith, which happened in the case of the disciples (2:11), but failed with others (12:37).

Painful contest between church and synagogue

John's Gospel, like the other Gospels, reflects the time in which it was written. It was in a period after the fall of Jerusalem. In John's Gospel, when the Jews are conspiring against Jesus, we hear them say that Jesus could not be allowed to continue to work miracles among the people, because "every one will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation" (11:48). It was a history that attempted to explain a great tragedy that had already taken place, showing that Christians saw the fall of Jerusalem as a judgment on the Israel that rejected its Messiah.

Deeply etched in the Gospel is the painful contest between church and synagogue. The Christian congregations were growing at the expense of the Jewish community. Even after accepting the Christian gospel, many believers continued as members of the synagogue, sometimes until they were expelled. Three times, we read about believers being "put out of the synagogue" (9:22; 12:42; 16:2).

These references dare not be taken casually, for they surely reflect a period of great pain in both the synagogue and the church as families were separated. The trauma of this rupture in the Jewish community left its marks on this Gospel, as we will see, just as deeply as the agony of the Roman persecution burned itself into the pages of Revelation. Both communities lived in a broken world, a world which they saw as dark (8:12) and therefore under the control of the forces of darkness (12:31).

Moving sonship back to the beginning of time

The Gospel of John makes its mark as it pushes out the boundary of Christian understanding about Jesus who came as light to a dark world. John's statement about the person of Jesus comes in the first verse of the Gospel: "In the beginning was the Word [Logos], and the Word [Logos] was with God, and the Word [Logos] was God."

This declaration, which set the stage for the Gospel of John, came at the end of a progression of thought in the church about Jesus becoming the Son of God. Paul placed the gift of sonship at the very end of Jesus' ministry—at the resurrector: "designated Son of God in power . . . by his resurrection from the dead" (Rom. 1:4). From there, each generation moved the moment of sonship earlier in the life of Jesus of Nazareth.

In Mark's Gospel, the moment came at Jesus' baptism, when Jesus heard the voice from heaven say, "Thou art my beloved Son" (Mark 1:11). Matthew and Luke moved the gift of sonship back to the time of birth, even to the moment of conception, so that they could write: "his name shall be called Emmanuel . . . God with us" (Matt. 1:23); "the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God" (Luke 1:35).

John moved the time of God-becoming back to creation, even before creation, beyond the borders of measured time. His beginning was the end of many long years of reflection within the church about the person of Christ. It is from this climax that John goes on to even more profound thoughts about the Son of God.

Lifted up—two words with two meanings

The Gospel of John opens with a Prologue (1:1-18), an eloquent hymn about the person of Jesus Christ. Here we find in capsule form the main themes of this book.

Jesus, the hymn says, was the Son of God from the beginning of eternity, even before creation. These verses speak of Jesus as the Word, or, as written in Greek, *Logos*. This name came from the Greek wing of Judaism which saw the Logos as the spirit of wisdom that came from the realm of light and took part in creation.

After the Prologue, the name *Logos* (or the Word) is no longer applied to Jesus. Yet the idea that Jesus existed with God from all eternity was often noted. Jesus came from heaven descending to earth as one sent by God (8:42). He often spoke about the time when he would return to the Father (3:13; 6:62; 16:28). His mission was to stay on earth for a time and then return to the one who had sent him (7:33).

Jesus was so close to God that he could say they were one (10:30). Yet he could also say that the Father was greater than he (14:28). Thus, Jesus carried out the work given to him whether it was to judge (5:22, 27) or to give eternal life (3:13-15; 6:27; 6:54). And he revealed God's glory (13:31). Yet he was a stranger from another world (8:23).

Several times when Jesus spoke about returning to the Father, "ascending" was described as being "lifted up," a phrase which had a double meaning for it referred also to Jesus being lifted up on the cross (3:13-15; 8:28; 12:32-34).

The Prologue also introduced the theme of being born "of God" (1:13), which became the subject of the dialogue with Nicodemus (3:1-15). The prologue hymn closed with a summary: "For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known" (1:17, 18).

Following the Prologue came the testimony of John the Baptist (1:19-51). The Baptist presented Jesus as the fulfillment of the hopes of Israel, twice introducing Jesus as the Lamb of God (1:29, 36). It was also in this section that Jesus was identified as Messiah (1:41), Son of God, and King of Israel (1:49).

