

Progressing Together



BIBL 211

New Testament Survey

Leader's Guide



Fragment of one of the Qumran Cave 'Dead Sea Scrolls'

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New Testament Survey

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Syllabus for BIBL211

New Testament Survey

Certificate Level

Course objective

To lead people to embrace the gospel, to learn to read and study the New Testament, and to gain an appreciation for its historical and theological context so that they will be better teachers, preachers, and leaders in fellowships among new converts.

Course description

This course begins with God's plan to redeem the world by sending his Messiah at the right time in history, and goes on the show, through study of the gospels, how this Messiah, Jesus Christ, not only demonstrated his identity, but fulfilled all of God's purposes in his birth, life, ministry, death and resurrection. It then traces the rapid expansion of the early church, the expression of God's growing kingdom on earth, through the message of the apostles, including the apostle Paul, and examines the foundations of faith and salvation in Christ as expressed in the apostolic writings.

Learning Outcomes

Content: By the end of the course, the student will be able:

- To describe the centrality of the Messiah's mission and appearance in the NT and show how it relates directly to God's plan of redemption as it appears in the Old Testament
- To chart key people and events of the New Testament on a historical timeline
- To identify and briefly describe key New Testament figures
- To summarize the teaching of key New Testament books
- To identify key elements contributing to the early church's growth and solidification as expressed in the book of Acts and the NT epistles

Character: By the end of this course, the student should:

- Embrace the gospel call to share the message of salvation in Christ, beginning in a local context, and in ever widening circles of influence
- Accept and embrace the radical transformation of life which acceptance of the gospel of the kingdom of God produces in a person's life and surroundings
- Internalize key principles which guide church life and growth in the New Testament

Competency: By the end of this course the student will be able

- To explain the message of salvation in Christ, as presented in the NT, to an inquirer
- To recite from memory and explain key verses found in the NT

- To transfer the knowledge acquired about major themes of the NT to a disciple, study group, or local congregation
- To demonstrate the effects of a core principle learned in the class, and to communicate that change or activity to the rest of the class

Course requirements

Certificate Level

- Demonstrate knowledge of course material through
 - answering questions at the end of each section
 - completion of the final exam, which will specifically focus on character outcomes
- Attend 18 of 20 instructor-led sessions (27 contact hours minimum)
- Participate in discussions by listening, contributing as appropriate, and responding when asked a specific question
- Draft a time-line of 40 key events and people in the New Testament
- Memorize at least 25 verses from the NT and their meaning
- Make a rough outline of at least 14 NT books, including the gospels, Acts, Romans, and Revelation, and 7 epistles of the student's choosing
- Write out a personal testimony following Paul's model in Acts 26: life before Christ, process of conversion, changes produced by knowing Christ, an appeal to the listener to surrender to Christ

Credits earnable

2 hours of credit towards a Certificate in Christian Studies

Prerequisites

Progressing Together BIBL201, BIBL202, BIBL203, and BIBL204, or equivalent

Textbook and related materials

- Required: Progressing Together Manual for BIBL211
 - Additional readings may be required at the instructor's discretion
- Recommended: At least one complete reading of the entire New Testament

Course methodology

The student will work inductively, reading texts, answering questions concerning knowledge, application and analysis, and drawing conclusions which will be applicable to local context. After answering the questions in each lesson, students will gather to discuss answers and practical application. When possible, the course leader will give additional talks to reinforce what the students are learning through the lessons.

Course schedule

To be announced.

Evaluation methodology and scale

- Student performance and mastery will be assessed according to the following scale:
 - 40% for completion of reading and assignments, (10% each for timeline, memory work, book outlines and testimony)
 - 10% on student participation and attitude in discussions
 - 10% on attendance (percentage equals number of classes attended, divided by number of classes held, times ten)
 - 40% on the final written, or oral, exam.
- The evaluation scale is as follows
 - passing grade – above 70%
 - good grade – 80-89%
 - excellent grade – 90% or above

Policies

- Cheating (copying another student's exam answers) and plagiarism (quoting another individual's material without acknowledging that person's work) will not be tolerated, because it is deemed contrary to Christian teaching and academic integrity.
- Absences in excess of 3 class hours will lead to a reduced grade; no student missing more than 6 class hours will receive credit for the course. Students who show little or no interest in completing course work will first be warned, then asked to leave the course if they do not change their conduct.

Bibliography

Guthrie, Donald. *New Testament Introduction*. InterVarsity Press: Downers Grove, IL. 1990.

Lebanese Bible Society. *Guide to the Bible* (المرشد إلى الكتاب المقدس). Beirut. 1996.

Wright, N. T. *Paul*. Fortress Press: Minneapolis, MN. 2005.

Wright, N. T. *The Challenge of Jesus*. InterVarsity Press: Downers Grove, MI. 1999.

Lesson 1: The Story Continues

Preparations for the Coming Messiah

Overview

The New Testament is the second volume in the Christian Bible. It is comprised of 27 books written in the first century after the death of Jesus Christ by several of Jesus' disciples (e.g. Matthew, James, Peter, and John) or close followers (Luke, Mark, Paul, Jude). Unlike the Old Testament which was written over several generations and covers more than 2000 years of history, the New Testament was written essentially concurrently with the events that took place over several decades of the first century AD. (*See Approximate Dates of New Testament Books in the Appendix*)

The New Testament is made up of several distinct types of literature: Gospels, History, Epistles (letters) and Prophetic. Each one contributes uniquely to the message of the New Testament by elaborating one or both major themes: the nature, person and work of Jesus Christ; and the birth, development and mission of the Church.

Abbreviations Exercise

Opposite the names of the books of the New Testament are the common abbreviations of these books in jumbled order. Match the abbreviations for each book mentioned below by crossing out the abbreviation in the abbreviation column and writing in the correct abbreviation next to the book to which it corresponds. We recommend that you learn the abbreviations of the books as well as the titles of the books of the New Testament in order as an aid to this and future Bible study. You may consult your Bible if you need help. (*The first one has been done for you.*)

Matthew:	<i>Mt</i>	1 Tim	1 Timothy:	<i>1 Tim</i>	Jam
Mark:	<i>Mk</i>	Ac	2 Timothy:	<i>2 Tim</i>	2 Jn
Luke:	<i>Lk</i>	Titus	Titus:	<i>Titus</i>	Mt
John:	<i>Jn</i>	1 Co	Philemon:	<i>Philem</i>	2 Thes
Acts:	<i>Ac</i>	2 Tim	Hebrews:	<i>Heb</i>	2 Co
Romans:	<i>Rom</i>	Gal	James:	<i>Jam</i>	3 Jn
1 Corinthians:	<i>1 Co</i>	Rev	1 Peter:	<i>1 Pet</i>	Eph
2 Corinthians:	<i>2 Co</i>	Mk	2 Peter:	<i>2 Pet</i>	Lk
Galatians:	<i>Gal</i>	1 Thes	1 John:	<i>1 Jn</i>	2 Pet
Ephesians:	<i>Eph</i>	1 Jn	2 John:	<i>2 Jn</i>	Jude
Philippians:	<i>Phil</i>	Jn	3 John:	<i>3 Jn</i>	Rom
Colossians:	<i>Col</i>	1 Pet	Jude:	<i>Jude</i>	Phil
1 Thessalonians:	<i>1 Thes</i>	Col	Revelation:	<i>Rev</i>	Heb
2 Thessalonians:	<i>2 Thes</i>	Philem			

The Old Testament tells the story of Creation, the Fall and God's plan to redeem humanity and all of Creation. At the centre of this plan is the nation of Israel which is founded and formed as the result of God's calling of Abraham and subsequent promises and covenants. Despite man's rebellion and God's discipline of His people which sent them off into Exile, removed and far away from the blessing promised in return for their obedience, the close of the Old Testament rings with prophetic encouragement that God has not forgotten his promises nor broken His covenants, but the time is coming when He will pour out His blessing and make for Himself a people from all nations. The key to the realization of this great hope is the promised coming of the Messiah whom the prophets describe as a prophet, priest, king, deliverer and saviour.

What is important to understand when reading and studying the New Testament is that it is not a completely 'new' story, but rather the completion of the story of redemption that God began in the Old Testament. The two volumes go together and must be understood in light of each other. This idea of 'completion' is made evident by the fact that the first thing described by the first book of the New Testament (Matthew) are the events surrounding the birth of a child. Is this the One promised by the prophets of old? Could it be that after all these years, God has been pleased to send to us His Saviour?

Introduction

The events that the New Testament records come after a period of nearly 400 years of prophetic silence. Malachi, the last prophet of the Old Testament period brought his call to repentance between 432 and 425 BC. Though the people of Israel had, by the grace of God, survived the captivity and exile under the Assyrians and Babylonians, and had returned to the Promised Land and rebuilt the temple and the walls surrounding Jerusalem, they were plagued with sin marked in particular by corrupt priests, neglected offerings and practices, and idolatry (Malachi 1:6-8; 2:6-9; 2:10-13; 3:6-9)

After the Babylonians, the Persians ruled Asia Minor and the Land of Palestine. The Persians were succeeded by the Greeks under the direction of Alexander the Great. The Greeks in turn were succeeded by the Romans. It is the Romans who ruled during the time of the events of the New Testament, and after 400 years, the hope of the people of Israel (known by then as the 'Jews') continued to be strong. Most remembered the prophecies of the coming Messiah, although many had grown complacent. Many, such as the Pharisees, still held out a living hope that He would come in their lifetime. What is the basis of this stubborn hope?

A. The Messianic Hope in the Old Testament

1. Read Genesis 3:14-16.

a. Who is speaking?

God

b. What is the context (what has just happened)?

Adam and Eve had taken and eaten the fruit of the Tree of the knowledge of good and evil which was forbidden to them.

c. What does this passage say is going to happen?

God cursed the work of the man, He sentenced mankind to physical death and He sacrificed an animal to cover their nudity. Then He threw them out of the garden.

2. Read Genesis 12:1-3.

a. Name the three promises that God gave to Abraham in verses 1-3.

- *I will make you into a great nation.*
- *I will bless you and you will be a blessing.*
- *I will make your name great.*

b. What does the author say is the key to receiving a blessing as a result of these promises?

We must bless Abraham and his offspring

3. Read Deuteronomy 18:15-17. According to Deuteronomy 1:1, much of what is recorded in this book is Moses' explanation of God's law for the people of Israel. Based upon this information, answer the following questions.

a. In verse 15, when the writer says, "God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you," who does the 'me' refer to? (Compare Acts 3:22.)

The 'me' refers to Moses by whom the prophecy will be given to the people.

b. What does the writer mean when says, "...from among you, from your countrymen"? (Compare Acts 3:25-26.)

From the people of Israel

c. How do we know from this verse that this prophet cannot be Mohammad?

He does not come from the people of Israel.

4. Read 2 Samuel 7:8-9, 16 and Psalm 89:20-21, 27-29

a. What does God promise to David?

God promised to establish his throne and his kingdom forever.

b. How can David experience this if he later dies?

His reign will continue through his sons.

5. Based upon the passages you looked at in questions 1-4 above, what can you say so far about the person that God intended to send to His people?

The Messiah must be a son of Israel of the line of David, he will reign for ever after having crushed the head of Satan.

6. Read Psalm 2:1-2.

- a. What name is given to God's representative described here in verse 2?

The Anointed, the Messiah

- b. How do the nations respond to God's representative?

They take counsel together to reject his authority.

7. Read Psalm 23.

- a. How is the Lord described?

He is described as being the good shepherd

who watches over, protects and feeds his sheep

with wisdom, goodness and mercy.

- b. What are three things the Psalmist says that the Lord does for His people in this Psalm?

He gives rest

He leads them

He restores and strengthens them

8. Read Isaiah 53:1-12.

- a. Who is Isaiah talking about?

He is talking about the righteous servant (52.13; 53.11)

- b. How is this person described?

He has nothing spectacular about him, he is ordinary, despised and rejected, wounded and crushed, led like a lamb to the slaughter, he did not defend himself against his murderers but was irreproachable and innocent.

- c. What does this person accomplish in his suffering?

The Servant would « make many be counted as righteous » (v. 11) and « bear the sins of many » (v.12) and « intercede for transgressors » (v.12)

9. Read Isaiah 9:6-7

- a. When Isaiah says in verse 6, "a child will be born to us," who is the 'us' he is talking about?

The « us » can mean « the people who walked in the darkness » (v. 1) specifically the people of the Covenant of Israel. And therefore, all humanity.

- b. What does Isaiah say will be the child's primary role?

He will increase his government and his kingdom

He will establish an eternal peace over the throne of David

There will be no end to justice and righteousness.

- c. What titles are used to describe this child?

Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

- d. According to Isaiah, how long will this person exercise his authority?

For eternity

10. Based upon the passages you looked at in questions 6-10 above, what else can you say about the person that God intended to send to His people?

This person will be called the righteous Servant, the Messiah on the throne of David, God, Wonderful Counsellor. The nations will take counsel together and reject his authority, his will be unjustly persecuted and executed but he shall not try to defend himself. But he shall be exalted and will establish forgiveness, justice and peace over an ever-extending kingdom.



Take Note!

The influence of the Old Testament is seen throughout the New Testament. The New Testament writers included approximately 250 express Old Testament quotations, and if one includes indirect or partial quotations, the number jumps to more than 1,000. It is clear that the writers of the New Testament were concerned with demonstrating the continuity between the Old Testament Scriptures and the faith they proclaimed. They were convinced that in Jesus the Old Testament promises had been fulfilled.

B. The Coming of the Messiah in the New Testament

1. Read Matthew 1:18-23.

- a. Summarize the angel's message to Joseph.

He says that Joseph can marry Mary for she is pregnant by virtue of the Holy Spirit in conformity with the prophecy of Isaiah.

- b. Read Isaiah 7:14. How do the words of Isaiah compare to the angel's message to Joseph?

They are almost identical apart from « and they shall call his name » instead of « and shall call his name. »

- c. If you were Joseph, what might you be thinking?

Before this announcement – that Mary was not pure

After the announcement – that she was an extraordinary woman

God had given him an amazing responsibility.

God intervenes for His people in sending a prophet who will be so close to God.



Take Note!

The expectation that the Messiah would come in 1st Century Palestine was so intense, that many men claimed that they were the 'One' and lead many people astray! (See Acts 5:33-39)

2. Read Matthew 2:1-6

- a. Who were the Magi looking for?

The king of the Jews

- b. Why would this alarm King Herod?

He thought that his throne was under threat from another claimant.

- c. The title 'messiah' is the Hebrew word for 'anointed one'. The Greek translation of 'Messiah' is 'Christ'. Therefore, the name 'Jesus Christ' means literally 'Jesus the anointed one'. What details do the Chief Priests give to Herod to describe this coming Messiah? List three:

He will be born in Bethlehem in Judea

He will be a ruler of his people

He will be a shepherd over Israel



Take Note!

Scholars have identified more than 300 prophecies from the Old Testament that Jesus fulfilled in his birth, life and ministry, and death and resurrection. In addition to these prophecies he performed many miracles and taught extensively about the things of God, adding weight to His claims to be the Prophet, Priest and King spoken of in the OT.

3. Read Luke 2:8-14.

- a. Summarize the angels' message to the shepherds.

A child is born in the city of David who is the Messiah, a Saviour, the Lord; a source of joy for all the people.

- b. Several Old Testament prophecies that you have already looked at in section A talk about the coming Messiah. Which of these prophecies do the angels refer to? (Give the book, chapter and verse as well as a one sentence summary of the prophecy.)

Deut 18:15-19 – A prophet like Moses

2 Sam 7:16 – 'The Messiah', Son of David, Lord, He will reign for ever on the throne of David.

Ps 23 – 'The Messiah', source of joy, He will lead his people and give them rest.

Es 53:1-12 – 'The Saviour', He will save his people from their sins by suffering in their stead.

Es. 9:5-6 – 'The Lord', a child is born who is 'the Mighty God'.

c. If you had been one of those shepherds that night on the hills in Palestine, what would you have been feeling?

Wonder. What would come out of all this? What will this child become? God is going to send us the Messiah to deliver us.

4. Read the following passages and summarize what they say about Jesus. *The first one is given as an example.*

Passage	What it says about Jesus
John 8:25-29	<i>Jesus speaks for God. He is therefore a prophet.</i>
John 5:17-18	<i>Jesus speaks of God as being his Father, he considers himself as equal to God.</i>
John 18:33-37	<i>Jesus is the King of the Jews, but his Kingdom is not of this world.</i>
John 10:11-14	<i>Jesus is the Good Shepherd (title of God) who gives his life in sacrifice to save his sheep, who know him.</i>
John 12:44-47	<i>Jesus is the light of the world who guides and saves.</i>
John 3:16-17	<i>Jesus is the Son of God who is come to save all those who will believe in him.</i>
John 4:25-26	<i>Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ.</i>
Luke 9:21-23	<i>Jesus is the Son of man who must suffer, die, and rise again the 3rd day.</i>

5. In your own words and using the passages above, explain how Jesus Christ showed Himself to be the One that the prophets of the Old Testament said was coming.

Jesus relates himself to several titles of the one who would come – Son of David, Saviour, Son of man, Son of God (Emmanuel), King of the Jews, Good Shepherd, the light, the Servant who must suffer and die to expiate sins.

As a tool for evangelism and teaching with regard to the person of Jesus, complete the following chart summarizing some of the major Old Testament prophecies fulfilled by Jesus. Select the appropriate New Testament passage from the list below, and write it in the appropriate space across from its Old Testament prophecy. (Note: Some OT prophecies have more than one NT reference that will 'fit'!) This chart can be carried in your Bible and used to help explain the unique person of Jesus. *The first one has been done as an example.*

Major Old Testament Prophecies Fulfilled by Jesus Christ

OT Passage	Subject	NT Passage
Micah 5:2, "As for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah... from you one will go forth from Me to be ruler in Israel..."	Born in Bethlehem	<i>Luke 2:4, "And Joseph also went up... to the City of David, which is called Bethlehem...and she gave birth to her first-born son."</i>

Isaiah 7:14, "Behold a virgin shall conceive..."	Born of a virgin	Lk 1.26,31
Deuteronomy 18:15, "The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you from your countrymen."	Declared to be a prophet	Ac 3.20,22
Isaiah 53:3, "He was despised and forsaken of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief...He was despised, and we did not esteem Him."	Rejected by His own people, the Jews	Luke 23.18, 21
Psalms 2:7, "... the decree of the Lord: He said to Me, 'Thou art my Son, today have I begotten Thee.'"	Declared to be the Son of God	Mt 3.17
Isaiah 50:6, "I gave My back to those who strike Me... I did not cover My face from humiliation and spitting."	Spit on and struck	Mt 26.67
Psalms 22:18, "They divide My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots."	They gambled over His clothing	Mt 27.35-36
Zechariah 12:10, "They will look on Me whom they have pierced."	His side pierced	John 19.34
Psalms 16:10, "because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead, nor will you let your faithful one see decay."	To be resurrected	Mark 16.6
Psalms 68:18, "When you ascended on high, you took many captives; you received gifts from people, even from the rebellious-- that you, LORD God, might dwell there.."	Ascended to Heaven	Eph 4.8 Mark 16.19

List of New Testament passages to be inserted into the chart above:

- Ephesians 4:8, "He ascended on High, He led captive a host of captives, and He gave gifts to men."

- Mark 16:19, “When the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, He was received up into Heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God.”
- Mark 16:6, “Do not be amazed; you are looking for Jesus the Nazarene who has been crucified. He has risen; He is not here.”
- John 19:34, “One of the soldiers pierced His side... and immediately there came out blood and water.”
- Matthew 27:35, “And they divided up His garments among themselves, casting lots.”
- Matthew 26:67, “Then they spat in His face and beat Him with their fists; and others slapped Him.”
- Matthew 3:17, “... a voice out of the heavens, saying, ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased.’”
- Luke 23:18, 21, “But they all cried out together, ‘Away with this man... crucify, crucify Him!’”
- John 1:11, “He came to His own (people) and His own (people) did not receive Him.”
- Acts 3:20, 22 “...He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you... (for) Moses said, The Lord your God shall raise up for you a prophet like me from your brethren.”
- Luke 1:26, 27, 31, “The angel Gabriel was sent from God to a virgin... Behold, you will conceive... and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus.”
- Luke 2:4, “And Joseph also went up... to the City of David, which is called Bethlehem... and she (Mary) gave birth to her first-born son.”

Conclusion

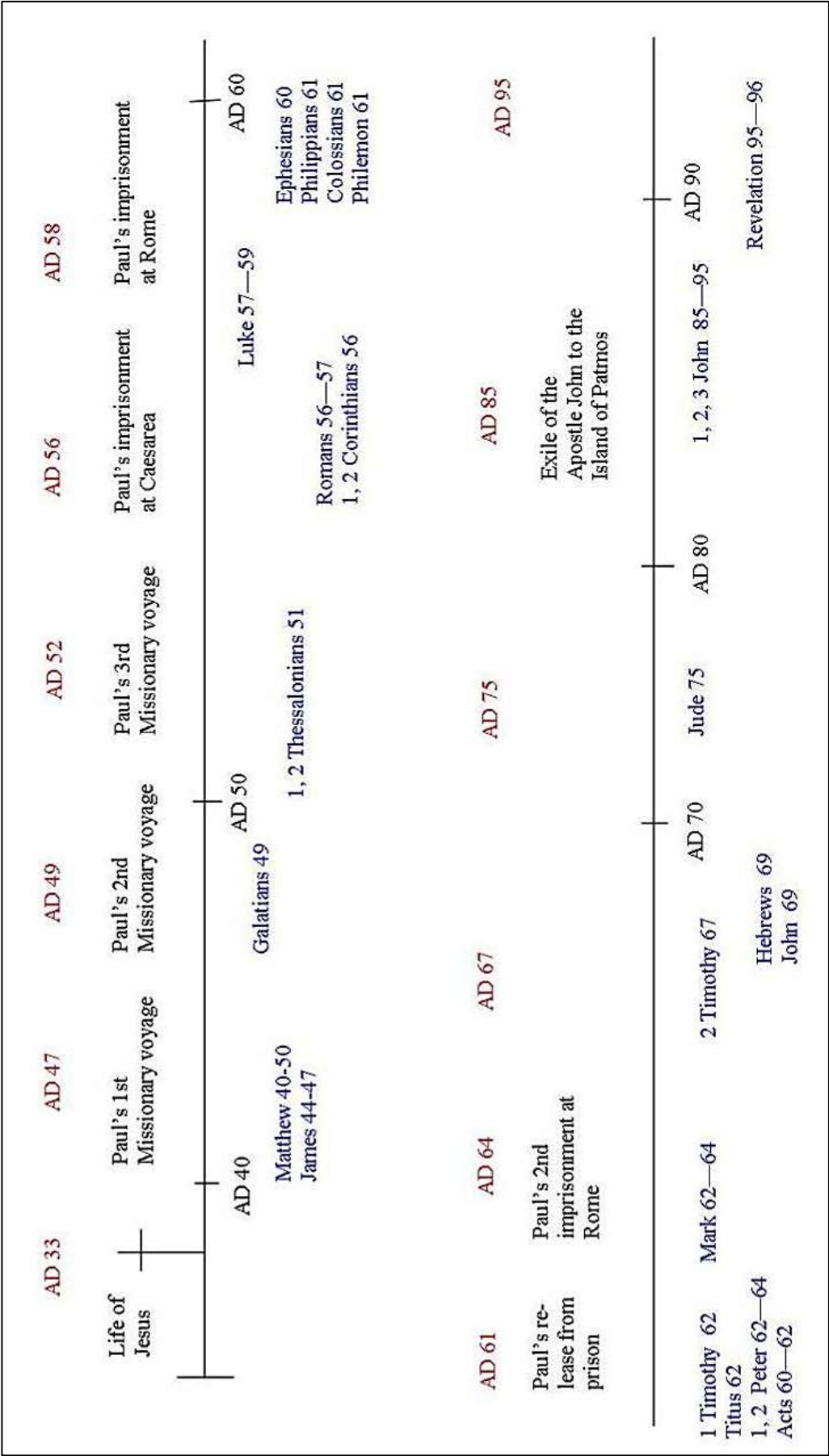
The New Testament continues God’s story of redemption by presenting the life and ministry of Jesus, the promised Messiah.

1. Choose one of the following passages to memorize:

- a. Genesis 12:1-3
- b. Isaiah 9:6-7
- c. Luke 2:10-11

2. Numbers 23:19 says, “God is not a man that He should lie; nor a son of man that He should repent; has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken and will He not make it good?” Take time now to pray and thank God for the fact that – just as He showed by fulfilling the prophecies of the Messiah in Jesus Christ – He is trustworthy and does what He says He will do.

Appendix 1: Approximate Dates of the Books of the New Testament



Lesson 2: The Unfolding of God's Plan for His People

The Social, Political, Religious and Geographical Context of the New Testament

Introduction

As we saw in Lesson 1, the events of the New Testament are directly and inseparably linked to the story of the Old Testament. This lesson is designed to help the student understand the setting in which the events and people of the New Testament are described. Two essential elements of the Bible that every Bible student must not overlook and which cannot be overemphasized are first, that the people mentioned and the events described actually happened in real places at a real time in history. Secondly, all that happened in the political, social, religious, historical and personal realms was superintended by God.

A. Geographical Setting

The events of the New Testament take place in the Mediterranean region of Asia Minor and the Arab Peninsula, though most of what happens is concentrated in the area known commonly as 'Palestine', which stretched from the Jordan River and the Dead Sea on the East, to the Mediterranean Sea on the West, and comprised (in the first century), Galilee, Judea, and Samaria. (See Map 2)

1. On the map below, find and circle the following important cities: Rome, Jerusalem, Corinth, Philippi and Antioch.

Map 1: The Mediterranean Region



a. Which of these cities were accessible to the Mediterranean Sea?

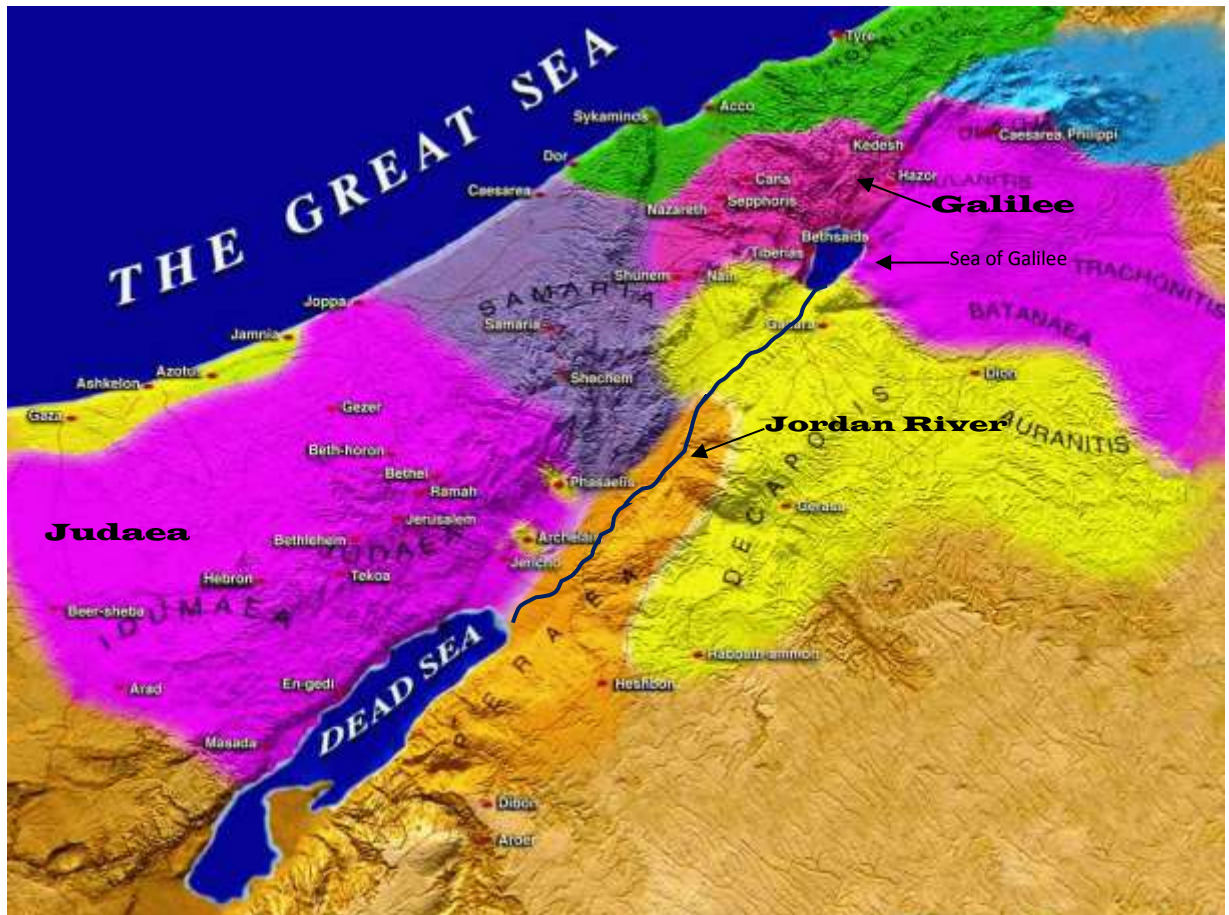
Rome, Corinth, Antioch.

b. Why would this be important for the advance of the Gospel?

They were accessible, central to spread the message, linked one to another even at a distance.

2. On the following map, find and circle the following important cities: Nazareth, Bethlehem, Cana, Jericho, and Bethsaida.

Map 2: Palestine in the Time of the Early Church



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As you can see, the continuing story of the New Testament makes use of many of the same cities and surrounding areas that were important in the Old Testament. One city of particular importance was the city of Jerusalem.

a. From your knowledge of the Old Testament, name two important things (people, events or objects) which identify Jerusalem as an important city.

The temple

The siege of Judah and of all Israel under David

The city of David

b. Read the following passages and note what each one says about Jerusalem's future. *The first one is given as an example.*

Passage	Jerusalem's Future
Isaiah 62:1-5	<i>Jerusalem will be renewed and all the nations will see her righteousness</i>
Zechariah 8:3-8	<i>God will bring back his dispersed people to Jerusalem, the holy mountain</i>
Revelation 21:1-4	<i>The city which will descend from heaven will be called « the new Jerusalem »</i>

c. What common theme do these texts share with regard to the future of Jerusalem?

The city will be filled with people, God will dwell with them, the city will be glorious and all will be well.

B. Political Context of 1st Century Palestine

1. Read the following passages and identify the political authority mentioned. See if you can gather from the context (a few verses before or after) the extent of the person's authority or rule (i.e., was he the Emperor of Rome, a local official, or a regional governor?). *The first one is given as an example.*

Passage	Authority figure	Extent of Authority or Rule
Luke 1:5	<i>Herod the Great</i>	<i>King of Judea</i>
Luke 2:1	<i>Caesar Augustus</i>	<i>Emperor of the Roman Empire</i>
Matthew 14:1-5	<i>Herod (Antipas)</i>	<i>Tetrarch (of Galilee and Perea)</i>
Matthew 27:1-2	<i>(Pontius) Pilate</i>	<i>Governor (of Judea)</i>
Acts 23:25-35	<i>(Antonius) Felix</i>	<i>Governor of Judea</i>
Acts 26:13-16, 21	<i>Agrippa II Herod</i>	<i>King (of Galilee and Perea)</i>
Luke 3:1	<i>Tiberius Caesar</i>	<i>Emperor</i>

During the time of the New Testament, the Roman Empire ruled the largest kingdom in the Western World. Due to the wisdom and might of the Roman authorities the Western World knew a certain amount of economic prosperity. One key to the success of the Roman Empire was the willingness on the part of Roman Emperors to allow local provinces the privilege of self-government and the right to keep their own language, customs, and religion as long as the people stayed on peaceful terms with Rome: meaning, as long as they paid their taxes and didn't cause any trouble.

The birth of Jesus takes place during the reign of Herod the Great. In an effort to maintain peace between Rome and the Jews, he undertook a number of large-scale building projects, including the restoration of the Jerusalem temple.

2. Despite Roman efforts to accommodate the Jews, over time, a considerable amount of animosity developed between them. Read the following passages and note the arena of conflict (i.e. political, religious, personal, etc..) between the Romans and the Jews.

a. Matthew 22:15-21:

Should the Jews pay taxes to Rome and use Roman money?

b. Matthew 14:3-12:

John the Baptist denounces Herod for adultery and loses his head

c. Luke 13:1:

Pilate is accused of atrocities and sacrileges in offering human sacrifices in the temple

d. Given the vast religious differences between the Jews who worshipped the God of Creation and the Romans, who were obliged to worship the Emperor, what could the Romans or the Jews have done to avoid cultural and religious conflict?

Religious compromise; dispensing obligatory religion; separate; live separately; convert

e. Since the ways of the Gospel are frequently different from the laws and customs of any given culture or country, what are the likely points of conflict for those who wish to follow Christ in your country?

Homosexual marriage, witness at school, in public...

3. Read John 18:35-37 and Acts 1:6-7.

a. What were the Jews (including the disciples) expecting Jesus to do as the Messiah?

He would establish a political kingdom and get rid of Rome.

b. Why were the Jews so convinced that the Messiah would be a military champion and overthrow the Romans in order to set up an Earthly Kingdom? (See Isaiah 60:10-14 and Psalms 2:1-9 if you need help understanding the Jews' view of the Messiah.)

No-one can stand before the power of the Messiah

He would subdue all his enemies.

C. Social Climate of 1st Century Palestine

1) Men, women and children.

1. Select one of the following passages: John 8:1-11; Matthew 19:13-15; Matthew 19:3-8. Read the passage and answer the following questions.

a. What does this passage indicate about the place of this person or persons in society in Jesus' day?

John 8 – The woman is accused; the man goes free?

Men judge and condemn with severity

Matt 18.13 – Children sent away by the disciples

Matt 19.3 – A woman can be divorced simply by letter if she displeases her husband

b. How does what Jesus says challenge the cultural norm of the day?

- 1) *Injustice and hypocritical discrimination*
- 2) *The true value of children, the weaker*
- 3) *The will of the heart, faithfulness and compassion of the law rather than the letter.*

c. How does the place of this person or persons in society in Jesus' day compare to the place of similar people in your own culture today?

i. John 8:1-9: The woman caught in adultery

An adulterous woman is put to shame more than an adulterous man. In the west adultery has become normal behaviour.

ii. Matthew 19:13-15: Children gather around Jesus

In many western countries, children are given rights that they can demand of their parents.

iii. Matthew 19:3-8: Jesus' instructing the disciples with regard to divorce (the 'person' in view here is the wife).

In many countries today, the woman theoretically has the same rights in matters of divorce as the man.

Divorce has become very widespread and less stigmatised.

In certain cases, a divorced woman has means to support herself.

2) Rich and Poor

The Gospels provide many glimpses into the life of ordinary people in the first century. Men and women, rich and poor, slave and free, Jew, Greek, Roman and others are all confronted with Jesus and an invitation to the Gospel.

Read the following passages and note what is happening, as well as Jesus' view of things. (In other words, what does Jesus see as most important in what is happening? What is the lesson He wants to teach?) *The first is given as an example.*

Passage	What is happening?	What is Jesus' teaching?
Mark 12:41-44	<i>A poor, old woman puts two pennies into the temple treasury.</i>	<i>Two pennies given in faith are worth far more than riches given to please men.</i>
Luke 17:11-16	<i>Healing of 10 lepers who cried out at a distance Only the Samaritan came back.</i>	<i>By his gratefulness, the Samaritan was worthier than the other. He was saved.</i>

Luke 18:9-14	<i>A pharisee scorns a tax collector.</i>	<i>Jesus recognises the humble faith of the tax collector.</i>
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3) Jews, Romans and Greeks

Palestine, in the first century, was home to a number of cultures. With the expansion of Roman rule and the improvements made to peace and welfare, transportation and commerce, people from many lands crisscrossed the kingdom bringing with them their customs, traditions, values and beliefs which often gave rise to misunderstanding and conflict.

1. Read Acts 17:16-21.

- a. Who does Paul meet in the city of Athens?

Idolatrous pagans, Epicurean and Stoic philosophers

- b. How would you describe their attitude towards religion?

They were always looking for new things – new gods, ideas and philosophies.

- c. How do their beliefs compare to those of Paul?

They believed in several gods and made idols. They had no assurance of a righteous God nor any intimate knowledge of any god.

2. Read Acts 21:27-39

- a. What was Paul accused of?

He was accused of defiling the temple by bringing in (uncircumcised) Greeks, and of teaching against the Jews, the temple and the carrying out of the law.

- b. Why did this accusation result in a near riot?

The Jews were zealous for the law. They sought to convert pagans to the practice of the law. They also considered the temple to be sacred. They had heard bad things about Paul and wanted to use the occasion to get him arrested.

- c. How and why did the Romans get involved?

They came to calm down the riot and to arrest the trouble-makers as well as to protect Paul from the violence of the crowd.

- d. This incident continues through chapter 23 where Paul is eventually taken to Caesarea to appear before the Roman Governor, Felix. Read Acts 22:24-29. How does Paul defend himself before the Roman military authorities?

Paul speaks of his being a Roman citizen and asks if it is lawful to whip him.

3. In light of what you have read and studied above, choose one of the following responses (by marking an 'X' in the box) and explain why you think so.

- a. ☐ Christianity was planted in a social setting that completely agreed with and accepted it.

No. The Jews had rejected Jesus as Messiah. The pagans did not accept the idea of one creator God nor that of resurrection from the dead.

- b. ☐ Christianity was planted in a social setting that completely ignored its ideas, values and beliefs.

No. The existence of Judaism throughout the Roman Empire had prepared the way to understand and receive Jesus as Messiah. The pagans knew nothing about the values of Christianity, but they were open to listen to the message.

- c. ☒ Christianity was planted in a social setting that needed to be transformed

Yes. Animosity between Jews and gentiles.

Social injustice: contempt of the woman; gap between rich and poor, between Roman and barbarian; immorality and idolatry; oppression of slaves.

D. Religious Context of 1st Century Palestine

First century Palestine was alive with religious sentiment. On the one hand, the people of Palestine were under the watchful eye of the Roman authorities who, for the most part, allowed their constituents to practice their religious faith as long as it did not conflict with, nor keep them from obeying, Roman law. The Jews were even exempted from Emperor worship, military conscription and appearing in court on the Sabbath. On the other hand, obligations and freedoms changed depending upon who ruled Rome which resulted at times in conflict.

Within the Jewish population itself, several expressions of the faith were evident: those who embodied the public and 'official' religious practice of the Jews, namely the Scribes, Pharisees and Sadducees; the every-day Jew who was often pre-occupied with eking out a living and staying out of trouble from either the Romans or the Jewish religious leaders, and the 'others' who practiced unapproved 'versions' of the Jewish faith, such as the Samaritans. To this mix, one must also add the various animists and idolaters of Greek or African origins, as well as those who practiced sorcery and other 'black' arts.

1) Roman Religious/Political Influence

1. Read Mark 12:13-17.

- a. What is the issue that the Pharisees ask Jesus to respond to?

They wanted his response to the issue of paying taxes to Rome

- b. Why is this issue troublesome to the Jews?

The Jews considered the Romans as pagans. Their money even carried the images of idols and emperors who were worshipped by their subjects.

Part of the revenue went to supporting idol worship.

For some Jews having faith in God = not fearing (not respecting) pagan authority.

c. How does Jesus' response silence the Pharisees?

His response was right and good: Give to each one that which belongs, to each their due.

Giving to Caesar takes nothing away from God.

God has given authority to humans, even to the pagans.

d. How does "give to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things of God" apply in your own life?

I must pay my taxes to the government in power and show respect and obedience to the laws promulgated by civil authorities except when they contradict the law of God.

2) Pharisees, Sadducees and Scribes

1. Read the following passages and note the prevailing attitudes of the religious leaders. *The first one is given as an example.*

Passage	Prevailing attitude
Matthew 9:10-11	<i>Accusing/judging Jesus for 'inappropriate' behaviour</i>
Matthew 12:9-14	<i>They seek to kill because he dared to heal a withered hand on the Sabbath day</i>
Matthew 26:3-5	<i>They plotted against Jesus in order to arrest him out of sight of the people</i>
Matthew 27:15-20	<i>They incited the crowd to demand the release of Barabbas instead of Jesus</i>
Mark 12:38-40	<i>Scribes – They liked to show off their piety in public but were greedy to get hold of the wealth of widows</i>
Luke 11:39-44	<i>Pharisees – They were pure on the outside, meticulous regarding rules but they neglected justice and love. They liked to be honoured</i>

2. Based upon the passages you have read in completing the table, how would you describe the religious leaders in terms of what they considered to be the most important things in the practice of their religion?

They sought to be irreproachable before religious law: accomplish everything in the list of rules set out.

3. Why do you think Jesus was a particular target of the religious leaders?

On one hand he did not conform to their lists and on the other hand, he exposed their lack of moral and spiritual integrity.

**Take Note!**

The Pharisees believed that the Babylonian exile was the result of a failure of Israel to keep the Torah (or 'Law'). As a result, they codified the contents of the Torah into 613 commandments: 248 positive and 365 negative; including 39 prohibited acts on the Sabbath.

3) Samaritans

The Samaritans were considered half-breeds by the majority of the Jews because they traced their ancestry to Jews that married outside of Judaism during the time of the Exile. By the time of the 1st Century the Samaritans, who for the most part inhabited a region called 'Samaria' (see map 2 above), found themselves somewhat isolated from the rest of their fellow Jews. So intense was the dislike of the Samaritans that many Jews would avoid business and social relationships with them and many would avoid traveling through Samaria – choosing to take a long detour around the region – when traveling between Galilee and Judea.

1. With this in mind, read Luke 10:29-37

- a. How do the priest and Levite (the 'good' Jews) respond to the injured man?

They went around him and continued their journey. This was understandable for those who served in the temple must avoid contaminating themselves by touching a dead body. They kept themselves « pure » to « serve God. »

- b. How does the Samaritan (the 'bad' Jew) respond to him?

It is the Samaritan who put himself at risk by taking the man to a Jewish hotel and paying from his own pocket for his care and food.

- c. What is Jesus trying to teach by telling this story?

-The observance of laws in the style of the Pharisees can remove a person far from the justice and love of God.

-People originating from despised ethnicities may have more merit than the Jews.

-God does not judge according to appearances

-We are all far from being a Good Samaritan. We would need to be as good as this Samaritan if we were to be saved by our works (Luc 10.25)

2. Read John 4:1-10

- a. What is significant about where Jesus takes his disciples on this trip?

Jesus took his disciples to Sychar, a Samaritan town. This shows the value that Jesus gives to this despised people and the incomprehension of the disciples.

- b. How do you explain the surprise of the woman when Jesus speaks with her?

The commentary in verse 9 explains this: the Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.

- c. In verse 27, the disciples come back to find Jesus speaking with a Samaritan woman. What do you think is going through their minds?

They may have asked themselves what good it would do him to speak to her. She would not be interested anyway.

- d. What is Jesus' purpose in bringing His disciples to Samaria?