Signs introduce the glory theme

As we have noted, seven signs form the main outline for the first half of the Gospel (2:1—12:50). Within this section is a series of meditations which related the mission of Jesus to a number of prominent Jewish festivals (5:1—10:39).

Glory is also an important subtheme. As Jesus began a circuit of his ministry in Cana of Galilee that also ended in the same place, he showed his glory in different ways. People also responded variously (2:1—4:42). The last two chapters in this section note that Jesus was moving toward the hour of his glorification (11:1—12:50).

The first sign, the miracle at the wedding in Cana, introduced the glory theme, saying that in this way Jesus "manifested his glory" (2:11). This event was followed by the cleansing of the temple, not itself a sign, but a commentary on the nature of Jesus' signs. When the Jews asked quite pointedly, "What *sign* have you to show us for doing this?" (2:18), Jesus responded with a veiled reference to his resurrection (2:20) sug-

The Gospel's John

So great are the differences between the Revelation to John and the Gospel of John in terms of language, style, and ideas that many feel that if the Fourth Gospel was written by a person named John, it was not John of Patmos. It is John, son of Zebedee and disciple of Jesus, whom some in the early church named as the writer of this Gospel. According to tradition, this John went from Palestine to Ephesus in Asia Minor where he served the church and lived to a ripe old age. The Gospel itself seems to carry a claim that John of Zebedee was indeed its writer (21:20-24). But this claim appears in the last chapter of the Gospel which has many marks of having been added by another writer. John 21 differs in style and content from the main body of the Gospel which comes to a formal close in 20:30, 31.

Chapter 21 of the Gospel may actually be a link with the letters of John. The First Letter of John, in particular, has some likeness of form

and language with the Gospel of John, though it has its own character as well. Therefore, the Gospel and letters of John as we now have them may be the work of two or more persons who were related and known to each other, coming from what might be called a Johannine school.

Seed

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father (John 1:14).

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him (3:16, 17).

If you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask whatever you will, and it shall be done for you. By this my Father is glorified that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be my disciples (15:7, 8).

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name (20:30, 31).

The Book of Signs

Seven miracles drawn from a book of signs highlight John 2:1—12:50:

Changing water to wine at Cana, 2:1-11

Curing the Capernaum official's son from Cana, 4:46-54

Curing the paralytic at Bethzatha's pool in Jerusalem, 5:1-15

Feeding the multitude in Galilee, 6:1-15

Walking on the Sea of Galilee, 6:16-21

Curing the man born blind in Jerusalem, 9:1-7

Raising Lazarus in Bethany, 11:1-44

gesting that in addition to the signs in this section of the Gospel, the resurrection was the climax of all the signs that Jesus performed.

Coming in glory a present event

Next came the dialogue on the new birth (3:1-15), a theme introduced in the Prologue (1:13). It concluded with a reference to Jesus as the person who descends and ascends to heaven (3:13). Jesus was also shown to be the Son of Man who was to be "lifted up" as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness. This was to happen so that the believers might have eternal life, another important theme word for John's Gospel (1:14, 15).

Then followed a monologue or a meditation on the way in which Jesus had power to give eternal life to the believers (3:16-21). It is in this passage that we find how John's exalted view of Christ as the Son of God had changed his view of the coming of Christ in glory. It was no longer an expected future event but a present reality.

No longer was judgment a dread for the future. It was something happening in the present: "And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil" (3:19).

The next chapter found Jesus at Jacob's well in Samaria where he met a woman of the region (4:1-6). They had a lively discussion about "living water" and about worship "in spirit and truth" (4:7-21). This was followed by a meditation or monologue on true worship (4:22-26) which ended with Jesus declaring himself to be the Messiah.

John, we will soon note, had a unique way of handling his material. He moved from a reporting of an action to a dialogue about the event (usually between Jesus and others) followed by a monologue or meditation. Thus a single event or theme was treated in a number of different ways as though each episode is being turned over and looked at from all sides to draw from it every shade of meaning.

The fourth chapter concluded with the second sign, the healing of a Capernaum official's son (4:46-54). This was a long-distance miracle, for the word of healing was spoken in Cana. This brought Jesus back to the site of the first sign.