(V.34-42) Jesus wants to show them that these Samaritans are part of the harvest ready to be brought in, of people ready to receive eternal life in Jesus Christ. Not only must they not despise them but they must preach the Good News to them.

- e. What people in your culture/village are like the Samaritans?

Free answer

- f. What does Jesus show us about how we should treat them?

We must bring them the Gospel. We must not neglect them or think of them as impossible to reach.

4) Other Religious Influences in the New Testament

1. Read Acts 13:5-11

- a. How would you describe the religious world of Elymas?

He used satanic powers to impress and dominate people. They knew the Scriptures but did not submit to them.

- b. How did Paul respond to him?

Paul openly opposed and denounced him. He called on the power of God to blind him for a time.

2. Read Acts 19:23-35

- a. How would you describe the religious world of (many of) the inhabitants of Ephesus?

They worshipped idols, one of which was Artemis of the Ephesians.

- b. Why does the preaching of the Gospel and the conversion of many Ephesians cause a problem that ends in a near riot?

The life of craftsmen was in danger as well as the pride of their profession, for Paul taught that idols were worth nothing before the Creator God. Their cultural pride would thus suffer.

- c. Consider the religious world of your own hometown. How would the preaching of the Gospel and the conversion of many of your friends and neighbours affect it?

Free answer.

For example: On one hand, non-religious people who teach atheism would feel threatened. On the other hand, Muslims would feel attacked by the dominant Christian majority (in the West). Their cultural pride would be affected.

Conclusion:

The people and events of the New Testament are real and historical. God made use of cities and cultures and politics and religion to finish that part of His story that would be written down as the Bible. The key to understanding the message of the New Testament in light of the message of the Old Testament is to recognize that nothing was accidental, no detail random, nothing overlooked, and that God used the things of culture, history, politics and religion to accomplish exactly what He said He would do.

In Luke 2:10-11, the angels announce Good News to the shepherds. That good news has two parts:

- a) A Saviour has been born, who is Christ the Lord
- b) He has come for all people.

Take time now to pray for your family, friends, neighbours, colleagues at work or school as well as for your country's leaders that they might meet Jesus as their Saviour and receive the promised joy.

Appendix 2: Definitions

Pharisee: “Pharisees were drawn from all classes and professions of Jewish society; many would not have been involved in politics at all. On the other hand, since Pharisaism was based on a view of what Israel’s responsibilities under the covenant entailed, those Pharisees who occupied positions of influence and power naturally did what they could to promote the acceptance of Pharisaic norms... Whereas they might at times succeed in influencing the proceedings of particular religious and political institutions, they controlled none... Both the rabbinic and Gospel materials appear to support the view that Pharisaic influence with the masses exceeded that of their rivals... Popular support was undoubtedly the main base of what influence the Pharisees possessed. The Pharisees emerge then as an organized party of members committed to a particular understanding of Israel’s Law, maintaining its practice themselves and advocating its adoption by others. Where rulers could be influenced, Pharisees lobbied for their views... In this respect, they functioned as a ‘political interest group.’”

The Pharisees were mostly middle-class businessmen, and therefore were in contact with the common man. Though they were a minority in the Sanhedrin (the Jewish judicial and administrative council – see below), and held a minority number of positions as priests, they seemed to control the decision making of the Sanhedrin far more than the Sadducees did, because they had the support of the people.

Religiously, they accepted the Old Testament Scriptures as inspired by God. But, they also gave equal authority to oral tradition, and attempted to defend this position by saying it went all the way back to Moses. This was nothing less than legalism. These traditions had evolved over centuries. These traditions were added to God's Word, which is forbidden (Deuteronomy 4:2; Revelation 22:18-19), and the Pharisees sought to strictly obey these traditions equally along with the Old Testament (Matthew 9:14, 15:1-9, 23:5, 23:16, 23; Mark 7:1-23; Luke 11:42). “Particular attention was clearly given to matters of ritual purity and tithing... violation of Sabbath laws... open association (even at meal times) with notorious sinners.” (Green et al., *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL, 1992, pages 610-611)

In contrast to the Sadducees, they held the following beliefs:

1. They believed that God controlled all things, and yet decisions made by individuals also contributed to the course of a person's life.
2. They believed in the resurrection of the dead (Acts 23:6).
3. They believed in an afterlife, with appropriate reward and punishment on an individual basis.
4. They believed in the existence of angels and demons (Acts 23:8). Although several things Jesus did and taught contradicted the Pharisees’ teachings, many of them were friendly toward him, inviting him to eat with them and warning him when threatened by Herod (e.g. Luke 7:36, 13:31). Some even became his followers (John 3:1-21, 19:38-42; Acts 15:5).

Sadducee: During the time of Christ and the New Testament era, those who were Sadducees were generally aristocrats. They tended to be wealthy and held powerful positions, including

those of chief priests and high priest, and they held the majority of the 70 seats of the ruling council called the Sanhedrin. They worked very hard to keep the peace by going along with the decisions of Rome (Israel at the time of Jesus was under Roman control), and in fact they seemed to be more concerned with politics than religion. Because they were accommodating to Rome, and they were the wealthy upper class, they did not relate well to the common man nor did the common man hold them in high opinion. The common man related better to those who belonged to the party of the Pharisees. Despite holding a majority in the Sanhedrin, they frequently conformed to the desires of the Pharisees because they were popular among the masses.

Religiously, the Sadducees were more conservative in one main area of doctrine than the Pharisees. The Pharisees gave oral tradition equal authority to the Old Testament scriptures, while the Sadducees considered only the written Word to be from God. However, they were extremely self-sufficient, to the point of denying God's involvement in everyday life.

Because the Sadducees were more concerned with politics than religion, they were unconcerned with Jesus until they became afraid He might bring unwanted Roman attention. It was at this point that the Sadducees and Pharisees united and conspired to put Christ to death (John 11:48-50; Mark 14:53; Mark 15:1). Other mentions of the Sadducees are found in Acts 4:1, Acts 5:17. The historian Josephus also implicates the Sadducees in the death of James (Acts 12:1-2).

Scribe: The word 'scribe' is the English translation of the Greek word 'Grammateus', which means literally 'accurate writer' This term came to mean a 'scholar of the scriptures.' Scribes were men whose primary occupation was writing out copies of the Jewish Scriptures and teaching the people what the law said. Because they copied the Old Testament books, they were familiar with the Hebrew Scriptures and were respected in society for their literacy and knowledge. The scribes provided teaching that was the religious and moral backbone for the Jewish people during the time of Jesus. Because of their role, they were often addressed as, 'Teacher.' At least some scribes were members of the Sanhedrin (Mt. 16:21, 26:3).

They were trusted as professional interpreters and as ones who could judge individual cases as they related to Jewish law. Scribes were, therefore, also trusted as lawyers within Jewish society. As the scribes were the most learned individuals on the fine details of following Jewish law, their duties also consisted of deciding on specific questions of the law in individual cases.

Scribes had no authority in themselves, but rather they continually deferred to the authority of other scribes and traditions to support their positions. Although some of the scribes agreed with Jesus' teachings (e.g. Mt. 8:19), other scribes were some of Jesus' most adamant opponents. In their minds, the Messiah who the Old Testament Scriptures spoke about did not seem to match up with who Jesus was. Particularly, they disputed with Jesus on such issues as ritual washing before a meal, eating with sinners, and forgiving people's sins (Mt. 15:1-2, Mk. 2:1-16). On the other hand, Jesus complained that the scribes cheated widows and orphans, sought the praise of people, were spiritually blind, etc.

Sanhedrin: The Sanhedrin is mentioned frequently in the New Testament in reference to the highest Jewish judicial and administrative council in the first century. Jewish tradition holds that the Sanhedrin was established with the 70 elders that were appointed by God through Moses (Numbers 11:16), while the Israelites were on their Wilderness Journey between Egypt and the

Promised Land, about two years after the Exodus (Numbers 10:11). There is no record that the council operated then as it did in apostolic times, however. For this reason, some believe that the Sanhedrin actually began some time during the three or four centuries between the testaments (after the last OT prophet and before the NT story begins), when the land of Israel was under the Syrian kings in the time of the Maccabees.

By the time of Jesus Christ, the Sanhedrin had great authority, while still under Roman rule. The council consisted of 71 members, including both Pharisees and Sadducees, presided over by the chief priest. The Sanhedrin members were bitter opponents of Jesus Christ and as such, were responsible for His arrest, 'trial,' and death sentence (e.g. Mt 26:1-27:56).

The council's opposition to the early Christian church was no less intense -

- Peter and John were brought before the Sanhedrin and ordered to stop teaching the Gospel (Acts 4:5-21). When the apostles continued, the council had them arrested (Acts 5:21-27). They were later released with a beating and yet another warning (Acts 5:34-42).
- Stephen was also brought before the Sanhedrin and stoned (Acts 6:12-15).
- Paul was brought before the council (Acts 22:30), and they later devised a plot to assassinate him (Acts 23:12-20).

Appendix 3: Selected Political Leaders of Jesus' Day:

Tiberius Caesar was the emperor of Rome (AD 14-37). Tiberius had distinguished himself as a citizen for his oratory skills, as a soldier and a public official. As emperor of Rome he was slothful, self-indulgent, licentious, vindictive and cruel. He was a master at lying and he was very cunning.

Pontius Pilate was the governor of Judea for 10 years (AD 26-35). He had entered public life not for pure of lofty reasons but to advance his own career and serve his own selfish purposes. He was ruthless and murderous, with a reputation among the Jews he ruled as being tyrannical and tempestuous. He had a very low and corrupt character.

Herod the Great was appointed king by the Romans (37-4 BC). He was only half Jewish, of Idumean background. He treated his enemies, real or suspected, ruthlessly. He completed many building projects during his reign, including the renovation of the Jewish temple in Jerusalem. Around AD 29, Jesus predicted the destruction of this temple, which was razed to the ground by the Romans in AD 70.

Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great, ruled Galilee as tetrarch (4 BC-AD 39). Herod was first married to a daughter of King Aretas of Arabia; then he took Herodias, his brother's wife, as his own wife. This sinful act resulted in the death of John the Baptist and the overthrow and banishment of Herod and his unlawful wife.

Philip, the half-brother of Herod Antipas, ruled the region of Ituraea as tetrarch (4 BC-AD 34). He was the only decent ruler from the line of Herod the Great. He was known for his moderation and his justice.

The High Priesthood of **Annas** and **Caiaphas**. Annas was the father in law of Caiaphas, and although Caiaphas was the official high priest of Israel (AD 18-36), Annas, who had been the former high priest (AD 6-15), still held power and authority. Caiaphas is the high priest that tore his clothes and declared Jesus worthy of death.

Lesson 3: The Life of Jesus, Part A

His Birth and Temptation, the Calling of the Disciples and His First Miracle

Introduction

Now that you have taken time to look at how the events of the New Testament continue the story of the Old Testament, it is time to focus on two of the major themes that make up the majority of the New Testament: the life and ministry of Jesus and the birth and expansion of the church.

This lesson will look at the beginnings of Jesus' life and ministry on the Earth. The purpose is to help the student understand the events surrounding Jesus' birth, His temptation, the calling of the disciples and His first miracle.

A. The Birth of Jesus

Prior to Jesus' birth, God sent another prophet – John the Baptist. Study the following section to discover who he was, why he was sent and how his ministry was significant.

1. Read Luke 1:5-17

- a. What blessing is God planning to give to Zacharias and his wife Elizabeth?

A son born of his wife who will be a subject of joy for them and for all the people.

- b. Why was this so important to them?

As his wife was sterile, it was the answer to their prayers (v.13) and a consolation after many years of shame and waiting.

- c. How does the angel describe who their son would be and what he would do?

He will be a faithful servant of God and of the people with the spirit and power of Elijah – maybe Elijah himself, according to the promise written by the prophet Malachi. He will prepare the way of the Lord (reference to Isaiah 40) to turn their rebellious hearts and reconcile fathers to children.

2. Read Matthew 3:1-6

- a. How is the ministry of John described?

As he who announced the need to repent and to prepare for the Kingdom of God by giving as baptism as a sign. In Isaiah 40 he is designated as the one who prepares the way of the Lord.

- b. Why do you think he is later known as John 'the Baptist'?

He called people to commit to a new life and to recognise their need of God's forgiveness by being baptised by John.

3. Read John 1:29-34

a. How does John describe Jesus?

He called Jesus « the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world and the Son of God, on whom the Holy Spirit descended. » He existed before John. He is God who has come down to man.

b. From what you know of the Old Testament, why does John connect Jesus, 'the Lamb of God', with the forgiveness of sins?

Lambs, goats and rams were used as sacrifices offered by man to satisfy the righteous anger of God against their sins.

4. From all that you have read of John the Baptist, describe how he prepares the way for Jesus.

John warned the people that the Lord God was going to come to earth and establish his Kingdom. People must recognise their need of God's forgiveness and seek to live according to his holy law. They must be ready to receive Jesus as Messiah and to follow him.

5. Read the following passages and match them by writing the reference next to the event that they describe. *The first one is given as an example.*

~~Luke 1:26-38~~, Luke 2:1-7, Matthew 2:13-15, Luke 2:15-18, Matthew 1:18-25, Luke 2:8-14, Matthew 2:1-12

Passage	Event Described
Luke 1:26-38	<i>Announcement of the birth of Jesus to Mary</i>
Matt 1.18-25	<i>Announcement of the birth of Jesus to Joseph</i>
Luke 2.8-14	<i>Announcement of the birth of Jesus to the shepherds</i>
Matt 2.1-12	<i>Visit of the wisemen</i>
Luke 2.1-7	<i>Birth of Jesus</i>
Matt 2.13-15	<i>Flight to Egypt of Joseph, Mary and Jesus</i>
Luke 2.15-18	<i>Visit of the shepherds</i>

6. What do you notice about the events surrounding the birth of Jesus that makes his birth special? List 12 things (exercise your powers of observation!):

- 1) *Elizabeth pregnant and birth of John the Baptist*
- 2) *Zachariah receives a revelation and is struck dumb*
- 3) *Joseph's dream – he agrees to marry Mary*
- 4) *The annunciation to Mary*
- 5) *Birth of Jesus to a virgin*
- 6) *Visit of the Magi seeking a child king and worship*

- 7) *Appearance of the star*
- 8) *Appearance of the angels to the shepherds*
- 9) *Testimony of the shepherds*
- 10) *Miraculous protection of Jesus from Herod*
- 11) *Birth in Bethlehem according to the prophet Micah*
- 12) *Flight to Egypt according to the prophecy*
- 13) *Testimony of the answer to the prayer of Simeon in the temple (Luke 2:25-26)*
- 14) *Prophetic witness of Anna (Luke 2.36-38)*

In telling the life of Jesus, God chose four men to record events, describe people, and discuss selected teachings from His life. Each Gospel writer was led by the Holy Spirit to select and compile information in such a way as to present a picture of Jesus that would appeal to a certain group of readers. For example, Matthew, in his Gospel, is writing to a primarily Jewish group of readers. Because of this, Matthew makes many references to Old Testament practices and traditions and he quotes often from Old Testament books, making use of knowledge that his Jewish audience would have.

Luke, on the other hand, is writing to communicate to a largely Gentile (non-Jewish) audience that would have little interest in and knowledge of Old Testament Jewish practices and Scriptures. He in turn, spends more time showing how Jesus interacts with nature, women and the poor – all things that concerned the Gentiles.

Similarly, for the Gospels of Mark and John, the writers of these Gospels, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, selected information and compiled it in such a way so that their readers would understand the person, ministry and invitation of Jesus to His kingdom.

7. In contrast to the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, which spend several chapters recounting various details surrounding the events prior to, during, and following the birth of Jesus, the Gospel of John describes Jesus' coming to earth from a theological point of view and the Gospel of Mark skips over Jesus' birth entirely. Why do you think these writers spend so little time discussing Jesus' birth?

On the one hand, John and maybe Mark also, wrote after Matthew and Luke and this information had already been made known. What they could complete with more certitude and interest was their witness to what Jesus had said and done. Also, for a better understanding of who he was theologically.

8. Because each of the Gospel writers, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, sometimes selected different events and teachings in order to explain the life and ministry of Jesus to their particular audience, what do you think is the best way to get a full picture of who Jesus is and what He came to do?

In order to get a deeper understanding, it is best to read each of the Gospel accounts.

9. Some people look at slight differences in between one Gospel and another and accuse the Christians of corrupting the original text. How would you explain these minor differences to such a person?

The small differences confirm that each testimony is original, comes from an eyewitness source, and not from a copy of a previous testimony which would add nothing either to our understanding or to our conviction of « the authenticity of these accounts. »

10. What is the advantage of having four separate testimonies about Jesus' life (the four Gospel accounts) as opposed to only one witness, such as in the sect of the Mormons and in the Islamic religion?

The existence of four testimonies gives us a solid assurance of the historical veracity of these accounts. The historical method for confirming the facts of an oral or a written testimony is to compare it with the writings of other witnesses. Indeed, before a tribunal, and notably in the law of Moses, it was normal to confirm a testimony by the greatest number of witnesses.

In the law of Moses, a minimum of two witnesses was demanded in order to establish a judicial fact. God gave twice as many to certify the truth of the message of the Gospel: that the Son of God came to die on the cross, be raised to life the 3rd day and appear before the disciples.

B. Jesus' Temptation

One thing to notice is that, despite all the detail surrounding the birth of Jesus, very little information is recorded which describes his growing up years. Apart from a few verses talking about being left behind at the temple during one Passover festival (Luke 2:41-50), the next events discussed by the Gospel are Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist and His move into public ministry.

1. Read Matthew 4:1-2. What happens to Jesus immediately following His baptism by John the Baptist?

The Spirit leads him into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

2. Read Matthew 4:3-10. Complete the table by describing the temptations and how Jesus responded to each. *The first one is given as an example.*

Verses	Temptation	Jesus' Response
vv 3-4	<i>Feed yourself (ignore God's provision)</i>	<i>Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word of God</i>
vv. 5-7	<i>Throw yourself down.</i> Ps 91.11-12	<i>You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.</i> Dt 6.16
vv. 8-10	<i>Fall down and worship me.</i>	<i>You shall worship the Lord God only.</i> Dt. 6.13

- a. What was Satan trying to get Jesus to do through this series of temptations?

He wanted Jesus to go against the will of God and to flout the Law.

- b. What was Jesus' strategy to withstand temptation?

Jesus quoted a passage from the Law of God which corresponds with temptation or erroneous reasoning.

- c. Each one of these temptations can at one time or another be part of our own personal struggle. Choose one of these three temptations with which you have the most trouble and memorize the passage that Jesus used to defeat Satan. Copy the verse that you are memorizing below.

*"It is the Lord your God you shall fear. Him you shall serve and by his name you shall swear."
Dt 6.13*

C. The Call of the Disciples

1. From the early days of Jesus' ministry, it was evident that He was not going to do everything on His own. For example, He invited 12 men to follow Him and serve with Him.

- a. Without using any Bible helps, list the names of the 12 disciples.

Matthew/Levi

John

Simon Peter

Bartholomew/Nathanael

Andrew

Thomas called the Twin

Philip

Simon the Zealot/Thaddeus

James, son of Zebedee

Judas/Thaddeus

James, son of Alphaeus

Judas Iscariot

- b. Read Mark 3:13-19 to fill in the names of the disciples that you missed.

Free answer

2. Read Mark 1:16-20 and Mark 2:13-14. Though not much is written about the lives of the disciples prior to their joining the ministry team of Jesus, what can you say about their character by the way that they respond to Jesus' invitation to be His disciples?

They left their previous life without hesitating, their work, to follow Jesus. (Note that it was not without already knowing who he was.)

3. How does their response compare to your own?

Free answer

For example: I followed Jesus in stages – it was difficult to let go of everything and give my life over to him completely.

4. From what we learn of the disciples, they included a few fishermen, a tax-collector, a political radical (known as a zealot), some unknown, and one man who Jesus knew would later betray Him. If you were going to pick 12 men who you would train to take over your ministry when you were gone, what kind of people would you pick?

Free answer

For example: People who would not seek power, glory, money. Workers, helpful and obliging, humble, listeners.

D. Jesus' First Miracle

Though Jesus' ministry begins with His baptism which is immediately followed by His temptation and the selection of His disciples, Jesus' ministry is characterized by two things: teaching and miracles. His teaching has as its purpose to explain to the people the message of the Kingdom that Jesus has come to announce. His miracles have as their purpose to demonstrate that He is God's representative – the Messiah, the Son of God, and the King.

1. The setting for Jesus' first miracle is the region of Galilee (see Map 2 from Lesson 2). Read John 2:1-10.

a. Describe the scene. What is the event and what need prompts Jesus to intervene?

Jesus and his disciples are at a family wedding. The crisis: lack of wine. Mary asks Jesus to intervene to provide for the lack of wine.

b. Why does Jesus respond to His mother as He does in verse 4?

He should follow the orders of his Father. Up until now he has not received any such order.

c. What miracle does Jesus perform?

The water in the jars is changed into wine.

d. What does this miracle demonstrate about Jesus?

This miracle demonstrates:

- 1) That Jesus came to bless and bring joy*
- 2) that he responds when we call upon him in faith*
- 3) that God has granted him exceptional power*
- 4) he is discreet*

2. Read John 2:11. What was the result of the miracle for the disciples?

They believed in him. This first discreet miracle was performed above all for them.

3. Have you heard of or seen the power of Jesus at work today? If so, write about it briefly here:

Free answer

A personal example of the one who provided this guide: God protected my skull and spinal cord from a fall from height landing on my head, whilst visiting an isolated church. Satan wanted to get rid of me and without God's powerful intervention, he would have succeeded. By the grace of God, I am alive and still serving him.