Judgment and eternal life happening now

Beginning with chapter 5, the theme of signs is intertwined with meditations built around the festivals of the Jews. First came the Sabbath (5:1-47), the weekly festival that originated in creation when God rested on the seventh day (Gen. 2:3). That discourse was built around a real life drama (and third sign) in which Jesus healed a paralyzed man by the pool of Bethzatha in Jerusalem on the Sabbath (5:2-9).

The dialogues that followed began with the question of what kind of work was proper for the Sabbath. Jesus asserted that what he was doing was the work of "my Father." This compounded the felony in the eyes of the Jews for he had not only broken the Sabbath but had made "himself equal with God" (5:18).

In the monologue that followed, Jesus defined God's work as giving life to the dead and the Son's work as one of judgment. He returned to the note struck in 3:19 about the day of judgment and the raising of the dead. These things, he said, are taking place in the present: "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears my word and believes him who

sent me has eternal life; he does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life" (5:24).

Son of God sign in saying "I am"

After the Sabbath, the best known Jewish festival is the Passover, the occasion for the fourth and fifth signs: the feeding of the multitude (6:1-14) and the walking on the water (6:16-21). John linked the signs with the Passover, the deliverance of God's people from Egypt brought by a miracle across the sea (Exod. 14:21-25) and then fed by a miracle in the wilderness by the bread called manna (Exod. 16:13-16, 31).

The discourse that follows the action of the signs deals with the bread that God gave to his people, symbolized both in the Passover and in the Christian rite of the Lord's Supper. Jesus introduces himself in this Passover discourse by saying, "I am the bread of life" (6:35). This was the first in the series of revelations into the person of the Christ marked by the words "I am": "I am the light of the world" (8:12), "I am the good shepherd" (10:11, 14), and "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (14:6).

These sayings link up with the revelation of the name of Yahweh to Moses in the desert as "I AM WHO I AM" (Exod. 3:14). Again, the Gospel of John pointed to Jesus as the Son of God, and echoed the first verse of the Prologue.

Stones in hand to throw at Jesus

The action in the next section took place at the Feast of Tabernacles, a harvest festival that was a time for a renewal of the covenant (7:14—10:21). A series of acts during this feast each provided dialogues and meditations on the role of Jesus as Messiah (Christ) and the place of the Christian community. The Jews refused to accept Jesus as their Messiah. They also refused to accept the followers of Jesus and put them out of the synagogues.

Between the lines of the talk about Jesus as the Messiah (7:26), as the water of life (7:37-39), and the light of the world (8:12), we can sense the debate in the first century between the church and synagogue about the person and authority of Jesus (7:32-36; 40-52). These were disputes not only between Christians and Jews, but among the Jews themselves.

The debate had to come down to the question of who were the true people of God (8:33-59). And if Jesus was the true Messiah (Christ), why did the Jews reject him and want to kill him? (The dramatic end of this dialogue found the Jews with stones in their hands ready to throw them at Jesus, 8:59.)

Fate of Christians in the synagogue

The controversy was made personal in the life of a man born blind to whom Jesus gave sight (9:1-7). The conversations that follow the blind man's healing show concern over the fate of those who had come to the light as members of the synagogue. They were misunderstood and were finally expelled and separated from their families (9:8-41). In an episode like this, we can feel the abuse that the Christians had to endure from their former friends in the synagogue (9:24-34). Not only did they have to defend themselves, but they also had to answer the attacks on the character of Jesus.

Faith from Signs

In the Book of Signs, faith came from seeing the miracle signs:

The disciples, 2:11

The Capernaum family, 4:53

The multitude fed, 6:14

People of Jerusalem, 7:31

Many of the Jews, 11:45-48

On the other hand, many did not believe, 12:37-38. But the Gospel recorded the signs so that "you may believe," 20:30, 31.