Conclusion

The New Testament, in continuing the unfolding of God's plan for His people, reveals the Messiah – Jesus – the Saviour of the World. As a result of your study of the beginnings of Jesus' life and ministry, note three key elements that demonstrate that Jesus is the Messiah.

- 1) *His birth attests that he is the Messiah, Son of David.*
- 2) *He received the approbation of John the Baptist and of the Father at his baptism.*
- 3) *He had the power to change water into wine and to bless his people.*

Appendix 4: The Death of Jesus' Witnesses

The Fate of the Apostles of Jesus

The Church historian Schumacher researched the lives of the apostles and recounted the history of their martyrdoms. Although we cannot be 100% certain of the truth of these accounts, he had reasons to believe that each died as described below.

Matthew suffered martyrdom in Ethiopia, killed by a sword wound.

John faced martyrdom when he was boiled in a huge basin of boiling oil during a wave of persecution in Rome. However, he was miraculously delivered from death. John was then sentenced to the mines on the prison island of Patmos. He wrote his prophetic Book of Revelation on Patmos. The apostle John was later freed and returned to serve as Bishop of Edessa in modern Turkey. He died as an old man, the only apostle to die peacefully.

Peter was crucified upside down on an x-shaped cross, according to church tradition because he told his tormentors that he felt unworthy to die in the same way that Jesus Christ had died.

James the Greater, a son of Zebedee, was a fisherman by trade when Jesus called him to a lifetime of ministry. As a strong leader of the church, James was ultimately beheaded at Jerusalem. The Roman officer who guarded James watched amazed as James defended his faith at his trial. Later, the officer walked beside James to the place of execution. Overcome by conviction, he declared his new faith to the judge and knelt beside James to accept beheading as a Christian.

Bartholomew, who is identified as **Nathanael**, was a missionary to Asia. He witnessed to our Lord in present day Turkey. Bartholomew was martyred for his preaching in Armenia when he was flayed to death by a whip.

Andrew was crucified on an x-shaped cross in Patras, Greece. After being whipped severely by seven soldiers they tied his body to the cross with cords to prolong his agony. His followers reported that, when he was led toward the cross, Andrew saluted it in these words: "I have long desired and expected this happy hour. The cross has been consecrated by the body of Christ hanging on it." He continued to preach to his tormentors for two days until he expired.

The apostle **Thomas** was stabbed with a spear in India during one of his missionary trips to establish the church in the subcontinent.

Matthias, the apostle chosen to replace the traitor Judas Iscariot, was stoned and then beheaded.

Others not among the 12 disciples:

James the Just, Jesus' brother and a leader of the church in Jerusalem, was thrown over a hundred feet down from the southeast pinnacle of the Temple when he refused to deny his faith in Christ. When they discovered that he survived the fall, his enemies beat James to death. This was the same pinnacle where Satan had taken Jesus during the Temptation.

Jude, the brother of Jesus, was killed with arrows when he refused to deny his faith in Christ.

Barnabas, said to be one of the group of seventy disciples, preached throughout Italy and Cyprus. Finally, Barnabas was stoned to death at Salonic.

The apostle **Paul** was tortured and then beheaded by the evil Emperor Nero at Rome in A.D. 67. Paul endured a lengthy imprisonment which allowed him to write his many epistles to the churches he had formed throughout the Roman Empire. These letters, which taught many of the foundational doctrines of Christianity, form a large portion of the New Testament.

Mark died in Alexandria, Egypt, after being dragged by horses through the streets until he was dead.

Luke was hanged in Greece as a result of his tremendous preaching to the lost.

Lesson 4: The Life of Jesus, Part B

The Sermon on the Mount, Selected Miracles and Teachings, and the Jews' Rejection of Jesus as the Messiah

Introduction

As was introduced in Lesson 3, Jesus' ministry was marked by two major elements: teaching and miracles. This lesson is designed to help the student understand the nature and purpose of several key teachings of Jesus and to evaluate the significance and impact of a select number of miracles. Finally, the student will explore the reasons and the result of the Jews' rejection of Jesus as the Messiah.

A. Sermon on the Mount

The Gospels record a number of significant teachings of Jesus. One of the most important and well known is the 'Sermon on the Mount' found in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke.

1. The Sermon on the Mount can be divided into three sections as noted in the table below. (All verses are taken from the Gospel of Matthew.)

Passage	Summary
5:1-16	Jesus describes the character of the people of the Kingdom of God.
5:17-20	Jesus explains the purpose of His coming and the nature of His teaching.
5:21 – 7:27	Jesus teaches how the people of the Kingdom are supposed to behave.

Note: the 'people of the Kingdom' are those that have entered into relationship with the King, Jesus: i.e. Christians

a. Read Matthew 5:1-12. How would you describe the kinds of people that are described as the ones who are or will be blessed?

Those who are blessed are humble, meek, saddened by injustice, merciful, persecuted but seekers after peace. They care for others and do not look out just for themselves.

b. How is Jesus' view of those that receive blessing different from the World's view of those that are considered to be 'blessed'? (Who are the heroes in your culture – what are they like?)

Those that the world considers blessed are the rich, the powerful, those who know how to impose themselves on others, be well thought of, and get everything they want.

c. Read vs. 13-16. How does Jesus describe the role of the people of the Kingdom with regard to the World?

Those of the Kingdom have the responsibility of being different to those of the world, to draw others to a better life, to guide those who seek after truth and expose those who prefer to live in the darkness. They must inspire admiration of God their Father.

d. Read Matthew 5:17-20. What does Jesus say is the purpose of His coming and the nature of His teaching?

Jesus came to fulfil perfectly the Law. To do this he had to satisfy all the demands of the Law – which he did in living in conformity to the Law of Moses. He demands the same standard of every person before the Law.

2. The following table summarizes the subject matter found in the Sermon on the Mount.

a. Read the passages indicated and complete the table as noted. (All verses are taken from the Gospel of Matthew.)

Passage	Subject	Message
5:21-26	Reconciliation	<i>He who refuses to forgive but who maintains anger, commits murder in his heart</i>
5:27-30	Adultery, an example of sin	Sin is actually deeper than the act of disobedience itself
5:31-32		Divorce, in most cases, only multiplies sin.
5:33-37	Vows	<i>Do not take oaths but always speak the truth</i>
5:38-42		Do not repay evil with evil, repay evil with kindness.
5:43-48	Love	<i>Do not love only those who love you but love also your enemies</i>
6:1-4		Give without drawing attention to yourself.
6:5-15	Prayer	<i>Do not pray in order to be admired by others but hide yourself away to please God alone</i>
6:16-18	Fasting	<i>Do not fast to be seen by others but fast in secret</i>
6:19-34	Money	<i>Do not make money your god</i>
7:1-5		Do not judge others for you are not blameless.
7:6-12	Requesting things from God	<i>Request of God with confidence and persevere in prayer for all your needs. He will provide.</i>
7:13-14	Two paths in life	<i>Be vigilant about your behaviour and do not follow the advice of the majority</i>
7:15-23		You can tell true teaching/teachers from false teaching/teachers by the fruit born in people's lives.

7:24-27	The wise and the foolish builder	<i>You must dig deep to find the word of God and then put it into practice in your life</i>
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b. Jesus introduces a number of subjects in this Sermon with the words “you have heard that it was said...but I say to you” (v. 5:27, 31, 33, 38, and 43). In these cases, Jesus is quoting from an Old Testament law and bringing a new understanding of it. Read the verses noted and summarize what Jesus ‘added’ to the OT law with his ‘new’ interpretation.

Do not worry about your material needs; Do not stack up treasures on earth. Trust God the Father who provides and follow him without hesitation.

Verse	Law and the Old Testament	New Interpretation
5.21	“You shall not kill.” Ex 20.13	<i>Whoever gets angry against his brother deserves judgment.</i>
5.27	“You shall not commit adultery.” Ex 20.14	<i>Whoever looks at a woman and desires her has committed adultery with her.</i>
5.31	“He who sends away his wife must write her a certificate of divorce.” Deut 24.1	<i>Whoever puts away his wife exposes her to adultery.</i>
5.33	“You must not swear falsely in the name of God.” Lv 19.12	<i>Do not swear! Simply say « yes » and « no. »</i>
5.28	“An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.” Ex 21.24	<i>Do not resist evil people.</i>
5.43	“You shall love your neighbour and you will hate your enemy.” Lv 19.18	<i>Love your enemies and pray for them.</i>

c. Did obeying this ‘new’ interpretation of the law, make obedience more difficult or simpler? Explain how.

Each time Jesus raises the bar of the Law higher than it was before.

d. What is Jesus trying to communicate by pushing obedience to this new level?

Those who like the Pharisees, think they can merit God’s approbation by their own acts of righteousness in conformity to the Law of God, must realise that this is impossible for them to achieve.

e. In chapter 6, Jesus treats the subjects of almsgiving, prayer and fasting. In each case, He seems to communicate the same message. Reread 6:1-18 and in your own words, note what you think Jesus’ message is for these three subjects.

The message of Jesus: do not carry out acts of piety towards God in public. By seeking to please men, you risk losing all reward before God.

f. What can you do to apply this message to your life this month?

For example: Seek a private place for prayer. Do not make known what you are doing. Give the offering discreetly in church. It is best to give to those in need through the church. Fast discreetly.

g. In chapter 7, Jesus closes His sermon by talking about two paths (v. 13-14), two types of teaching/teachers (v. 15-16), two kinds of trees (v. 17-19) and two types of builders/houses (v. 24-27).

i. List the characteristics of all that pertains to the 'bad' path, teaching/teacher, tree and builder/house

Bad ways lead to destruction; even if it seems the best way to get what is desired at the time. Bad ways are easier and followed by more people.

ii. List the characteristics of all that pertains to the 'good' path, teaching/teacher, tree and builder/house.

They are durable, fruitful in the long term. Even if they demand more effort, they are worth it.

iii. How does your life demonstrate the characteristics of the 'good' path, teaching/teacher, tree and builder/house?

Free answer.

For example: The writer can attest that the regular reading of the Bible and the putting into practice of its teachings within the family brings forth the peaceful fruits of righteousness.

B. Selected Miracles of Jesus

In order to demonstrate His authority to teach, Jesus performed many miracles. In fact, John 21:25 says that Jesus did so many things that they could not all be recorded. In general, Jesus' miracles can be grouped into three categories; those that deal with nature, those that deal with human health and welfare and those that deal with spiritual forces (mainly demonic).

1. Read the passages noted and complete the table.

Passage	Describe the situation	Miracle Performed	This proves that Jesus...	Reaction of the people
Matthew 8:23-27	Storm threatens to drown disciples	Jesus calmed the storm.	... has power over nature	Amazement, wonder
Mark 6:35-44	A crowd of 5000 men + women and children need food	<i>Jesus feeds the crowd with just 5 loaves and 2 fish</i>	<i>... takes care of our needs</i>	<i>Contentment, then, a greater seeking of his power to heal.</i>

John 11:38-45	<i>His friend Lazarus is dead. A crowd has gathered to mourn his death.</i>	Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead	<i>... has authority over nature / can guarantee health and save life</i>	Faith
Luke 8:26-37	Jesus is confronted by a demon possessed man.	<i>Jesus casts out evil spirits from the man.</i>	... has power over the demonic forces	<i>Great fear. They asked Jesus to go away.</i>
Luke 6:6-11	Jesus meets a man with a withered hand in the synagogue on the Sabbath	Jesus healed the withered hand	<i>... can restore people's health.</i>	<i>Anger and opposition from the religious leaders.</i>

2. Why do you think that the religious leaders responded so negatively to Jesus' healing of the man with the withered hand?

The religious leaders had a wrong understanding of the laws concerning the Sabbath. Also, Jesus' lack of conformity to their will annoyed them. Their pride blinded them.

3. In John 10:37, 38, Jesus says, "If I do not do the works of my Father, do not believe Me. But if I do them, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father." How do the miracles of Jesus show that the Father is in Him and He is in the Father?

Jesus did everything that His Father does as Creator and Redeemer-King-Shepherd of his people.

C. Selected Teachings of Jesus

In addition to long messages, like the Sermon on the Mount, in which Jesus dealt with several subjects at once, the Gospels record numerous incidents in which Jesus seized upon a question, a situation or even an everyday object to instruct those around him. One common tool that Jesus used to teach was the parable – a simple story told to convey a moral teaching.

1) Teaching through Parables

Read the following two texts, choose one and answer all the questions for this text alone. Then prepare a 5-6-minute message to share with the class. Remember to introduce the story, tell or read it, prepare questions to ask and/or comments, and apply its teaching.

1. Read Luke 8.4-15.

a. In your own words, retell the parable. (Mention the farmer who sows; the four types of ground and the results of each one.)

Free answer.

- b. From verses 11-15, describe how Jesus explains the parable.

Hearing the word of God does not produce the same effect in the hearts of people. Some forget before having understood; others give up on the way because of life's worries or persecutions but for those who listen and apply what they hear to their lives, there is a dynamic change which enriches several.

- c. Who is present to hear Jesus give this parable?

The disciples are present with him in a place apart.

- d. Why do you think that Jesus wanted them to hear this message?

The text does not say why, except perhaps in v 10, where Jesus explains to them in private that they have the exceptional privilege to hear and understand his teaching. This was not given to all. Jesus wanted them to realise the privilege they had to understand, and to not be surprised if even the religious leaders did not believe.

2. Read Mark 12:1-12.

- a. In your own words, retell the parable. (Mention what the owner did to prepare his vineyard, his trip, the sending of successive servants and the treatment they received, the death of the son and the ensuing judgement.)

Free answer

- b. What do you think is Jesus' intended message of this parable?

The religious leaders rebelled against God when they rejected his prophets and even his own Son. They will be severely judged for their sins.

- c. What is the reaction of the religious leaders to this parable?

They understood the message perfectly and they sought to have Jesus arrested and tried. But their fear of the people prevented them from doing this.

- d. Why would they respond like that?

They didn't like Jesus reproaching them. They justified themselves in their hearts and blamed Jesus in their stead.



Take Note!

The Gospel writers record 39 different parables of Jesus! However, only 10 of them are cited by more than one of the Gospel writers.

2) Direct teaching

In addition to parables that Jesus told to his disciples as well as to the crowds, Jesus taught directly on everything from death to taxes and from marriage to work. Select one of the following passages below and answer the questions that accompany it. (You may complete the other work during the group discussion or at another time.)

1. Jesus teaches on faith, Matthew 6:25-34

a. What emotion is contrary to faith (v. 25)?

Anxiety

b. What three reasons does Jesus give for not being anxious?

- 1) *We can have confidence in God our Father for he takes care of the birds who have no cares and worries. How much more will he do for us? v 26*
- 2) *We cannot change anything by being anxious about it. v27*
- 3) *Being anxious like the non-believers shows that we do not have faith that honours God. v31-33*

c. How does Jesus' example of God's provision for the birds help respond to the emotion of anxiety with regard to having enough to eat and clothing to wear (v. 26)?

God provides food for the birds who have done nothing to merit (neither sown nor reaped). Since man is worth much more than birds, can we not have confidence that God out of his goodness will provide for us, especially as we work?

d. How does Jesus' comparing flowers to Solomon help respond to the emotion of anxiety (v. 28-29)?

If God watches over flowers and grasses which wither so quickly, how much more will He take care of us, His children? And if He takes such care of us, why be anxious?

e. What is Jesus' point in verse 32, when He says that the Gentiles seek after all these things (food, drink, and clothing)?

The Gentiles trust in their material resources to meet their needs. When they lack something, they become anxious (even before). Whoever knows God should realize that He alone can ensure their future needs. "No one can serve two masters: God and Mammon" (the god of materialism of the Gentiles).

f. What can you do today to grow in faith and reduce anxiety with regard to having enough?

Free answer

For example:

- *Thank God for His goodness, His love, His power, His wisdom, and express confidence in Him in prayer.*
- *Bring to God something in which I have put my confidence up until now.*

2. Jesus teaches on forgiveness, Matthew 18:21-35

a. What is Peter's question?

Should I forgive my brother as many as 7 times?

b. Why did Peter ask such a question?

Teachers at that time taught that forgiving someone 3 times was sufficient. Maybe Peter thought he was being generous or maybe he thought that 7 was the perfect number.

c. In Jesus' answer, he tells the story of a King and a man who owed him a large sum of money. How badly was the man in debt to the King?

His debt was an unpayable amount.

d. What was the King's response to the man's pleas?

He released him and cancelled the debt.

e. From verse 27, what does forgiveness mean?

It is compassion.

f. What did the man do once he was set free by the King?

He pounced upon a fellow servant who owed him money and demanded repayment.

g. How was the man not like the King when it came to being able to forgive?

He had no compassion and had the man thrown into prison

h. Think about your own life. How much has God forgiven you?

Free answer

i. Think of someone that you know that you need to forgive. How much are they in debt to you? How can you do for them what the King did for the man with the huge debt?

Free answer



Take Note!

Jesus has more to say about money than about Heaven and Hell combined! Why does Jesus put so much emphasis on money?

3. Jesus teaches on honesty. Mark 10:19; John 8:31-45

a. What is the difference between lying and telling the truth?

Do not bear false witness, you shall not defraud means that we must not say things about someone else that may not be true. It could be hearsay but it could also be interpreted as a judgement when we don't have all the facts. It can harm their reputation. Truth sets us free from the power of the Evil one. Jesus is truth and says the truth. Satan is a liar and only tells lies. Truth is the work of Christ, Lies are the work of Satan.

b. From Mark 10:19 how important is telling the truth?

It is a commandment of God.

c. Read John 8:31-38. Why does Jesus say the Jews do not believe Him?

They seek to have him killed. They are doing the works of their father, Satan and do not believe as did their father Abraham (v56).

d. Read vs. 39-44. Who does Jesus say is the 'father' of these Jews?

He says it is Satan.

e. Read vs. 43-45. Name the two characteristics that Jesus says describes Satan's character.

He is a murderer and a liar.

f. What can you conclude from this passage as to the origins of lying?

The origins of lying are with Satan. (Gen 3.4)

g. What do you think Jesus expects of His children with regard to telling the truth?

He wants His children to always say the truth. We should love the truth.

h. What is Jesus' relationship to the truth?

He is the way, the truth and the life. (John 14.6)

i. What practical application can you make to your life with regard to telling the truth?

Free answer

D. The Jews' Rejection of Jesus as the Messiah.

As you have seen in this brief survey of Jesus' miracles and teachings, the people who heard what He said, and saw what He did, did not always respond positively. In fact, in many instances the Gospel writers record that some people after hearing one of His teachings or observing one of His miracles were enraged, perplexed or simply lost interest in following Him.

As was noted at the outset of this course, the New Testament is the continuation of God's plan for His people, Israel, through whom He intended to reach the whole world with salvation. As part of His plan, and in keeping with His prophetic promises and covenant obligations, God sent the Messiah who was born of a virgin, in Bethlehem - the city of David, who performed miracles, and preached the Good News of the Kingdom, just as God had promised.

And yet, Jesus' life was ended by execution. He died on a cross, condemned by the Jews – His own people. What happened? How did the Jews miss their Messiah? There are at least three main reasons why the Jews of Jesus' day rejected Him as the Messiah.

1) The question of the Law and the Sabbath.

During the last few centuries described in the Old Testament, the Jews suffered the consequences of their disobedience. God had warned them of what their disobedience would cost them when He gave His Law to Moses before the People entered the Promised Land (see Deuteronomy 28:15-68). Though they had finally returned to the land, their captivity and exile at the hands of the Assyrians and Babylonians had depleted and humbled them. It also, however, cured them of idolatry and contributed to the rise of a class of people (the Pharisees – see appendix) who were zealous to keep the Sabbath and guard the Law so as to prevent the nation from undergoing another round of suffering due to disobedience.

1. Read Matthew 12:9-14.

- a. What does Jesus do to the man with the withered hand?

He heals him by restoring his hand.

- b. Where does the healing take place and on what day of the week?

The healing took place on the Sabbath day in the synagogue in full view of everyone there.

- c. How does Jesus explain the reason for His healing this man from verses 11-12?

If it is lawful to show pity by rescuing an animal on the Sabbath day, surely it is alright to do good to a human being on that day.

2. Read Deuteronomy 5:13-14.

- a. What does God say about the Sabbath day?

The Sabbath was given so that people may rest—and was especially for servants and the poor.

- b. How did the Pharisees interpret what Jesus did in light of the command in Deuteronomy?

The considered Jesus to be a rebel who had no respect for the Law, but who put himself above the Law. In fact, they made rest become a burden for an afflicted person, wanting them to suffer in order to « honour God » in following to the letter their interpretation of the Law. In so doing, they had violated the spirit of the Law.

As a result, some saw Jesus as a law-breaking rebel.

Jesus spoke with authority that came from God himself. He spoke of an intimate relationship and a knowledge of God as a Son equal to a Father. (Jn 5:8-18; Jn 10:29-33; Matt 26:57-65)

The Jews accused him of blasphemy, a crime punishable by death by stoning. (Lv 24:16)

2) The question of maintaining peace with Rome.

One of the strengths of the Roman Empire was its commitment to allowing its sovereign peoples to keep their traditions and religious practices as long as they didn't interfere with allegiance to Rome. In an effort to guarantee this sense of peace and cooperation, a number of Jewish leaders made concessions to Roman law in exchange for Imperial favours. Many prospered under this arrangement and sought to maintain every privilege.

1. Read John 11:45-48.

- a. What was reported to the Jewish leaders that Jesus had done?

He had raised Lazarus from the dead.

- b. What was the fear of the Jewish leaders?

They feared that the people would rise up to rebel with Jesus against Rome. This would lead to the destruction of the nation by the powerful Romans.