Synoptic Parallels

Only a few incidents in John have parallels in the Synoptic Gospels:

- Call of the disciples, 1:35-51
- Healing the official's son, 4:46-53
- Feeding the multitude, 6:1-14
- Walking on the water, 6:16-21
- Peter's confession, 6:66-70
- Triumphal entry, 12:12-15
- Cleansing the temple, 2:13-22
- Anointing at Bethany, 12:1-8
- The Last Supper, 13:1-11
- The Passion, 18:1—20:10

Only in John

The following events appear only in the Gospel of John:

- Wedding at Cana, 2:1-11
- Nicodemus, 3:1-21
- The Samaritan woman, 4:7-42
- Bethzatha Pool healing, 5:1-9
- The man born blind, 9:1-12
- Raising of Lazarus, 11:1-44

Messiah Used Only by John

Messiah, the Hebrew title translated as Christ, appears only twice in the four Gospels, both times in John: 1:41 and 4:25.

Finally, the converts had no place to turn inside the Jewish community. They had to flee to the fellowship of the disciples (9:35-41). The experience is related with a great deal of feeling. Perhaps, the writer of the Gospel of John had also gone through an experience of being excommunicated from the synagogue and taking refuge in the church.

The section ends with a monologue from Jesus in which he named himself the good shepherd (10:1-18). It was an allegory of the care with which Jesus nurtured his followers, particularly those like the man born blind who sought refuge in him.

But the sheepfold was not a fortress to keep others out. The shepherd laid down his life for his own flock, the Jews (10:15). But he has other sheep (Gentiles) that he wanted to call into the fold (10:16).

Eternal life in the sign of Lazarus

The final Jewish feast in which Jesus took part and which became the occasion for still more discussions was the Feast of Dedication (10:22-39). This feast celebrated the rededication of the temple in 164 B.C. after it had been desecrated by Antiochus Epiphanes. (See chapter 21, "A Pig on the Altar" and "A Little Help from the Maccabees.") This was a great victory for God's people, and a time when they renewed their covenant.

Here Jesus presented himself as the one consecrated by God and sent into the world (10:36). But the claims of Jesus were met with outright rejection from the Jews. They tried to stone him once again (10:31) and they attempted also to arrest him as they had tried several times before (10:39; see also 7:30, 32, 44; 8:20).

The mounting resistance led to the trial and crucifixion of Jesus. The first move in this direction was the completion of Jesus' public ministry. To mark the end of this period of his life, Jesus returned to the Jordan, to the place where his public ministry had begun (10:40-42).

Now Jesus was moving to the hour of his glorification. The concluding event in the Book of Signs is further preparation for the passion of Jesus: the raising of Lazarus (11:1-44). The meaning of this sign was that the believers in Jesus have eternal life: "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live" (11:25).

Anointing prepared him for his burial

As in the case of previous signs, some people believed in Jesus, but others did not (11:45, 46). A controversy ensued and the plot to put Jesus to death grew more intense (11:53). Jesus retreated to the wilderness, his public ministry at an end. The Jews were waiting for Jesus to come to Jerusalem for the Passover where they intended to trap him. Suspense mounted as they wondered whether Jesus would show himself or not (11:54-57).

Jesus did appear at Bethany where he was anointed by Mary, a symbolic act preparing him for his burial (12:1-8). Then, Jesus entered Jerusalem in triumph, ready for his glorification (12:16). This was followed by a discourse on the meaning of the cross (12:23-36), in which Jesus was in dialogue with a voice from heaven. The Book of Signs ends with a meditation on the meaning of signs (12:37-50).

The glory of the foot washing

John's attention turned then toward the passion. But before the trial and crucifixion came a series of farewell discourses that ended in a prayer for the church (13:1—17:26). These were given at the Last Supper and likely were used as meditations at the Christian observance of the event.

The account of the Last Supper (13:1-11) included the foot-washing scene which is not a part of the record in the other Gospels or in Paul's account (1 Cor. 11:23-26). The event was an acted parable of humility in keeping with the interpretation of the crucifixion as glorification. In fact, glorification introduced the dialogue that followed the act of foot washing (13:31—14:31).

This led to a discussion on the life of the believer in the world. It was to be a life centered in Jesus, a relationship of love with other believers, and a life separate from the world (15:1—16:15). The risen Christ who was present in these relationships was the one who spoke to the church, and the one whose words were recorded by John. The presence of the resurrected Christ was a reality for the church: "A little while, and you will see me no more; again a little while, and you will see me" (16:16).

The high point of these farewell discourses came in the prayer for the church (17:1-26). The prayer affirmed the gift of eternal life that had been given to the believers (17:3), because Jesus had the power to give this gift.

The prayer was also concerned about glory, a word used seven times in its several forms. Jesus had been glorified, but the glorification of the believers was still in process, though they already shared in Christ's glory. Christ had sent them into the world on a mission similar to the one that had brought him into the world (17:18).

Pained by his people's rejection

The passion narrative in the Gospel of John (18:1—20:31) brings us to events covered in the Synoptic Gospels. John seems to have been aware of Mark and to have followed his record, bringing his own emphases to bear. He saw the Jews as the people almost totally responsible for Jesus' death, and Pilate, the executioner of the crucifixion, as almost a kindly father figure intent on saving Jesus.

In John's treatment, Jesus was not the victim but an individual who was in complete control not only of himself but of all events. He was even capable of putting an end to the drama in a moment should he have so desired.

This writer of the Gospel, who portrayed the Jews as so completely responsible for the death of Jesus, was himself a Jew who was, it seems, sorely disappointed that his people had rejected Jesus. Thus, a note of bitterness touched his report as he showed the high priest, Caiaphas, saying that "it was expedient that one man should die for the people" (18:14) and the chief priests telling Pilate, "We have no king but Caesar" (19:15).

After the discovery of the empty tomb, the Gospel writers gave varying reports. In Matthew, the women who came to the grave went to tell the disciples and then the risen Jesus appeared to the disciples in Galilee (Matt. 28:9, 10). In Luke, the report of the women was not

Secret Believers

In spite of the power of the signs reported in John's Gospel, many people did not believe in Jesus. On the other hand, some people did believe, including some in high places (12:42), though they did not profess Jesus openly for fear that "they should be put out of the synagogue" (12:42), a reference to the secret believers in the Jewish communities during the first century.

The Parts of John

The main parts of the Gospel of John:

1. Prologue and testimony, 1:1-51
2. The book of signs, 2:2—12:50
3. Farewell discourses and prayer for the church, 13:1—17:26
4. The Passion, 18:1—20:31
5. Epilogue, 21:1-25

After Mark's Order

Though the Gospel of John and the Gospel of Mark contain different events ordered in a different way, John does follow Mark's order on a number of events. The order of the following is the same:

Ministry of John the Baptist

Jesus returns to Galilee

Feeding the multitude

Walking on the water

Peter's confession

Going to Jerusalem

Triumphal entry and anointing

Last Supper with prediction of betrayal and denial

The arrest and passion

In Mark's Words

A number of striking similarities in wording occur between John and Mark, and only between them:

John 5:8 = Mark 2:11: "Rise, take up your pallet and go home [and walk]."

John 6:7 = Mark 6:37: bread worth "two hundred denarii."

John 12:3 = Mark 14:3: "a pound [jar] of [costly] ointment of pure nard."

believed until Jesus appeared to the disciples a number of times in Jerusalem and vicinity.

In John, Mary Magdalene told Simon Peter and "the other disciple" about the empty tomb (20:2). Then Jesus appeared to her and to the disciples in Jerusalem (20:11-23, 26-29) and in Galilee (21:1-14). Here the appearances emphasized the spiritual presence of Jesus following his resurrection.

Present in the spirit after the resurrection

The return of Jesus in other form had already been promised (6:62, 63; 16:7). In the appearance to Mary Magdalene, Jesus told her that he was about to ascend to the Father (20:17). The purpose of returning to God was so that his spiritual presence would be available to all the believers. This was demonstrated in the appearances to the disciples that followed.

In the first appearance, Jesus appeared to the disciples who were in hiding (20:19-23). He breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (20:22). The word *breath* in both Hebrew and Greek is the same word used for *spirit*.

The experience of the spiritual presence was also dramatized in the person of Thomas who doubted the reports (20:24-29). The confrontation of the risen Jesus with the doubtful Thomas has assured the believers in every age that they can experience the resurrection presence: "those who have not seen and yet believe" (20:29b).

Footnotes for the church in chapter 21

The resurrection appearance in Galilee comes in chapter 21, an epilogue to the Gospel, which may have been added by a later editor to supply material not included in the Gospel itself.