2. Read John 11:49-53.

- a. What was the solution offered by Caiaphas, the High Priest?

The solution was to sacrifice one man—even if he was blameless—rather than risk losing the whole nation. They needed to arrest him and have him put to death before a rebellion could take place.

- b. To what extent was this 'solution' what Jesus deserved?

The solution proposed had strictly nothing to do with an innocent man before the Law. However, it lined up perfectly with the spiritual reality of a sacrifice to take away sin and the destruction of the nation before the righteous tribunal of God, even if the high priest saw the expediency as a purely political solution.

As a result, as verse 54 says, "So from that day on they planned together to kill Him."

3. Read John 19:1-4, 12-16.

- a. What does Pilate conclude about Jesus' guilt?

He declared to the crowd that he found nothing in Jesus that deserved death (v4)

- b. What does Pilate think should happen to Jesus?

After having him whipped, he should be set free.

- c. How do the Jews respond to Pilate when he offers to release Jesus (v.6)?

They insisted on him being crucified.

- d. What do the Jews add to their argument 'forcing' Pilate's hand against Jesus (v. 12, 13)?

By proclaiming himself « king » he opposed Caesar.

3) The question of a Conquering Messiah.

Despite the peace and favour that the Jews enjoyed under Roman rule, Roman local officials often abused their powers and took advantage of Jews. Taxation, always a delicate subject, was doubly loathsome and burdensome to a Jew who was also expected to pay 'taxes' to the temple. Furthermore, many religious Jews simply couldn't reconcile sharing their land – the land God had given to them as Abraham's descendants – with pagan idolaters. For them, their hope was in the coming of the Messiah who would, obviously, overthrow Rome and restore God's rule and Israel's prominence.

1. Read Acts 1:6.

- a. What are the disciples hoping for by asking Jesus this question?

They hoped that Jesus would defeat the power of Rome to bring about his eternal reign over all the earth.

b. How does Jesus respond (verses 7-8)?

They cannot know the times set by the Father (but it is certain that things will happen as prepared by God). But soon they would receive a spiritual power in order to witness to Jesus Christ in the face of persecution.

c. If you had been one of the disciples, what would you have understood Jesus to mean by his answer to your question?

I would have been extremely puzzled. It is difficult to know what to expect, not have had any previous experience.

In the events leading up to the crucifixion, Jesus stands trial before Annas and Caiaphas, the Jewish High-Priests, before appearing before Pontus Pilate, the Roman Governor of Judea.

2. Read John 18:33-37.

a. What does Pilate expect as an answer from Jesus to his question in verses 33 and 37?

Concerning Jesus' claim to be king, it seems that Pilate is looking for a simple 'yes' or 'no' answer. (Rather a 'no' in order to get out of trouble.)

b. How does Jesus' response in verses 36 and 37 differ from what Pilate was expecting?

Jesus said that his kingdom was not of this world and that he sought no political power nor to lead his disciples in battle. He spoke of truth, a spiritual conception that Pilate could not understand.

3. Read Matthew 27:37-44.

a. What did the inscription say that was placed over Jesus' head on the cross?

"This is Jesus, the King of the Jews."

b. What did the onlookers say in mocking Jesus?

They derided him, telling him to come down from the cross, to save himself as he had saved others. He who would destroy the Temple, let him show his authority now.

c. How did Jesus' death on the cross result in the 'end of a dream' for those who were expecting a Conquering Messiah?

The death of Jesus was seen as a final defeat. If he was going to establish his Kingdom, he should have done it before dying.

As a result of His death on the cross, those who were hoping that Jesus was the Messiah who would overthrow Rome and usher in the Kingdom of God on Earth saw the ultimate end to their dream and thus concluded that Jesus was not the Messiah.

Summary and application

1. We have discussed four major reasons that prompted the Jews to refuse Jesus and put him to death. Quote them:

1)

2)

3)

4)

2. Which people in your society will identify with this immediately, without the need for explanation?
3. How can you help them in their turn, to understand the reason for the putting of Jesus to death and the fulfilment of God's extraordinary plan?

Conclusion

The purpose of this lesson was to expose the student to several key teachings and miracles of Jesus in addition to exploring the reasons that led the Jews to reject Jesus as their Messiah. But what we have so far seen in this brief overview of Jesus' life is that he was a man born according to the words of the prophets, who worked miracles of every sort and taught with divine authority. Was He just an ordinary man? Is it possible that those who rejected Him failed to see something bigger?

Take a moment to describe at least two things that you have learned about Jesus (what He did or what he said) that impress you and demonstrate to you that he was no ordinary man.

1) *Free answer*

2) *Free answer*

Lesson 5: The Life of Jesus, Part C

The Judgment, Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus in Light of Prophecy

Introduction

Much has been written about the miraculous beginnings to Jesus' life - born of a virgin in the town of Bethlehem – his miracles, and His teachings, many of which are still discussed today. However, no event in History is more important than the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The purpose of this lesson is to help the student understand the events leading up to the crucifixion as well as Jesus' subsequent resurrection in light of prophecy.

A. Plan of Old

The death of Jesus on the cross was not a surprise, a failure or a plan 'B' that God had to come up with at the last moment. Both Old and New Testaments make clear that Jesus' death on the cross was not only necessary, but planned by God Himself.

1. Read Revelation 13:8. What does this verse suggest about the death of Christ?

The death of Jesus was decided in heaven before the « foundation of the world ».

2. Read John 1:29.

- a. In this verse, how does John the Baptist refer to Jesus?

John refers to Jesus as « the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world ».

- b. Given the Old Testament practice of sacrifice (See Leviticus 1-7), what did John the Baptist mean by referring to Jesus in this way?

Jesus takes away the sin of the world in the same way that a lamb removed the sin of the sinful worshipper who offered it in sacrifice in the Temple.

3. Complete the following table by selecting and matching the New Testament reference with the prophetic statement taken from Isaiah 53. *Two answers are given.* Mathew 26:47-57; Mark 15:15; John 19:32-34; ~~Luke 23:32-33, 39-41, 53~~; Matthew 27:11-14; ~~Luke 22:39-45~~

Passage	New Testament Reference
v. 4 "...surely our griefs He himself bore and our sorrows He carried..."	<i>Luke 22:39-45</i>
v. 5 "He was pierced through for our transgressions..."	<i>Jn 19.32-34</i>
v. 5 "...by His scourging we are healed..."	<i>Mk 15.15</i>
v. 7 "He was oppressed and He was afflicted yet He did not open His mouth..."	<i>Mt 27.11-14</i>

v. 8 "...by oppression and judgment He was taken away..."	<i>Mt 26.47-57</i>
v. 9 "His grave was assigned with wicked men (yet) He had done no violence nor was there any deceit in His mouth..."	<i>Lk 23.32-33, 39-41, 53</i>

4. Read Mark 10:32-34. What does Jesus say will happen to Him?

He said that he would be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, be condemned to death, tortured and killed but he would rise on the third day.

5. Based upon the testimony of the prophets (both Isaiah and John the Baptist), the disciple John and Jesus Himself, what can you conclude about the crucifixion of Jesus?

The death of Jesus was not an accident, but the plan of God. Jesus must die for bring salvation to his people and to the whole world, just as the lamb had to die in the place of the worshipper in order for his sin to be forgiven.

B. The Importance of the Crucifixion

The judgment and crucifixion of Christ take up a significant part of the Gospel narratives. In fact, nowhere else in the Bible are so many detailed accounts provided of events that span only a few days. Clearly these details are important to our knowledge of Christ and the Christian faith. Despite the claim that Jesus' death was a tragic mistake, the Gospel writers show Jesus was aware of what was going to happen and took time to prepare Himself and the disciples.

1. Jesus prepares His disciples.

a. Read Luke 22:14-20. What was Jesus trying to tell His disciples by identifying Himself with the bread and the wine as part of the Passover meal? (If you need to be reminded of the Passover, read Exodus 12:1-3, 5-7, 12-13)

During the last supper before his crucifixion, Jesus was explaining to his disciples that the Passover meal symbolized the redemption of the people by his own sacrifice. Just as the blood of the lambs had protected each household from the judgement of the angel of death, the blood of Jesus Christ buys back all those who call upon him and protects them from the wrath of God which falls on their sins. The Pascal lambs were only a preparation of salvation by Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God.

b. Read John 13:1-5.

i. What did Jesus do for His disciples?

He loved them to the end, washing their feet when he was at table with them.

ii. According to verses 13-15, why did Jesus do this?

He left them an example of how to conduct themselves in a humble manner as leaders who serve those under their responsibility.

iii. According to verses 21-27, what happened next?

Jesus said that Judas Iscariot, one of the disciples, was going to betray him. Then Satan entered into Judas.

2. Jesus prays and is arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane.

a. Immediately after the final supper with the disciples, Jesus leads them to the Garden of Gethsemane where he spends time in prayer. Read Matthew 26:36-46.

i. What did Jesus pray about?

He asked that the Lord to allow him not to drink from the cup of suffering, if that were possible. But he willingly gave himself up to obey the will of the Father.

ii. What did the disciples do while Jesus prayed?

Despite Jesus' insistence that they watch and pray, they fell asleep.

b. Read Matthew 26:47-56.

i. What happened to Jesus after he prayed?

Judas came with the Temple guard, betrayed Jesus with a kiss. Jesus was arrested.

ii. How did Jesus respond?

He did not resist.

iii. How did the disciples respond (see verses 51 and 56)?

One struck the ear of the High Priest's servant and cut it off. The disciples left him and fled.

3. Following Jesus' arrest, He was brought before a series of Jewish and Roman officials to be tried.

a. Read the following passages and complete the table. *Some answers are given as an example.*

Passage	Authority	Political Orientation	Charges against Jesus	Verdict
John 18:12-14, 19-23	<i>Annas</i>	<i>Jewish</i>	<i>Nothing noted</i>	<i>Nothing noted</i>
John 18:23-24	<i>Caiaphas (the High Priest)</i>	<i>Jewish</i>	<i>Nothing noted</i>	<i>Nothing noted</i>
Luke 22:66-71	<i>Assembly of elders, (council, Sanhedrin)</i>	<i>Jewish</i>	<i>He confessed that he was the Son of God</i>	<i>Guilty</i>
Luke 23:1-6	<i>Pontius Pilate</i>	<i>Roman</i>	<i>Inciting the people, does not pay taxes, calls Himself a king</i>	<i>Sent to Herod</i>

Luke 23:7-11	<i>Herod (king)</i>	<i>Jewish</i>	<i>Diverse and numerous accusations</i>	<i>Nothing noted</i>
Luke 23:13-15	<i>Pontius Pilate</i>	<i>Roman</i>	<i>Revolt, incitement of the people against Rome</i>	<i>Not Guilty</i>

b. What do you observe about the differences in attitudes and emotions between the Jewish authorities and the Roman authorities throughout this series of trials?

The Jewish authorities mock or are indignant. They oppose Jesus or are undecided. The Roman authorities find Jesus innocent and seek to release him.

c. Why do you think the Jews were so angry and intent on having Jesus executed?

He refused to deliver the nation from the Roman oppression. He claimed to be the Son of God and Messiah. He claimed to be qualified to do what he did and to make such claims.

d. Pontius Pilate declared Jesus not guilty both times he interrogated him. Why then did he not release Him?

Because of the insistence of the people, fearing a riot. Luc 23.22-25

Scholars have compiled a list of at least 12 reasons why the arrest, trial and crucifixion of Jesus was illegal under both Jewish and Roman standards. And yet, he was crucified! (See Appendix at the end of this lesson.)



Take Note!

In Roman-style crucifixion, the condemned sometimes took days to die slowly from asphyxiation, caused by blood loss and exhaustion. The dead body was left hanging for vultures and other birds to consume.

The goal of Roman crucifixion was not just to kill the criminal, but also to mutilate and dishonour the body of the condemned. In ancient tradition, an honourable death required burial. Leaving a body on the cross, so as to mutilate it and prevent its burial, was a grave dishonour.

Under ancient Roman penal practice, crucifixion was also a means of exhibiting the criminal's low social status. It was the most dishonourable and painful death imaginable, originally reserved only for slaves.

C. The Burial and Resurrection of Jesus

The closing chapters of the Gospels recount the events of Jesus' burial, resurrection and post-resurrection appearances. Despite the fact that the resurrection of Jesus is often overlooked except for during Easter weekend, this event, probably more than any other in the life of Jesus,

separates those who believe from those who do not. The resurrection is the ultimate mark of divinity, of credibility and of integrity of Jesus and the Gospel. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15, if Jesus did not rise from the dead, then our faith is worthless, we are still in our sins, those who have died in Christ have perished forever and we who have hoped in Him, are of all people those who should be the most pitied.

In an effort to deny the divinity, credibility and integrity of Jesus and the Gospel, many objections have been proposed to the resurrection – each attempting to offer a denial of the biblical facts. See the appendix of this lesson for a discussion and response to four of the prominent objections to the resurrection.

What does the Bible say happened to Jesus after he died and was placed in a tomb?

1. Read John 20:1-2.

a. What caused Mary to come running for the disciples?

She had found the tomb empty.

b. What was she convinced had happened? Why?

She thought that someone had taken the body of Jesus. She could not believe that he could have risen from the dead.

2. Read John 20:3-8.

a. What did Peter and John find at the tomb?

The tomb was open, the body was not there but the linen cloths were lying in place and the face cloth folded apart.

b. Verse 8 says that John “entered the tomb, and he saw and believed.” What did he believe?

He believed that Jesus was risen. (Peter had not yet believed)

3. Read Luke 24:1-9.

a. Who do the women meet at the tomb?

Two men in dazzling clothes. (According to Matthew these are angels. Matthew and Mark mention only one).

b. What was their message to them?

He is risen as he had told them.

4. Read Luke 24:10-12.

a. What is the response of the rest of the disciples to the news of those who had been at the tomb?

They didn’t believe what they took to be an idle tale. But Peter ran to check the tomb.

b. Why did they respond in this way?

They had lost all hope after his death. They had forgotten his words and expected nothing.

5. Read the passages in the table below.

a. Complete the table. The first responses are given as an example.

Passage	To whom does Jesus appear?	Jesus' message
Luke 24:13-15, 27	<i>Two on the road to Emmaus</i>	<i>I am who the Scriptures predicted would come, the Messiah</i>
Luke 24:36-43	<i>To all the disciples including the two from Emmaus</i>	<i>See, I am present with you in body.</i>
John 20:26-29	<i>To all the disciples, including Thomas</i>	<i>"Check and see if I am not really here in body." (Said to Thomas but applicable to all of us)</i>
John 21:1-2, 15-17	<i>To the disciples (7 at least)</i>	<i>"If you love me, take care of my sheep." (Said to Peter but applicable to all of us)</i>

b. Why did Jesus appear to these different people after His resurrection?

To confirm that his body really was risen from the dead. To restore them and call them to serve in his name.

c. In the closing chapters of the Gospels, we often find the disciples behind closed doors, incredulous and unsure as to what to do next. In the early chapters of Acts, which record events which take place just a few days later, the disciples are publicly preaching the death and resurrection of Jesus and then boldly facing trial and arrest for doing so. In your opinion what happened to transform the disciples from those who were hiding to those who were boldly preaching in the streets?

They had seen the risen Jesus. They had spent time with him. They had been encouraged. They had received the Holy Spirit.



Take Note!

Jesus predicted His own death and resurrection several times (see Matthew 16:21, Mark 8:31, Luke 9:22, etc.). Islamic teaching claims however that Jesus didn't die but was taken up to Heaven leaving someone else (Judas, the traitor) to be crucified in His place.

If this were true, what would this say about Jesus?

6. If the purpose of Jesus' death on the cross was to serve as the payment for sin and make the forgiveness of sins possible, what was the purpose of the resurrection? In other words, why did Jesus have to rise from the dead? Read the following passages and note what each one says about the purpose of Jesus' resurrection.

a. Acts 2:29-32

“Jesus rose from the dead ...

So that he be recognised as the Messiah, established on the throne of David eternally without seeing corruption according to Ps 16.10

b. 1 Corinthians 15:20-23

“Jesus rose from the dead ...

To make possible by Jesus the resurrection of the dead to be made alive in Christ.

c. 1 Corinthians 15:12-19

“Jesus rose from the dead ...

1) *That man knows that all of mankind shall be raised.*

2) *To fulfil the promises (his own and those of the AT).*

3) *To prove that Jesus is the Son of God.*

d. Acts 2:22, 24-28

“Jesus rose from the dead ...

It was not possible for him to be held by the pangs of death. God sustained him so that he not be shaken. God did not abandon him.

e. Summarize the purpose of the resurrection.

Rom 1:4 It declared Jesus ‘Son of God’ (God made man).

It fulfilled the prophecies of the OT, confirming them to be true.

Rom 4:25 He was raised “for our justification.”

Conclusion

This lesson concludes the survey of the life of Jesus, one of the principal themes of the New Testament. An unknown writer had this to say about Him:

“Nearly two thousand years ago in an obscure village, a child was born of a peasant woman. He grew up in another village where He worked as a carpenter until He was thirty. Then for three years He became an itinerant preacher. This man never went to college or seminary. He never wrote a book. He never held a public office. He never had a family nor owned a home. He never put His foot inside a big city nor travelled even 200 miles from His birthplace. And though He never did any of the things that usually accompany greatness, throngs of people followed Him. He had no credentials but Himself.

“While He was still young, the tide of public opinion turned against Him. His followers ran away. He was turned over to His enemies and sentenced to death on a cross between two thieves. While He was dying, His executioners gambled for the only piece of property He had on earth – the simple coat He had worn. His body was laid in a borrowed grave provided by a compassionate friend. But three days later this Man arose from the dead – living proof that He was, as He had claimed, the Saviour whom God had sent, the Incarnate Son of God.

“Nineteen centuries have come and gone and today the risen Lord Jesus Christ is the central figure of the human race. On our calendars His birth divides history into two eras. One day of every week is set aside in remembrance of Him. And our two most important holidays celebrate His birth and resurrection. On church steeples around the world, His cross has become the symbol of victory over sin and death.

“This one Man’s life has furnished the theme for more songs, books, poems and paintings than any other person or event in history. Thousands of colleges, hospitals, orphanages and other institutions have been founded in honour of this One who gave His life for us. All the armies that ever marched, all the navies that ever sailed, all the governments that ever sat, all the kings that ever reigned have not changed the course of history as much as this One Solitary Life.”

1. Looking back over the first 5 lessons, name at least 5 things that indicate to you that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God.

- *The fulfilment of the prophecies about the Messiah/Servant/Son of man – given to Abraham, David, Isaiah in the Old Testament*
- *His sinless life. He carried out to perfection the Law of God, submitting to the Father.*
- *His powers over nature and evil spirits*
- *His submission to the authorities, giving himself up as a lamb*
- *His resurrection from the dead*
- *His teaching*

2. How does the fact of the resurrection of Jesus give you hope and change the way you live?

Open answer.

Here are some examples:

- *My faith is well-founded—giving me assurance.*
- *My hope is sure—I will rise again after my death.*
- *Jesus’ sacrifice has been accepted by God.*
- *I can rest in his righteousness.*
- *My body is important to God—it can be holy because God himself became flesh.*
- *My faith is rooted in human history.*
- *I am truly dead and raised again with Him, a new creature.*
- *I can also lay down my own interests for others according to Christ’s example, knowing that my identity and my future are secure.*

Appendix 6: Twelve reasons why the Arrest, Trial and Crucifixion of Jesus was Illegal under Jewish Law.

1. There was no legal basis for Jesus' arrest because no one had presented a formal charge of any crime; He was simply taken. Moreover, those who went with Judas to have Jesus arrested included the priests and elders – the Judges (Luke 22:52) – among whom were the ones who had bribed Judas.
2. Jesus was subjected to a secret preliminary examination at night - John 18:12-14, 19-23). Jewish law permitted only daylight proceedings.
3. The indictment against Jesus was illegal because the judges themselves brought up the charges without any prior testimony by witnesses. The Jewish court (the Sanhedrin) by law was not allowed to originate charges.
4. The court illegally proceeded to hold its trial of Jesus before sunrise so no one would be available to testify on His behalf.
5. The trial began on a day before a Sabbath (John 18:28), even though Jewish law did not permit the trial of a capital offense to begin on Friday or the day before a Sabbath. Jesus was arrested and tried on the 14th of Abib, the day before the first Sabbath of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.
6. Jesus' trial was concluded in one day. Jewish law says, "If a sentence of death is to be pronounced, it (a criminal case) cannot conclude before the following day." (Mishna, 'Sanhedrin' IV.1) This was to allow sufficient opportunity for any witnesses in support of the accused to present themselves. Jesus' trial was conducted in private and completed in less than nine hours.
7. Two false witnesses charged Jesus with saying He would destroy the temple made with hands (Mark 14:58); yet He was condemned by the court on another false charge – that of blasphemy. He was condemned on His own testimony (Luke 22:67-71). But according to Jewish law, a person could not be condemned on his own testimony.
8. The merits of Jesus' defence were not considered. Despite Deuteronomy 13:14, the high priest did not "inquire, and make search, and ask 'diligently'" to see whether Jesus' statement was blasphemous. The law in the Mishna says, "The judges shall weigh the matter in the sincerity of their conscience." ('Sanhedrin' IV, 5). Instead, the court pronounced sentence instantly and unanimously.
9. Those who would have voted against condemnation were not at Jesus' trial. Joseph of Arimathea was a member of the court, yet he was not there (Luke 23:50-51). Jesus' opponents had made sure that only those who hated Him would be there.
10. The sentence was pronounced in a place forbidden by law. The trial took place at the high priest's house (Luke 22:54). According to the law, a death sentence could be pronounced only in the court's appointed place.