The appearance of Jesus to Peter and the disciples in Galilee (21:1-8) affirms that the Lord's Supper as observed by the church was a ritual meal between the believers and the risen Lord (21:9-14). The discourse of the Master with Peter restored the authority of apostolic leadership (21:15-19) to the disciple disgraced by his denial of Jesus. The last note identified the author of the Gospel as "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (21:20, 24).

Concern for the inner life in the letters

As the epilogue of the Gospel had concerns for the church, so the three short letters of John also directed attention to the inner life of the church. The foes in the letters were no longer those on the outside and from the synagogue. They were the false teachers within the church (1 John 2:22, 23; 4:2, 3). While we do not know the writers of the letters of John, they were persons who had concerns similar to those found in the Gospel.

The false teaching that had caught the attention of 1 John was one that denied the human nature of Jesus. It was called "docetism" because it said that Jesus only "seemed" to be human (from the Greek *dokeo*, "I seem"). Those who held this view also overlooked the need for love in the Christian community and the need to tell the truth. The writer of the letter intended through his writing to correct these errors.

The second and third letters of John are letters written to a congregation by a writer who called himself "the elder," a title for a leader

in the church. He had some counsel to offer the congregation in matters of doctrine. He warned against the false teachers of the docetism mentioned in the First Letter of John (2 John 7-11).

The writer of the Third Letter of John (who was probably the same person as the writer of the Second) encouraged the congregation to extend hospitality to other Christians who had come to them (3John 5-8).

Glory for everyone in the world

The Gospel of John ended with the confession of Thomas, "My Lord and my God!" (20:28). The faith of the believers found its summary in these five words: the Jesus of Nazareth who taught and healed in the villages of Palestine and died on the cross under the sentence of Pilate was the risen Christ alive in their congregations as their God.

All the things that the believers need to know about their Lord and God have been written in the Bible. All these words speak to us, but perhaps none more pointedly than John 12:20-26, a unique yet typical teaching in the fourth Gospel.

In this rare passage in a Gospel concerned so much about relations with Jews, Greeks came to the disciple Philip and said, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus" (12:21). Jesus opened himself to these from the outside and offered them terms on which they, like the insiders, could enter eternal life: follow and serve him.

For so the one whom Thomas called "My Lord and my God" lived and served the God he called Father and thus was glorified.

Discovery

1. Contrast the way the ministry of Jesus is told in the Synoptics with its presentation in the Gospel of John.
2. How does the point in time when Jesus is recognized as having become the Son of God bear on the way the ministry of Jesus is reported?
3. What is the gospel of Jesus Christ? How is the good news of the New Testament a fulfillment of the covenant of the Old Testament?
4. Contrast the view of the end times in Revelation with that of the Gospel of John.

Resources

Kee, Young, and Froehlich. "The Community of the Spirit," *Understanding the New Testament*. Chapter 14. Pages 323-54.

Inventory

1. Identify:
Antiochus Epiphanes
Book of Signs
Cana
Faith
Feast of Dedication
Feast of Tabernacles
Passover
Pilate
Signs
2. How do miracles in John differ from the miracles in the Synoptic Gospels?
3. Name three or more of the signs from the Book of Signs in the Gospel of John.

Suggested Resources

70

Books

- Alexander, David and Pat. *Eerdmans' Handbook to the Bible*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1973.
- Anderson, Bernhard W. *Understanding the Old Testament*, Third Edition. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1975.
- Baly, Denis. *The Geography of the Bible*. New York: Harper and Row, 1974.
- Charlesworth, James H. *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*. Garden City: Doubleday, 1983-84. Two volumes.
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- Kramer, Samuel N. *Cradle of Civilization*. New York: Time, Inc., 1967.
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- May, Herbert G. *Oxford Bible Atlas*. Second Edition (paper). London: Oxford University Press, 1974.
- Miller, Madeleine S. and J. Lane. *Harper's Bible Dictionary*. Eighth Edition. New York: Harper and Row, 1973.
- Schroeder, David. *Learning to Know the Bible*. Newton: Faith and Life Press; Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1966.

Audio visuals

Abingdon Bible Map Transparencies for overhead projector

- Set 1. Palestine — Old Testament
 - 1A Physical Map of Palestine
 - 1B The Exodus
 - 1C The Kingdom of Saul
 - 1D The Empire of David and Solomon
 - 1E The Kingdom of Israel and Judah

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Part 2 - The Bible Crosses Europe - 24 minutes

Part 3 - Making of the English Bible - 35 minutes

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Part 2 - The Bible Crosses Europe - 9 minutes

Part 3 - The Bible Comes to England - 11 minutes

Part 4 - The Bible Comes to America - 10 minutes

Part 5 - The Bible in the World Today - 8½ minutes

The Dead Sea Scrolls and Our Scriptures

82-frame color filmstrip, script, 1958. AVL

How the Old Testament Came to Be

76-frame color filmstrip, script, 1958. AVL

A Survey of the Bible

40-frame color filmstrip, record, script. AVL

American Bible Society (ABS): Write to Film Rentals, Audio Visuals, 1111 Lancaster Avenue, Rosemont, PA 19010

Audio Visual Library (AVL): Box 347, Newton, KS 67114

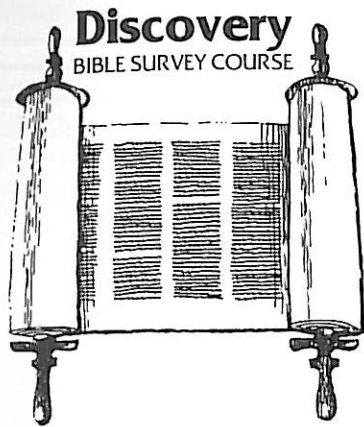
Time Line of the Bible

THE WRITING OF THE BIBLE	1300 B.C. (The Exodus)	(Joshua—The Conquest)	1200 B.C. Conquest)	(Period of the Judges)	1100 B.C. the Judges)
	THE LAW	ORAL TRADITION	ORAL TRADITION		
	FORMER: THE PROPHETS				
	LATTER: THE WRITINGS:				
CANONIZATION OF THE BIBLE					

THE WRITING OF THE BIBLE	600 B.C. (Fall of Jerusalem)	(Exile)	(Temple Rebuilt)	500 B.C. (Nehemiah rebuilds Jerusalem)	400 B.C. (Conquests of Alexander)	300 B.C. (Palestine under Syria)
	THE PENTATEUCH	Joshua Judges	Samuel Ezekiel Obadiah II Isaiah	Haggai I Zechariah	III Isaiah Joel Malachi	Job Proverbs Psalms Song of Songs Ruth Jonah Esther
						II Zechariah
						Chronicles Ezra-Nehemiah Ecclesiastes
CANONIZATION				PENTATEUCH BY 400 B.C.		
TRANSLATION						THE SEPTUAGINT

1000 B.C. Monarchy— David Solomon)	900 B.C. (The Divided Kingdom; Ahab, Elijah)	800 B.C. (Fall of Samaria)	700 B.C. (Hezekiah) (Josiah)
J	E	J E	J E D
MEMOIRS AND OFFICIAL RECORDS		Amos Hosea Isaiah Micah	Kings Zephaniah Nahum Habakkuk Jeremiah
ORAL TRADITION			
			DEUTERONOMY (621 B.C.)

200 B.C. (Maccabean Revolt)	100 B.C. (Palestine under Romans) (Herod the Great)	A.D. (Jesus) (I Jewish Revolt)	A.D. 100 (II Jewish Revolt)
Daniel		ORAL WRITTEN TRADITIONS COLLECTIONS Mark, Matt. Luke-Acts John I Peter Paul's Letters Hebrews Revelation	Letters of John Pastoral Epistles James Jude II Peter
PROPHETS 200 B.C.		Paul's Letters collected THE WRITINGS (O.T.) BY A.D. 90	The Four Gospels and Paul's Letters
LAGINT (250-100 B.C.)			Greek Versions (O.T.) of Aquila and Theodotion.



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- Chapter 2. Lands Around the Bible
- Chapter 3. Eyes of Faith to See the World

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- Chapter 4. The Founding Families and Joseph
- Chapter 5. The Shape of the Promised Land

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- Chapter 29. The Heroic Son of God
- Chapter 30. The New Moses
- Chapter 31. Liberator

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- Chapter 33. Hope in the Hour of Persecution
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