11. Most of the judges were legally disqualified to try Jesus. Some had bought their way into office, according to Josephus. Also, since they were known enemies of Jesus, Jewish law required that they disqualify themselves so He could be tried by impartial judges.
12. The court illegally switched the charges from blasphemy to treason before Pilate. Jesus' opponents wanted Him killed, but they did not want to do it themselves. So, they charged Him with treason.

Appendix 7: Responses to the Basic Objections to Jesus' Resurrection

Objection 1: Someone else died in Jesus' place

Response: This common objection is based upon the unfounded belief that it would somehow be detrimental to Jesus' identity if He were to die on the cross; the humiliation and powerlessness of that would somehow negate all that He claimed to be. This is the popular view in Islam of Jesus' death – that a truly guilty person, Judas – died in Jesus' place.

There are several problems with this view. First, how is it possible that after interrogating, beating, and parading Jesus around the city for half a day that at the moment of the crucifixion the guards and officials would somehow pick the wrong person? Or, if they had chosen someone else to suffer the beating, etc., how is it that that person would not have either admitted to the lie or been found out? Why didn't he tell them they had the wrong person?

Secondly, if indeed someone else was taken in Jesus place either by accident or as part of a ploy to save Jesus' life, then this makes Jesus out to be a false prophet and hence a liar because He said numerous times before that He would die in this way.

Thirdly, there is no record in any Jewish, Muslim or Christian tradition that validates this possibility that someone else died in Jesus' place. Certainly, if this had been the case, someone somewhere would have recorded it. The idea was invented long after the beginning of Islam.

Fourthly, Jesus' own mother and several people who know him quite well were standing at the foot of the cross when he died. Can anyone believe that his own mother did not recognize her son?

Lastly, if Jesus didn't die at this point, then what happened to Him? His popularity was at its highest, His teachings were circulating far and wide. How is it that all of a sudden, He would simply disappear and leave His disciples to endure subsequent persecution and martyrdom (all but John) for believing and preaching that Jesus had died and was resurrected, if in fact the whole thing was a lie?

Objection 2: The Jewish leaders took Jesus' body

Response: This objection is based upon the idea that the Jewish leaders were so afraid of what would happen to the crowds if Jesus did indeed rise from the dead, as He had predicted, that in order to prevent any such thing from happening, they conspired with the Roman officials to arrange to take the body of Jesus. The problem with this objection is that, if the Jewish leaders had taken the body of Jesus, why did they not produce it later so as to silence the preaching of the disciples who were declaring the resurrection of Jesus throughout the Roman Empire? All that would have been necessary to stop the whole thing was evidence that Jesus' body had not been resurrected.

Objection 3: The Disciples took Jesus' body

Response: This objection is based on the idea that the disciples wanted the truth of Jesus' words to be realized so badly that they somehow overwhelmed the Roman guards and took the body making it look as if Jesus was resurrected. The problem with this scenario is that all of the disciples except John were subsequently martyred for preaching that Jesus had been resurrected. How is this possible if the whole thing was a lie? And how does one account for the multiple post-resurrection appearances and interactions with Jesus that many had afterwards? On one occasion he appeared to about 500 people at the same time (1 Cor. 15:6).

Furthermore, this 'solution' also does not absolve Jesus' from being deceitful and hence a false prophet.

Objection 4: Jesus didn't die; he simply fainted, came to, and escaped.

Response: This objection is based on the idea that resurrections and miracles do not really happen. So, the biblical accounts of such are actually exaggerations by the church in order to make Jesus out to be divine. The problem with this objection is that it fails to explain how Jesus, who had suffered scourging and crucifixion (with the subsequent dislocation of the shoulders, asphyxiation and punctured heart and lungs), could have thrown off the 100-pounds of burial wrappings, removed the several-ton stone entrance, and overtaken 12-16 Roman guards in order to escape.

For further research into this subject, read Josh McDowell's book *More Than a Carpenter*.

Lesson 6: The Development of the Church, Part A

The Birth of the Church at Pentecost, its Early Challenges and an Explanation of its Missionary Vocation

Introduction

With the crucifixion of Jesus marking the high point of the rebellion of His people Israel, the time had come for God to reveal the mystery of the Church – a body of redeemed individuals from every nation, tribe and tongue. This lesson together with lessons 7 and 8 is intended to give the student an introduction to the origins, development, and mission of the Church in the first century. In the appendix, a chronological listing of events and the suggested dates of writing of the New Testament books is provided.

A. The Birth of the Church at Pentecost

1. Read Acts 2:1-13.

a. What happened to the disciples that provoked the reaction of the crowd?

Tongues of fire, telling in various languages of the mighty works of God

b. From verses 9-11, list the nations who were represented in the crowd on that day.

Parthians, Medes, Elamites, residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, parts of Libya, Rome, Cretans and Arabians

c. Why were the people so amazed?

The messengers were all Galileans, but were speaking in the native languages of all.

d. What does this suggest to you that God had in mind with regards to the composition of the church?

The Church is to be made up of people from all nations.

e. What does the crowd accuse the disciples of (v. 13)?

Some said they were drunk with wine.

2. In response to these accusations, Peter (the one who had just a few days earlier denied Christ three times – See John 18:12-27) stands in the midst of the crowd and gives a lengthy explanation of what has happened. Read verses 14-40 and complete the table below by summarizing Peter's message from each section. *The first answer is given as an example.*

Passage	Summary
v. 14-15	<i>These men are not drunk</i>
v. 16-21	<i>This fulfils the prophecy of Joel concerning the coming of the Holy Spirit on the people of God</i>

v. 22-24	<i>The one you crucified, God has raised him from the dead</i>
v. 25-28	<i>The prophecy of David in Ps 16 shows that the Messiah, his son, will be raised from the dead</i>
v. 29-36	<i>God has made Lord and Christ this Jesus that you crucified, by raising him from the dead</i>
v. 37	<i>The response of the crowd: What shall we do?</i>
v. 38-40	<i>Repent, be baptized and you will receive the Holy Spirit</i>

a. How does Peter support the points he makes in his sermon (i.e. personal examples, illustrations, Old Testament quotes, etc.)? Why does he use these supports?

Peter quotes the prophets to show that Jesus is absolutely qualified to be the Messiah. He reminds them of their own experience and knowledge of him and his own personal testimony.

b. How do the people respond? (v. 37, 41)

They asked what they must do and 3000 promptly did it.

3. Bible scholars consider Pentecost, on this date in the first century, to be the origins of the Church. And what a start! After the first sermon, 3000 people are converted! Imagine if you were one of the disciples in Jerusalem and in one afternoon 3000 people turned to Christ. What would you do next?

Free answer

B. The Early Church

On the day of Pentecost, the Church was born with over 3000 new believers. As you can imagine, there were not yet any church buildings and the Jewish synagogues would not have been available for use as places of worship by the Christians. What to do...

1. Read Acts 2:42-47. This passage, which is one of the best descriptions of early Church practice, is clearly a summary of the principle elements of local church life.

a. List four elements that constituted the basic activities of the early Church. (v. 42)

Teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayers

b. Name two attitudes that marked the spirit of the Christians. (v. 43-45)

Awe of God (v.43) with joy and simplicity of heart (v.45); Solidarity and sharing of possessions.

c. Verses 44 and 45 describe the manner in which the Church members shared their possessions with others in the community. It even says that they were selling their things and sharing the proceeds with others who did not have enough.

i. What do you think motivated the Christians to behave in such a way?

Love of the Lord

Persecutions created needs for certain people

The needs of visitors who prolonged their stay in order to teach and train the new disciples

The law of jubilee by which the family property returned to the heirs before the end of 50 years

ii. Do you think that such behaviour is necessary in the Church today? Why or why not?

Without this generosity and sharing, it is difficult to advance the work of God, the preaching and diffusion of the word of God, the commitment of workers, and helping newly planted churches.

d. Where did the Christians meet? (v. 46)

In the temple and also in one another's homes

e. What was the result of this early Church behaviour? (v. 47)

There was a joy of the Lord, the favour of all the people, the Church grew.

2. How does your church compare to the Church described here in Acts 2? What is different and what is similar?

Free answer



Take Note!

Scholars have documented that by the 3rd century after Jesus' death and resurrection, hundreds of churches were scattered across North Africa. Furthermore, several prominent theologians and church leaders called North Africa their home, including; Tertullian, Cyprian, Origen and Augustine.

C. First Persecutions

As you can imagine, the lifestyle, preaching and values of the Christians soon came into conflict with those around them. Just as Jesus had said (John 15:20), the disciples soon began to experience objections and opposition from the religious and political authorities.

1. Read Acts 4:1-4. Around 5000 people believed in Christ on this occasion.

a. Who are the first ones to react negatively to the preaching of the disciples?

The priests and the Sadducees

- b. Why do you think they are so upset and eager to try to stop the preaching of the disciples?

First of all, the Sadducees did not believe in resurrection, they were convinced that it was impossible and an invention. What is more, this put their own incredulity directly into question – their doctrine and their guilt in giving Jesus up to death.

2. Read Acts 4:5-22.

- a. What do the Jewish leaders ask of the disciples?

Charged them not to speak of Jesus or teach in His name.

- b. In your own words, summarize Peter's response.

Is it right to listen to men rather than to God?

- c. From verses 13-17, the Jewish leaders try to decide what to do with the disciples. What is the biggest problem that they acknowledge? (v. 16)

It was evident to all that God had performed a miracle. They could not deny the reality before the people.

- d. What do they decide to do?

Threaten the disciples to shut them up.

- e. How does Peter respond to the discipline that the Jewish leaders inflict upon him?

He openly declares his intention to continue to preach the truth. They must carry out their threats if they wanted to.

- f. What did Peter know or believe that enabled him to respond to this persecution as he did?

He had seen and heard: Jesus was indeed raised from the dead. (v 20)

There is salvation in no other name. (v 12)

- g. How is his response different than the world's response of vengeance?

They submitted to the authorities – in preaching the truth without provoking a revolt and in leaving the judgement by their own choice in the hands of the authorities.

- h. Does God ever sanction vengeance? When? (Rom. 12:17-21)

No, never. We must overcome evil with good.

- i. From what you learn in this passage, define 'persecution'.

The use of lies, of threats and violence to prevent faith in Christ to spread.

- j. Based upon Peter's example from this passage how should you respond to persecution?

I should obey God, give witness to the Gospel and trust myself in the hand of God in the face of authorities or violent enemies (Submission) 1 Pierre 4.

3. Read the following passages and note what they say about our attitude towards persecution.

a. Matthew 5:10-12

It is a source of joy and gladness, for our reward shall be great in heaven.

b. John 15:20

Our Lord Jesus was persecuted in the same way so it is normal to go through it as his disciples.

c. 2 Timothy 3:12

All who want to be consecrated to Jesus will be persecuted. Persecution should rather reassure us that we are following the right path.

d. 1 Peter 4:12-14

Do not be surprised by sufferings but rejoice and be glad. It is a sign that the Spirit of God is upon us.

4. Do you think that persecution is inevitable? Why or why not?

Yes, for if we decide to live for Christ, we constitute a threat to the spirit of this world. The world understands neither Christ nor His disciples.

5. Have you ever been the subject of persecution? Describe briefly what happened. How did God help you endure it?

Free answer

6. Take a moment now to pray for Christians in your country and around the world who are being persecuted.

D. First Church Officers

Obviously, with more than 8000 young believers, many from differing backgrounds and ethnic groups, the need would soon be evident that some sort of organization and authority structure be developed. Before the disciples even had time to think about such things, a situation arose which provided a great opportunity to display how the Church should be organized and function.

1. Read Acts 6:1-8

a. Describe the problem.

It was a problem linked with the rise of the number of disciples from a Greek background, in itself a good thing. But there was no-one designated to respond to the daily practical needs of the poorer among them, in this case, widows.

b. What do the disciples propose as a solution?

Designate 7 reliable and reputable servants to administer the needs.

c. Why is favouritism opposed to the Gospel?

All have access to salvation by grace through faith alone, Jews and Greeks. All cultural barriers are broken down. Gal. 3.

Pentecost – all languages

d. What were the characteristics of the men selected as deacons?

Good repute, full of the Spirit of God and wisdom

e. What do you notice that is missing from the list of criteria?

Training in management. (Neither do we find this in the list of qualifications of deacons in 1 Tim 3.)

f. From this passage, what do you understand to be the best way to select people to lead in the Church?

Example of criteria given by the leaders

Freedom of choice given to the members according to these criteria

Blessing and gratefulness of the leaders in the inauguration of the functions

2. If you had been there that day, do you think you would have been selected as one of the deacons?

a. If yes, how does “a good reputation, wisdom, and fullness of God’s Spirit” show in your life?

Free answer

b. If not, which of these characteristics are you lacking? What can you do to develop this in your life in the weeks and months to come?

Free answer

E. The Church Continues to Expand

As you learned in earlier lessons, the Samaritans were despised by the Jews, so much so, that it was common for Jews travelling from Judea to Galilee, to take a much longer route to ensure that they would not have to travel through Samaria. The advent of the Church at Pentecost, demonstrated that ethnic, religious and political distinctions were to be dissolved. But for religious Jews, newly converted to Christianity, what did this mean in reality?

1. Read Acts 10:1-8

a. Who is Cornelius?

A centurion of the Roman Army (the Italian Cohort)

b. What does the angel say about Cornelius’ faith?

A devout man who feared God and gave alms to the poor

- c. What is Cornelius instructed to do?

To send for Simon Peter

- d. Why?

The text doesn't say. We can suppose that it was to answer his prayers.

2. Read Acts 10:9-16

- a. What happened to Peter?

He fell into a trance and had a vision 3 times, insisting that he eat impure animals.

- b. What was the message that God was trying to send to Peter?

What God declares to be pure cannot be impure. Peter must accept this.

- c. Why does Peter struggle with this idea?

Up until now under the Old Covenant, certain foods were considered to be impure.

3. Read Acts 10:17-48

- a. From verses 28 and 29 (and 34-35), summarize the lesson that Peter has learned from the episode of the sheet and the unclean animals.

One must not consider a man to be impure. God does not judge on nationality or race: he who fears Him and exercises justice, is pleasing to Him.

- b. What happened to convince Peter that "God is not one to show partiality"?

God showed him the vision, sent him to Cornelius, a Roman pagan who sought to serve the God of Israel.

- c. How does the family of Cornelius respond to Peter's message?

*They spoke in tongues and exalted God; the Holy Spirit was poured out on them. (v.44-47)
They were baptised in water.*

- d. In the light of this lesson, how should the Church today treat those who are ethnically or religiously different?

Nobody should be excluded from the preaching of the Gospel.

F. God's Intention to Bless the Nations

As you learned from your study of Acts 2 and the events on the day of Pentecost, the nations were represented in Jerusalem and the disciples were given the ability to proclaim the things of God in the languages of those nations present. The intent here was clearly that God wanted the nations to hear and respond to the Good News of the Gospel, and though the Bible does not say explicitly who responded to the message that day, one can imagine that of the 3000 that were saved, many were from the nations other than Israel (Acts 2:41).

But God's interest in the nations did not begin at Pentecost. The Old Testament is full of indications that He had intended this from the beginning. It was always God's intention to bring hope, healing and salvation to people from every tongue, tribe and nation.

1. Read the following passages and complete the table. *The first answer is given as an example.*

Passage	What happens to the Nations?
Genesis 12:1-3	<i>They will be blessed.</i>
Psalms 22:27-28	<i>All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD,</i>
Psalms 86:9	<i>All the nations you have made shall come and worship before you, O Lord, and shall glorify your name.</i>
Isaiah 25:6-7	<i>The Lord will give a feast for all peoples, He will remove the veil (that all nations may worship Him)</i>
Isaiah 49:6	<i>His servant shall be a light for the nations so that salvation reaches to the ends of the earth</i>
Revelation 7:9-10	<i>All the nations will come before the throne of God and the lamb to shout out His salvation</i>

2. From what you have read in the above passages, how would you summarize what God intends to do for the Nations?

He wants all the nations to come to Him to celebrate His salvation and contemplate His glory.

G. God's Plan to use the Church to Reach the Nations

As we have noted, when the Jews failed to represent God's plan on the Earth by crucifying their Messiah, God allowed a "partial hardening" of Israel for a time (Romans 11:25) and in their place, He called on the Church to take the Good News to the nations.

1. Read Matthew 28:18-20

a. What is the objective that God sends the Church out to accomplish?

To baptize, teach and make disciples

b. Who is sent out? Just those with special gifts, diplomas or authority, or everyone? Explain your answer.

Jesus was speaking to his 11 disciples but the commandment is for all disciples of all time and all places since that time to reproduce disciples and plant churches. It is common however for only church leaders to actually carry out baptisms.

c. To which nations is the Church sent?

All nations

d. On the basis of whose authority is this effort to be carried out?

That of Jesus Christ in whom is all power

e. What two things does “making disciples” include?

Baptizing and teaching

2. Describe briefly how you came to be a disciple of Christ.

Free answer

3. What do you understand your specific role in the task of “making disciples” of the nations to be? How do you accomplish this in your day-to-day activity?

Free answer

For example: I am responsible to give good witness by my behaviour and actions and in sharing the Gospel verbally.

4. Read Acts 1:8.

In this verse, Jesus again ‘commissions’ the disciples to take the Gospel to the Nations. He identifies four places where the disciples need to take the Gospel:

‘Jerusalem’ – this refers to their local context, their neighbours, family and friends

‘Judea’ – this refers to their countrymen, their ethnic group

‘Samaria’ – this refers to people from another ethnic group; the ones they looked down upon

‘Uttermost parts of the Earth’ – this represents the rest of the world

a. List the names of at least three people that you know who fit the ‘Jerusalem’ label and who have not yet responded to the Gospel.

Free answer

b. List the names of at least three people you know who fit the ‘Judea’ label and who have not yet responded to the Gospel.

Free answer

c. Identify someone that you know who fits the ‘Samaria’ label who has not yet responded to the Gospel.

Free answer

d. Identify a person or group that you know who fits the ‘uttermost parts of the Earth’ label who has not yet responded to the Gospel.

Free answer

**Take Note!**

The world's population is more than 6.2 billion and is comprised of some 16,307 people groups (defined by a distinct language and culture).

Of these 16, 307 people groups, 6651 are considered 'unreached' that is, they have no viable church or witness of the Gospel in their language or culture.

Of the top 100 unreached people groups by population size:

46 are Muslim

39 are Hindu

7 are Buddhist

4 are non-religious

4 are ethnic religions

<http://www.joshuaproject.net/unreached.php>

Take some time right now to pray for each one of these people that God would reveal Himself to them. Ask God to give you an opportunity to explain the Gospel to them so that they can become disciples.

Conclusion

Following the resurrection of Jesus, the next significant event in New Testament history is Pentecost and the birth of the Church. Despite the fact that the Church demonstrated itself to be a haven for men and women of all ethnic, religious and political affiliations, it wasn't long before opposition to the Christian message surfaced and the church found itself facing persecution. Based on what you have studied in this lesson, answer the following questions.

1. In what ways has your church experienced what the early church experienced? (See Acts 2:42-47, Acts 6:1-7, Acts 15:1-29)

Activities; organisation; dealing with a problem of important differences in doctrine between churches and different cultures.

2. Based upon Scripture, who did God intend the Church to be made up of?

The Church should be made up of peoples from all nations

3. What can you do personally to encourage your church to welcome those of a different culture, race or political affiliation?

Make a special effort to welcome; to pray together pour their salvation; to learn/teach songs in their languages.

4. How does your faith help you face persecution?

Understand that our reward will be great; that persecution is normal and a subject of joy

5. What is the missionary task of the Church?

All families on the earth, all nations, even the furthest away, benefit from salvation in Christ

6. How can you participate in this missionary task this week?

Free answer

Appendix 8: Chronological Order of the New Testament Books

Book name	Attributed authorship	Approx. date	Important NT event
		30	Death and resurrection of Christ
		35	Paul converted
		44	the apostle James martyred
		46-48	Paul's 1st journey
Galatians	Paul	49	Paul in Syrian Antioch
		50	Jerusalem council
James	James, Jesus' brother	50	
Matthew	Matthew	early date 50	
Mark	Mark	early date 50	
		50-52	Paul's 2nd journey
1 Thessalonians	Paul	51	Paul in Corinth
2 Thessalonians	Paul	51	Paul in Corinth
		53-57	Paul's 3rd journey
1 Corinthians	Paul	55	Paul in Ephesus
2 Corinthians	Paul	55	Paul in Macedonia
Romans	Paul	57	Paul in Corinth
		57-59	Paul imprisoned in Caesarea
		59-61	Paul imprisoned in Rome
Ephesians	Paul	60	Paul in Rome- house arrest
Colossians	Paul	60	Paul in Rome- house arrest
Philemon	Paul	60	Paul in Rome- house arrest
Luke	Luke	around 60	
Philippians	Paul	61	Paul in Rome- house arrest
1 Peter	Peter	63	persecution by Nero 62-65
Acts	Luke	63	
Matthew	Matthew	before 64	
1 Timothy	Paul	64	Paul in Philippi
Titus	Paul	64	Paul in Philippi
Jude	Jude, Jesus' brother	65	

2 Timothy	Paul	66	Paul in Roman prison
2 Peter	Peter	67	Peter martyred by Nero?
		68	Paul martyred, Nero's suicide
1 John	John	early date 69	
2 John	John	early date 69	
3 John	John	early date 69	
John	John	early date 69	
Hebrews	Apollos? Aquila? Silas?	possibly 69	
Mark	Mark	before 69	
Revelation	John	possibly 69	John exiled on Patmos?
		70	destruction of Jerusalem
1 John	John	traditionally 90	persecution by Domitian 88-95
2 John	John	traditionally 90	
3 John	John	traditionally 90	
John	John	traditionally 95	
Revelation	John	traditionally 95	John exiled on Patmos?

Essential dates in red, Gospels in green, Paul's writings in blue, Acts in brown, Revelation in purple, Remainder in black

Lesson 7: The Development of the Church, Part B

The Expansion of the Church via the First Two Missionary Voyages of Paul and the Message of the First Epistles

Introduction

As was noted in Lesson 6, God had always intended for all the nations to enjoy His blessings. In the Old Testament Israel was charged with representing God in their faith and behaviour so that the nations would be drawn to God. In the New Testament, the Church takes centre stage and is sent out to the nations to make worshipping disciples.

This lesson will give the student an overview of how God's plan to bless the nations through the Church was initiated through the missionary activity of the Church and its first great missionary, the Apostle Paul.

A. The First Great Missionary on His First Missionary Journey

In Acts 8, Saul is involved in the stoning of Stephen (7:58), the first martyr. In verse 3, it says that Saul was "ravaging the church, entering house after house; and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison." In chapter 9, Saul is converted and God says this about him, "*He (Saul) is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel*" (v. 15).

Soon after his conversion, Saul's name is changed to Paul. He is welcomed into the Church (thanks to a couple of courageous believers, Ananias and Barnabas) and begins to teach and preach. Once Paul, the former persecutor of the Church, had demonstrated the sincerity of his conversion, he was eventually sent out from Antioch on his first missionary journey.

1. Read Acts 13:1-4, which introduces Paul's first missionary journey.

a. What is the setting of this event?

It was during a time of worship and fasting.

In response to the order of the Holy Spirit, the leaders of the church sent two members out.

b. How does the Church know who to send out?

The Holy Spirit had set them apart but we do not know how (vision, voice, conviction).

c. What does this indicate to you about how missionaries should be identified and sent out?

It is necessary to seek the will of God along with one's church or with other Christians if there is no local church

A task begins – those who remain take on the support; pray; participate in the work.

2. Acts chapters 13 and 14 recount the events of Paul's First Missionary Journey (see map below for an indication of where he went).

Map 3: Paul's First Missionary Journey



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a. Read Acts 13:4-5. What did Paul (and his companion, Barnabas) do when he (they) arrived in Cyprus?

They went to the town's synagogue and preached the word of God (Gospel of Christ).

b. Read verses 6-12. Describe the two different types of responses to Paul's preaching.

Opposition – Elymas Bar-Jesus, a false prophet and magician, tries to turn the Proconsul away from the faith

Desire to hear the word – the proconsul

3. In Acts 13:14-43, Paul preaches in the synagogue located in the town of Pisidian-Antioch.

a. Why do you think Paul would go to a synagogue to preach?

The Jews already know a lot. They are already prepared and waiting for God's promises.

b. Without reading Paul's sermon, what do you think Paul would include in a sermon (i.e. what types of examples, references, support material) to those in the synagogue in order to help them understand the Gospel?

Basis – history of the salvation of the people

David and the promise of the Messiah (v.23)

John the Baptist and his preaching (v. 24-25)

The unfair condemnation of Jesus (v. 26-27)

Death and resurrection (v. 28-31)

Fulfilment of the OT promises (v. 32-37)

Invitation – believe and receive forgiveness, a new life.

c. Read verses 42-44. How did the people respond?

Several believed, all wanted to hear more. Crowds came to listen again the following week.

d. Read verses 45. What happened next?

Filled with jealousy, some Jews began to oppose and contradict what Paul said.

e. Read verses 46-47. How did Paul (and his companion) respond?

They left and went to preach to the Gentiles.

f. Read verses 48-50. Then what happened?

The Gentiles rejoiced; Paul taught them

The Jews stirred up opposition to Paul and Barnabas and drove them out.

4. From these first experiences of Paul, what can you conclude about the response that missionaries should expect to the preaching of the Gospel?

There will be opposition and objections

There will be those who are destined for salvation

5. Read Acts 13:52. Despite all that happened, what is the attitude of the disciples? How is this possible?

They rejoiced and were filled with the Holy Spirit.

6. Look again at the map of Paul's first missionary journey. Name the regions in which the Gospel was preached.

Cyprus, Pamphylia, Pisidia, Iconium, Galatia

B. First Challenges to the Gospel from within the Church

Following Paul's first missionary journey, it is reported in Acts 15:1-5, that a conflict broke out regarding the role of the Mosaic Law in the lives of new believing Christians – both Gentiles and Jews. For Paul, the conflict was not something to take lightly for it affected the very core of the Gospel message. It wasn't long before a number of leading men of the church, led by James, Jesus' brother, convened a Church council to discuss the matter.

1. Read Acts 15:1-5.

- a. Describe the nature of the problem that resulted in Paul and Barnabas' appearance before the Church Council?

Christians from Judea insisted that all must be circumcised in respect of the Law in order to be saved.

- b. Verse 2 says that Paul and Barnabas had "great dissension and debate with them." Why were Paul and Barnabas so stirred up over this issue?

The teaching of the Judeans went against that of the Gospel, they preached another gospel according to one's own good works before the Law.

2. Read Acts 15:6-11. How does Peter describe the heart of the issue?

Salvation is by grace alone. God makes no distinction between the nations, all are equal through the Spirit.

The Jews cannot fulfil the Law; they are not saved by the Law, they shouldn't impose it.

3. Read Ephesians 2:11-22.

- a. How does Paul describe the effect of the Gospel on the Gentiles?

He has destroyed the separation between Jews and Gentiles to make them one people in the direct presence of God.

- b. Because of the Gospel, what is the new relationship between Jews and Gentiles?

They are co-citizens and members of the household of God (family) and make up one same temple indwelt by God.

4. Read Acts 15:13-21. What is the decision that James hands down as a 'solution' to the problem?

Do not make trouble unnecessarily – by imposing rules. Give a minimum of instructions in respect for the Jews.

5. Why is the decision made in Jerusalem in the first century important for the Church today?

It allows non-Jews (and Jews) to enjoy their liberty in Christ.

It removes all confusion concerning the Gospel – by grace alone, to protect from error and from condemnation.

C. First Epistles Written to the Church

Probably sometime after the Jerusalem Church council, the apostle Paul wrote his letter to the Galatians. The point of his letter was to clarify the Gospel of grace by opposing the elements of legalism that had begun to creep back into the speech and practice of some in the churches that Paul had visited.

1. Read Galatians 1:6-9; 3:1-5

- a. What has happened to the faith of the Galatians that concerns Paul?

They had distorted the message of the Gospel of salvation by faith and returned to the Law by which they believed they owed their salvation. They were imposing works of the flesh, e.g. circumcision.

- b. What does he want them to understand about living the Christian life?

Their wanderings are fatal! Dangerous, useless. They cannot go forward by abandoning the faith in favour of works of the Law.

2. Read Galatians 2:11-21.

- a. Describe what Peter was doing that upset Paul.

When those who insisted upon circumcision and observation of the Law came visiting, Peter drew back from eating with the Gentiles – giving the impression 1) that he still observed the Law 2) that there were two classes of Christians.

- b. Why was Paul so angered by what Peter had done?

He was acting hypocritically. (v.13)

He 'forced' the Gentiles to do the same as him in order to be well seen.

Note the importance of teaching by example. (v. 14)

- c. Summarize Paul's message to Peter, explaining why Peter was wrong in doing what he had done.

One must not seek to justify oneself by works of the Law, neither before God nor to please men and be looked upon favourably. Hypocrisy can be fatal. Otherwise Christ died in vain.

3. Read Galatians 3:6-14 and complete the table below. *The first answers are provided as examples.*

Identity	Relationship to God	Spiritual End
<i>Those of faith</i>	<i>Sons of Abraham (v9)</i>	<i>Blessed</i>
<i>Those who rely on works of the law (v10)</i>	<i>No-one is justified before God</i>	<i>Cursed</i>

Clearly, Paul intends to make a clear distinction between the Law and those who follow it and faith and those who live by it.

4. In Galatians 4:21-31, Paul again makes use of the life of Abraham to drive home the distinction between Law and faith. In this passage Paul discusses the difference between the son of Hagar, Ishmael, and the son of Sarah, Isaac.

a. In verse 22-24, how does Paul describe Hagar and her son?

She was a slave who gave birth to a son according to the flesh. She represents the Covenant of Mount Sinai.

b. In those same verses, how does Paul describe the son of Sarah?

He is the son of the free woman, born according to the promise (he who inherits the Jerusalem above v.26)

c. In verse 28 and 31, who does Paul say that we are?

We are children of the promise, of she who was free.

d. Therefore, why is it wrong for us to live under the Law?

We are no longer children of the slave woman on a human level. We are children set free according to the promises of God.

5. One of the 'dangers' for those of us who are no longer under the Law, is that of thinking and acting as if we are 'free' to do whatever we like. Of course, this is not at all what freedom means. Throughout his letters, Paul makes repeated efforts to call people to right living. Read the following passages and summarize how they instruct us in right living.

Galatians 5:13-15	<i>We should live not to satisfy selfish desires but to serve others through our love.</i>
Galatians 5:19-26	<i>Instead of quarrels, disputes and excess of fleshly pleasure, we should live according to the fruit of the Spirit: love, peace, gentleness, self-control.</i>
Galatians 6:1-5	<i>We should help one another to carry burdens, beginning by keeping a watch on our own behaviour. Restore those caught in sin.</i>

6. James, Jesus' brother, played a significant role in the first century church. Not only did he serve for some period of time as the head of the Jerusalem council – which served to settle matters of doctrine and practice for the churches of the 1st century – but he also wrote an epistle which bears his name.

A simple outline of the book of James yields two major themes: trials of faith (1:1-18) and characteristics of faith (1:19-5:6).

a. From what you have learned about the political, cultural and religious climate of the 1st century, what are some causes of trials that Christians of the first century had to endure because of their faith?

Opposition of the Roman Empire (Christians refused to worship Caesar), opposition from the ruling religious Jewish factions.

b. Read James 1:1-5

- i. How does James say that believers should respond to trials?

To count it all joy

- ii. What does James offer as the reason why this is possible?

They know that these trials will be good for them to grow towards maturity in their faith.

c. Read James 1:19-25

- i. What does James say is a mark of true faith (or of a faithful believer)?

Hear the word of God, receive it and act upon it with humility

- ii. Describe how you have obeyed the Word of God this week.

Free answer

d. Read James 2:1-9. In this passage, James explains that faith in Christ is not compatible with the attitude of discrimination. Give two reasons why discrimination is not compatible with the Gospel.

- 1) (See James 2:5.)

God has chosen the poor of this world for His Kingdom. We must not dishonour them.

- 2) (See Galatians 3:27-28.)

We are all one in Jesus Christ, without distinction of status or origin or social background.

e. In James 3:1-12, James says that one of the most difficult challenges for the believer is to learn the control of his tongue. In order to describe the power of the tongue, James makes use of several images to describe it: a bit in the horse's mouth, a rudder which steers a great ship, a small flame which burns and consumes, a fountain that sends up fresh or poisoned water, and a fig tree and grape vine which cannot produce the wrong fruit.

- i. How does controlling the tongue show faith?

If we control what we say, we can honour God, bless Him and worship Him.

- ii. How can your faith help you control your tongue?

If I love, honour, worship and bless God, I will grow in my trust of Him and learn to control my tongue to bless others.

- iii. Is controlling your tongue a struggle for you? What can you do this week to control your tongue?

Free answer

f. Read James 4:1-10

- i. What is the problem in the Church that James is addressing here?

Quarrels and fights due to selfish desires

ii. What does James say is the solution?

Submit to God in humility, draw near to Him to seek purification.

iii. How does humility show faith?

By putting our confidence in God and not in our own righteousness, we will understand that He alone is righteous and able to purify us.

g. James returns in the last chapter of his letter to the opening theme from chapter 1, trials and the need to endure. Read James 5:7-11.

i. What does James say in this passage is the key to successfully enduring sufferings and trials?

Know that the end is near (v. 8).

Be patient and remember/be inspired by the words of the prophets (v. 10-11)

See how farmers wait for the earth to produce its fruits.

ii. How does patience in suffering show faith?

It is by faith that we put up with unfairness over a period of time, otherwise we will seek to give in to present societal pressures.

D. Paul's Second Missionary Journey.

Map 4: Paul's Second Missionary Journey



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After resolving the Jewish-Gentile controversy (Acts 15:1-29) which established the Gentile as a full believer in Christ and freed the Gospel from the Law and its Old Testament requirements, Paul leaves on his second missionary journey (see map above).

1. Read Acts 15:40-16:5.

- a. Describe Paul's initial work on this journey to the cities he had originally visited on his first missionary journey.

Strengthen their faith (15.41; 16.5)

Inform them of the decision of the apostles and elders in Jerusalem and encourage them to obey (16.4)

- b. Why was it important for them to hear from Paul again?

To receive confirmation of teaching on the Gospel which was contested over legalities.

To strengthen links with the church in Jerusalem and spread them throughout the world.

To be encouraged and know Paul's love for them as their spiritual father.

2. Read Acts 16:16-26.

- a. What happened to Paul and his companions in Philippi?

They were dragged before the rulers, attacked, beaten and thrown into prison.

- b. According to verse 25, how did Paul and Silas respond to their imprisonment?

They prayed to God and sang hymns.

- c. How and why did they react to their horrible situation in this surprising way?

They sought to glorify God in their time of trial, for He is always good. God delivered them in an extraordinary manner.

3. Once freed from jail and having left Philippi, Paul and his companions made their way to Thessalonica. Read Acts 17:1-3.

- a. How would you describe Paul's missionary strategy?

He always began by preaching in the synagogues.

- b. Do you think this was an appropriate strategy? Explain.

Yes, for the Jews were already there prepared and waiting to receive the Messiah. They already knew the Scriptures. They just needed to believe in Christ to receive life and become witnesses to others.

- c. Read verses 4-6. How did the people respond to Paul's preaching?

Some Jews and devout Greeks believed whilst other Jews opposed violently.

- d. Why do you think that some were so upset?

They were jealous of the effect that Paul's preaching was having on some Jews, the leading women and the devout Greeks.

4. Following the excitement in Thessalonica, Paul was led under cover of night to Berea by local believers where he applied his typical strategy and preached in the local synagogue (Acts 17:10-11). However, pursued by some from Thessalonica who heard that he had come to Berea, Paul was obliged to leave the area and he went to Athens where he waited for some of his companions to catch up. While in Athens, Paul was troubled by the idolatry and was moved to preach once again. Read Acts 17:22-31.

a. How are the people that Paul is now preaching to different from those in the synagogues?

They knew nothing about God (v. 23-29), but they worshipped idols (v. 29). They had no idea of the coming judgment (v. 30-31).

b. How does Paul adjust his message so that these people can understand what he is talking about?

He begins by acknowledging their practices and understanding of God (or lack of it).

He teaches simple lessons about God, beginning with creation, judgment, the need to change.

He contrasts their understanding with the truth.

c. What do you learn from Paul with regards to missionary strategy for preaching the Gospel?

It is good to always realise the understanding of those to whom we preach and present the message accordingly 1) where they are at the present time 2) what they lack 3) what is the essential part of the message that they need to seize and put into practice.

5. Imagine a conversation you could have with a close friend of yours about the Gospel. What kind of examples and resources should you use to help him or her understand the Gospel?

Free answer

For example: Certainly, the Bible, probably Genesis to open up an understanding of general revelation, creation, the beginning of sin and its consequences (Genesis chapters 1-5). God's plan prepared from the beginning (chap 3). My own search and discovery (testimony), testimonies of others from the same background as my friend.

6. Look again at the map of Paul's second missionary journey. List the regions in which the Gospel was preached.

Syria, Cilicia, Lyconia, Phrygia, Galatia) Bithynia, Mysia, Macedonia, Achaia, Asia minor, (Judea)

Note for the group leader: Today, these regions are in Turkey, Macedonia and Greece.

E. More Letters to the Churches

While in Corinth, Paul took time to write to the new believing community that grew out of his visit on his 2nd missionary journey. The first letter to the Thessalonians is largely in response to Paul's apprentice Timothy's good report of the faith and faithfulness of these new believers.

Encouraged by this report, Paul wants to seize the moment to encourage the faith of these men and women as well as challenge them to continue to grow in faith.

1. Read 1 Thessalonians 1:1-5. What kinds of things does Paul give thanks for?

Their work for Christ motivated by love, their steadfast hope in Christ through several trials

2. Read 1 Thessalonians 1:6-10.

a. What does Paul note as characteristics of the faith of these men and women in Thessalonica? (list at least 4 things)

Their reception of the word despite much affliction

They became imitators of Christ and of Paul

Their good witness and good example (vv 7-8)

Their zeal and their transparency

The transformation of their lives and leaving of their idols

b. Which of these elements are evident in your Christian life?

Free answer

3. In chapter 3, Paul explains that he had sent Timothy to them to find out how they were doing because he was anxious to know how their faith was enduring since his departure.

a. What did Timothy report about the Thessalonians that encouraged him?

The brothers and sisters maintained a solid faith despite their trials.

They remained attached to Paul and his team by mutual love.

b. Who was it that first brought you the Good News of the Gospel? As an encouragement to them, make a commitment to tell him/her this week about your on-going faith in the Gospel (if possible). (Note: if it is not possible to visit face-to-face with the person, call or write them)

Free answer

Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians was written from Corinth, shortly after the first letter in an effort to respond primarily to false teaching and ideas that were circulating in the church regarding the Day of the Lord.

4. Read 2 Thessalonians 1:1-3. What does Paul note as characteristics worthy of praise in the lives of the Thessalonian believers?

Their confidence in God and their love for one another continued to grow.

5. Read verses 11-12. What things does Paul pray for the Thessalonian believers?

He prayed that the word of God be glorified in them and that all works be in the name of Christ and that God keep them worthy of their call until Christ comes again.

6. Read 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3

- a. Describe the misunderstanding that has begun to shake the faith of the believers?

Some were saying that the day of the Lord had already come and so either there was no more salvation (it had already come) or that those that remained were disqualified.

- b. How does Paul respond to this false teaching?

He reassures them to the contrary and he warns them against being deceived (3). He gives clear signals to enable them to recognise the appearance of the man of lawlessness (maybe the Antichrist).

7. Read 2 Thessalonians 2:13-17. In this passage Paul again lays down multiple layers of salvation truths that are designed to encourage his believing friends. Identify one of the truths that Paul mentions and explain how this truth serves as an encouragement to your faith.

Election, God's choice revealed by faith in the Gospel and the holiness of their transformed lives (13-14)

Eternal encouragement and hope (16)

Being strengthened in every way

Conclusion

With the refusal to assume their role as God's representatives, the Jews were displaced by the Church in the Plan of God to redeem the nations. In contrast to the Jews who were to draw the attention of the nations by their holy life, thus bringing them into contact with God, the Church is sent to the nations to live and preach the Gospel.

1. Read Luke 2:8-14 and 1 Corinthians 15:1-4. Summarize the message of the Gospel that the Church has been commissioned to preach to all the nations.

Good news of a Saviour, the divine Messiah has come, a source of peace and joy for lost sinners.

2. Name two things that you can do this week to contribute to the task of "taking the Gospel to the nations" that God has called the Church to.

- a. *Open answer*

- b. *Open answer*

3. The Apostle Paul (and other apostles) provided on-going teaching and encouragement through their letters sent to the early churches. One of the recurring themes in these letters is that of giving thanks to God for the believers. Take some time now to pray, giving thanks to God for the believers in your church, your family, and others that God has used in your life.

Lesson 8: The Development of the Church, Part C

Paul's Third Missionary Journey, Final Voyage to Rome and Additional Letters to the Churches

Introduction

As the New Testament era progressed, more and more people turned to faith in Christ and more and more Churches were established. As noted in lessons 6 and 7, much of what we know about the Church from this era comes to us through the life and writings of the Apostle Paul. This lesson will give the student an overview of Paul's third missionary journey and his final trip to Rome to stand trial as well as introduce a number of epistles (letters) Paul and other apostles wrote in their final years.

A. Paul's Third Missionary Journey

Following the events of his 2nd missionary journey and after returning to Antioch, his home-base, Paul set out once again on what would be his third missionary journey. The most significant events of this journey took place in Ephesus. (See map below.)

Map 5: Paul's Third Missionary Journey



1. Read Acts 19:8-20.

- a. What was Paul doing to proclaim the Gospel in Ephesus?

He began by proclaiming the Gospel to the Jews in the synagogues, then he taught for two years in the hall of Tyrannus. He carried out healings and exorcisms until others sought to imitate him (without success).

- b. How did the people who believed in Jesus respond?

They renounce their ancient magic arts and destroyed their heretical books. The whole of society was transformed.

- c. Is there anything from your pre-Christian days that you need to get rid of? Explain.

Free answer

For example: my guilt, my perfectionism, my good luck charms, my visits to the marabout

2. Read Acts 19:23-29.

- a. Why did the people of Ephesus respond as they did to Paul's teaching and preaching?

v. 25 – because of financial losses

v. 27 – because they were afraid that their practices would come into disrepute

v. 27 – because of being proud of their culture and their ancient religion – protect their identity, the legacy and their gods

- b. The Gospel message in Ephesus confronted the making, selling and worshipping of idols. What things does the Gospel oppose in your culture today?

Free answer

For example: glory of the culture, Islam, the economy, the contribution to the mosque

- c. How has your behaviour changed in these areas of your life since you have believed the Gospel?

Free answer

3. At some point during Paul's stay in Ephesus, a delegation from the church in Corinth found their way to him with a report of problems and a request for his help in understanding certain biblical principles with regards to marriage. In response to this request, Paul wrote the letter of 1 Corinthians. Read 1 Corinthians 1:10-11.¹

- a. Describe the problem that they report.

There was quarrelling, divisions and rivalries

¹ In 1 Corinthians 5:9, Paul refers to a letter that he had written to the Corinthians before that which we call 1 Corinthians - 1 Corinthians is therefore in fact the second letter that he wrote to them. However, this first letter was not considered as essential by the Holy Spirit and is not therefore included in the New Testament.

b. How does Paul respond? (vv. 10-17)

He appeals to them to agree and be united in the same mind, not to hide behind different ministers who are all subordinated to Christ.

4. After delivering the letter of 1 Corinthians to the Corinthian believers (1 Corinthians 16:10, 11), Timothy returned to Paul to report a growing opposition to Paul's apostolic authority among some in the Corinthian church. Subsequently, Paul made a brief and what is described as a "painful" visit (2 Corinthians 2:1, 12:14, 13:1, 2) in an effort to respond to the opposition in person. Upon returning to Ephesus, Paul wrote what he describes as a "sorrowful" letter in which he urges the church to discipline whoever is leading the opposition against him (2:1-11; 7:8). This letter was carried by Titus to the Corinthians while Paul travelled to Troas and Macedonia. Shortly afterwards, Paul met up with Titus in Macedonia (perhaps in Philippi) to hear his good report that many had repented of their rebellion, though not all. Paul's letter that we know as 2 Corinthians was written from Macedonia (Philippi?) and was intended to encourage the believers in their faith (in particular with regards to forgiveness, perseverance in ministry, and giving) and to re-establish his legitimate authority as an apostle.

a. Read 2 Corinthians 4:7-18. Paul has by this point in his ministry faced opposition from inside and outside the church. He has been threatened, arrested, beaten, accused of wrongdoing, etc... and yet he keeps on going. This passage gives a great summary of the things that helps Paul stay focused in ministry.

i. Explain what Paul considers to be the source of his ministry.

He is certain that:

- 1) It is God who renews and strengthens them despite their weakness (v. 7-11, 16)*
- 2) That at the end Paul will be raised together with the Corinthians (v. 14-15)*
- 3) The eternal glory which awaits them cannot be compared with the present momentary afflictions (v. 17-18)*

ii. What truths about the future does Paul meditate on so that he has confidence in the midst of persecution and hardships?

The resurrection of Jesus Christ and of the body of the believer with him (v. 14-15).

The eternal weight of glory that awaits those who serve God faithfully (v. 17).

The fact that the present world will be destroyed but that which is done in God will remain (v. 18).

iii. What truths from this passage do you need to meditate on in order to gain confidence when faced with the hardships of your own situation?

God helps me to persevere beyond my own strength – He is glorified in my weaknesses, by my patience in the face of trials.

God wants to reward me beyond my afflictions. He seeks a « way to fill me with his grace. »

b. In chapters 10 to 12, Paul systematically defends his apostolic authority before the Corinthians. In so doing he describes his love for them (11:11, 12:15), his gentle appeal for repentance during his personal visits (10:1), his sufferings on behalf of the Gospel (11:23-33) and the miracles that he performed (12:12). Above all, Paul pleads with the Corinthians to listen to his heart for them and to accept and treat him as they do the other apostles.

i. From what you have learned about the nature and structure of the local church, why did God design the church so that certain people had authority over others?

God is a God of order so the Church too must be orderly, as is Creation. God wants us to be answerable and connected to one another. He exercises His authority over us through His servants. At the same time, we are all equal before God and each of us must be answerable to God for what we have done with the ministries He has given us.

ii. When is it appropriate to oppose the authority of a church leader?

In his own defence, Paul speaks of several criteria.

- *Not conforming to the teaching of the apostles (nowadays Biblical teaching) (2 Cor 11:4-5)*
- *A tendency to exploit those who are under their care instead of serving them. Note: the teaching pastor and his family have the right to a suitable salary – on the same level as the church he serves. Do not be abused by a spirit of superiority, by an invasion of your private life, or by financial exploitation by a spiritual leader 11:19-21a; 12:14-15. We could also add seduction to commit adultery 2 Pe 2:14.*
- *Deception and pretention of self-glorification 11:11-14; 2 Pe 2:10-12*

iii. In light of the example of Paul, how should a church leader exercise his authority?

The leader should first of all be an example and a model that others can imitate. He must not seek his own interests, nor to impress others, nor exercise a domineering authority over those in his care. He considers their well-being. He defends his authority in order to protect them against those who want to get hold of them to harm and destroy.

5. Shortly before his 3rd missionary journey comes to an end, while Paul is again in Corinth, he writes and sends a letter (Romans) to the Church in Rome – a church he did not found, but which was significant not only because of the large number of disciples associated with the church, but also because of its presence in Rome – the most important Roman city in the Roman Empire in the first century. From chapter 15:22-29, we learn that Paul has been wanting to visit the believers in Rome but has not had the opportunity. He has however made plans to try to see them on his way to Spain. But first, he must deliver the offering that the churches in Macedonia and Achaia have taken for the believers in Jerusalem.

a. Read Romans 1:8-15. Compare with Romans 15:14-24. Why did Paul write Romans?

To prepare a journey to visit them and preach the Gospel (v.15) and to encourage them and be encouraged by them

In chapter 15, Paul specifies that he wants to remind them of and reinforce certain things, to explain his ministry to them and ask for their support in the new ministry to evangelise Spain which had not yet been reached by the message of the Gospel

- b. Read Romans, 1:1-7. It is commonly recognized that Paul often builds the introduction to his letters with the elements that he intends to treat later in the letter. Based upon this idea, what elements does Paul seem to emphasize in his introduction?

He specifies his role in the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the nations, in conformity with the Scriptures (of the OT), in expectation of an act of faith which leads the sinner to God.

Romans is considered to be one of the most theologically dense books of the New Testament. In this book, Paul systematically makes a case for the universality of sin and judgment (chapters 1 to 3), defines and defends the Gospel as the grace-enabled invitation to repentance and forgiveness (chapters 4 to 7), paints a glorious picture of the spiritual possession of the saints (chapter 8), pleads for Israel's repentance (chapters 9 to 11), and closes with practical application of the Christian life with regards to authorities, neighbours, and other believers (chapters 12 to 15). Finally, in chapter 16, he closes his letter with a round of affectionate greetings.

- c. One of the keys to understanding the message of Romans is in understanding what Paul says about the Gospel. Read Romans 1:18-20. How does Paul describe man's standing before God?

Man is under the wrath and condemnation of God (v. 18) for his refusal to recognise God. He is without excuse.

- d. In Romans 3:9-11, Paul makes this even more explicit. Who does Paul say is guilty before God?

Everyone, without exception, Jews and non-Jews are all under the domination of sin.

- e. In Romans 5:6-8, what does Paul mention here as a solution for the sins of mankind?

Christ died for us sinners.

- f. In 5:9-11, what does Paul go on to say about the effects of forgiveness that comes through the blood of Christ?

We have assurance of our salvation and of protection from the wrath of God. We are already reconciled to Him and in a direct relationship with Him.

- g. Romans chapter 8 is considered to be one of the most encouraging of all passages in Scripture. In this chapter, Paul lays out a number of the benefits of the Gospel in the life of a believer. Read 8:28-39.

- i. In verses 28-30, what does Paul say that God does with the things that happen to us?

All things work together for the good of those who love God for even hardships help us to be transformed to the image of Christ and to understand His sufferings for us. Our sufferings contribute to our future glory (v. 18, 30).

ii. In verses 31-36, what does Paul say about God's spiritual care and protection of our faith?

This protection is certain and sure. Nothing, no-one, can touch us for God himself protects and understands us. His love is unshakeable and constant despite our circumstances.

iii. Finally, in verses 37-39, what assurance does Paul offer to the believers in Rome with regard to their relationship to God?

Nothing can separate us for the love of Christ.

iv. Remember that not many years after this letter was sent to the church in Rome, Nero unleashed a horrendous wave of persecution against the church. How do you think the words of Paul from chapter 8 would have served as a comfort to those believers facing persecution from Nero?

These words would have been most welcome! What assurance when facing horrendous persecution – God does not abandon us, but He wants to glorify us through such trials.

v. Which of Paul's words here are a comfort and encouragement to you today? Why?

Free answer

For example: The grand finale of verses 37-39; The goodness of God (v. 32); The justification of God in the face of all accusations (v. 33-34).

B. Paul on Trial and Imprisoned

In the final chapters of the book of Acts Paul is on trial for his faith before several Jewish and Roman leaders. It all begins with an accusation that Paul has polluted the Jewish temple with some of his Gentile colleagues. This accusation swells into a scene in which Paul appears before an angry crowd wishing to kill him (Acts 21:40-22:23). His life is spared by a Roman Centurion (Acts 22:24-29) who, after hearing his case, sends him to the Jewish Sanhedrin (Acts 22:30-23:10) to deal with the matter. Following his appearance before the Jews, Paul is sent to stand before Felix, the Governor of Judea (Acts 23:23-35). Ananias, the High Priest, comes to Caesarea to bring charges against Paul before Felix (Acts 24:1-23). Despite the intensity of these various trials, no verdict was handed down and Paul was left in prison for nearly two years in Caesarea. During this two-year period, Paul was often summoned by Felix, governor of Judea (Acts 24:26-27).

1. Imagine that you are alive at the time of the Apostle Paul and know him as a friend. Use the space below to write a brief letter to encourage him during his imprisonment in Caesarea.

Free answer

Example of elements this letter could contain:

- *Effect of witness especially amongst the magistrates*
- *Protection of God*
- *News of the churches*

2. What can you do now so that you are prepared spiritually to endure opposition, even imprisonment, for your faith?

Free answer

For example:

- *Study the theme of persecution in the Bible – the example of Paul*
- *Memorise Bible verses*
- *Link up with brothers and sisters to support one another*
- *Inform the media*

C. Paul's Final Voyage

When Felix was replaced by Festus, Paul was again put on trial by him (Acts 25:1-12) and then appeared before King Agrippa and his wife, Bernice (Acts 25:23-26:32).

When Paul realized that he might be sent back to Jerusalem only to be murdered by the Jews, he appealed to Caesar (Acts 25:8-12). Acts 27 and 28 recount Paul's final days under Roman guard. As a result, Paul's final recorded voyage is not that of a missionary, but that of a captive on his way to stand trial before the Roman authorities. (See map below.) Along the way he is shipwrecked on the island of Malta.

Map 6: Paul's Journey to Rome



Most of what we know about the life of the Apostle Paul comes to an end in Acts 28 with him in his own rented quarters where he lived for over two years under house arrest waiting for his chance to make his defence before Caesar. Though it is not 100% certain, many scholars believe that Paul was tried and executed in Rome sometime around AD 64. Others suggest that he was released, made a missionary trip to Spain (Rom. 15:23-28), and was executed during the reign of the demented emperor Nero in AD 68.

It was during this period of house-arrest (AD 59 – 61) that Paul wrote a number of epistles to local churches: including his letters to the Ephesians, Colossians, and Philippians as well as a letter to Philemon concerning a newly converted slave. Together, these four letters are known as the 'prison epistles of Paul'.

1. Read Ephesians 3:1, 4:1 and 6:18-20. In these passages, Paul refers to his imprisonment - commonly believed to be that described at the end of Acts 28. Despite the fact that this imprisonment lasted for two years, how does Paul ask the Ephesians to pray for him (6:18-20)?

He asks that words may be given to him to boldly proclaim the Gospel (at the time of his imprisonment).

2. Why do you think Paul does not ask that they pray for his release from prison?

He knows that he is in chains for the service of the Gospel, an ambassador (v. 20) to speak to kings and governors.

3. Read Philippians 1:12 -18. Here again Paul mentions the fact of his imprisonment.

a. What does Paul rejoice over in these verses?

- *He rejoices that the Gospel is being spread in an extraordinary way through his imprisonment*
- *his story has become known to all*
- *the believers now have the courage to evangelise (in his stead)*

b. Why is Paul joyful about this?

The Gospel is proclaimed widely

The Gospel saves those who will believe

4. Colossians 4:2-6. Here again Paul refers to his imprisonment in Rome.

a. What does he instruct the Colossians to pray for?

That he will have opportunities to witness to the Gospel

That he will speak clearly and make the Gospel understood.

b. What word of instruction does he give to the Colossian believers with regards to the unbelievers around them?

To be always wise and gracious, salt of the earth, to draw people to the Gospel and make them desirous to know it and believe it.

c. A popular question, which has its roots in the instructions and encouragements of Paul's prison epistles goes like this, "If it were suddenly against the law to be a Christian, would there be enough evidence against you to convict you?" What evidence can you show from your own life which would make you 'guilty' of being a Christian? Rather than write your answer, discuss this question with the other members of your study group.

5. Read Philemon. Note that Paul refers to his imprisonment in verses 9, 10, 13 and 23.

a. Describe the problem that prompts Paul to write this letter.

Onesimus, the servant of Philemon who had abandoned his master Philemon, has become a Christian. He is guilty and liable before his master. He needs to be forgiven and be received back by Philemon

b. What does Paul tell Philemon to do?

To forgive him his debt; to be reconciled to him; to welcome him again as before – except now as a brother in Christ.

c. Once again Paul opens his letter with a word of encouragement to Philemon. What does this tell you about Paul's priorities when writing to the believers?

He communicates his gratefulness for their ministry in love for Christ and His Church, to encourage them, and to reassure them of his prayers for them.

d. What do you do intentionally to encourage the believers around you?

Pray for them; recognise their ministry; honour them.

D. Final Words

1. Paul's final recorded sermon is found in Acts 28:23. Summarize Paul's message.

The Messiah suffered, He must rise again and offer light and salvation to the Jews and to other nations

Jesus Christ according to the Scriptures of the OT (28.25)

2. Read Acts 28:25-28. In light of the Jew's response to his message, what does Paul say God has done instead?

He said that they did not believe because they were blind to God as He had said, but that the Gentiles, (the nations) would welcome the Gospel and obey its message.

E. Last Letters

If Paul wrote his Prison Epistles (discussed above) during his imprisonment described in Acts 28, then his remaining letters (1, 2 Timothy and Titus: known as the 'Pastoral Epistles' of Paul) were written following the close of the book of Acts. These final letters from Paul were written to two

men that had been important to him and who would inevitably carry on much of the work of the care for the churches in Ephesus and Crete after Paul's (expected) death. Scholars agree that it was at this same period of time that Peter wrote his epistles, 1 and 2 Peter. (Note: For a complete study of 1 Peter, see BIBL 201, Bible Study Methods).

1. In Paul's **first letter to Timothy**, Paul provides instructions for how to care for the church. Complete the table below by reading the indicated passages and providing answers in the empty spaces. The first answer is given as an example.

Passage	Paul's Instructions
1 Timothy 1:18-20	<i>Fight the good fight to keep the faith</i>
1 Timothy 3:14-16	<i>I'm instructing you how you should behave in a godly manner in God's household</i>
1 Timothy 4:11-16	<i>Exhort and teach, put my instructions into practice</i>
1 Timothy 5:21	<i>Follow his instructions with impartiality</i>
1 Timothy 6:20-21	<i>Guard the deposit to ensure sound doctrine is passed on</i>

2. Obviously, Paul wrote these things to Timothy because they were necessary to preserve the health of the Church and protect the integrity of the Christian Faith in that day. If Paul were writing this letter to your Pastor today, what would he say to him? If Paul had written this letter to church leaders today, what do you think he would have said to them?

Study the Bible carefully, put into practice what you teach and thus be a model for the church members, teach to all without partiality

3. In his **second letter to Timothy**, Paul is once again, apparently, a Roman prisoner. This time he is not under house arrest with access to his friends, but in a Roman prison, and nearly alone. Throughout this letter, Paul leaves hints that he realizes that his time on earth is short. Complete the table below by reading the passages noted and summarizing the truth behind Paul's confidence in the face of suffering and anticipated death.

Passage	The truth behind Paul's confidence in the face of suffering
2 Timothy 1:12	He (God) is able to preserve my soul until the day of His appearing
2 Timothy 2:11-13	<i>If we persevere, we will live and reign with Him</i>
2 Timothy 4:7-8	<i>He has fought the good fight until the end; the crown of righteousness awaits him</i>
2 Timothy 4:18	<i>The Lord will deliver him from every evil deed and bring him safely into His heavenly Kingdom</i>

- a. How does a believer gain this type of confidence that Paul displays in these passages?

Free answer

For example:

- *By serving the Lord*
- *By spending time with Him – a whole life's experience*
- *By meditating the word – the Gospel that Paul is preaching*

- b. Imagine that you are at the bedside of a new believer who is in the process of dying. Using the things that Paul notes in 2 Timothy, what could you say to encourage this person?

The crown of righteousness awaits the believer, there is therefore no need to fear (4.8)

The Apostle Peter, like Paul, was no stranger to the suffering of persecution. His first letter (1 Peter) was probably written to believing Gentiles scattered throughout the Roman Empire just prior to or just after the outbreak of Nero's persecution of Christians around AD 62, following the fire in Rome (which Nero blamed on the Christians).

4. The letter of 1 Peter divides into three sections:

1. Salvation – its reality and benefits for the believer (1:1 to 2:12)
2. Submission – the obligation of the believer (2:13 to 3:12)
3. Suffering – the privilege of the believer (3:13 to 5:14)

- a. How does a correct understanding of our salvation (1 Peter 1:3-5) help us to submit with hope, as Peter says, to authorities (government), in our work, and in marriage? (Read 1 Peter 2:20-21)

Assurance of such a wonderful salvation, kept in heaven for us, gives us courage and patience to endure injustice from various people in authority over us and to not seek to take vengeance ourselves. On the contrary, these unfair treatments only increase our future reward. (2 Thess. 1:5-7).

- b. How does a correct understanding of our salvation help us suffer with joy, as Peter says, in 1 Peter 4:12-14?

With correct understanding, we can rejoice in our sufferings – understand them as a proof of our salvation rather than an unfair scourge which would question 1) our relationship with God or 2) the goodness of God. It is a privilege and an honour to share the sufferings of Christ.

5. In Peter's second letter, his concern is not the suffering brought on by persecution, but damage done to the faith of the believers as a result of false teaching.

- a. Read 1 Peter 2:1-3 and describe the things that Peter says that false teachers will try to do.

They will bring in destructive heresies which waylay the believers from true saving faith and lead to a laxist lifestyle and immorality which discredits the Christian faith.

They exploit people through a love of money.

b. Read the following passages and note how Peter says the believers should combat false teaching. *The first answer is given as an example.*

2 Peter 1:5-7 – *By being diligent to add moral and spiritual qualities to their faith.*

2 Peter 1:10-11 – *Be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure and an entrance into the eternal kingdom.*

2 Peter 3:1-2 – *Understand and remember the teachings of the Apostles and the OT.*

2 Peter 3:11 – *Walk in holiness*

2 Peter 3:14-15 – *Be diligent to be found by Christ without spot or blemish when He comes again. Be patient!*

2 Peter 3:17-18 – *Be aware, grow in knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.*



Take Note!

According to tradition, the Apostle Peter was arrested, imprisoned and eventually executed by Nero around AD 67.

Knowing that crucifixion was a common mode of execution by the Romans, Peter asked to be crucified up-side down, as he felt unworthy to endure the same physical sufferings of his Lord Jesus!

6. **The book of Hebrews** was written to respond to Jewish believers who, having stepped out of Judaism into Christianity, were seeking to return to Judaism in order to escape persecution from their countrymen.

Though the writer of Hebrews is uncertain, as is the exact date of its writing and circulation, several references in the text of Hebrews suggest that it must have been written sometime in the first century (while Timothy was still alive – Hebrews 13:23-24).

A final clue to the dating of Hebrews is significant also for the dating of the rest of the New Testament. As a result of unresolved religious and political tensions between the Jews and Romans, a local conflict grew into a full-scale rebellion in AD 66. This unrest provoked the Roman Emperor, Nero and, after his death in AD 68, Vespasian, to mount a full-scale effort to crush Jewish opposition once and for all. As the article in the appendix describes, the crushing blow in this first Jewish-Roman war was the siege and subsequent destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in AD 70. Tens of thousands of Jews were killed in the conflict and the treasures of the temple were carried off by the Romans.

Interestingly, no New Testament book makes mention of this momentous event in Jewish life and history of the 1st century. Because of the scale and significance of this event, it is hard to imagine that any New Testament writer writing after the fact could have failed to mention it. The

fact that none do is certainly strong evidence for concluding that the New Testament books must have been written before this event took place.²

A brief outline of the book of Hebrews is shown below:

- 1) The Superiority of Christ's person (1:1 to 4:13)
- 2) The Superiority of Christ's work (4:14 to 10:18)
- 3) The Superiority of the Christian's walk of faith (10:19 to 13:25)

a. How would the themes of this book, help Jewish believers not return to Judaism?

- *They would realize that the Son of God has come and this requires an acknowledgement of and confidence in the rest that He offers.*
- *They would realize that the ritual practices and repetitive sacrifices have found their definitive fulfilment in the perfect offering of Jesus Christ.*

b. How do these same themes help you not return to your old way of life?

Free answer.

Examples:

- *It is worth being insulted for the name of Jesus Christ because he is our eternal glory and hope. It is better to have faith in the perfect justice of Christ than to be judged according to our own works and merits.*
- *There is no sense in offering blood sacrifices – they dishonour Christ, as if to say that his sacrifice was not sufficient.*
- *It is true that a life of faith can bring about persecution but God uses this for our spiritual growth and not as a punishment for unfaithfulness.*
- *His sufferings were the lot of many pious people under the Old Covenant and they show the glory of faith*

7. Hebrews 11 is one of the most important passages on the nature of faith in the life of the believer. Read Hebrews 11:1-5 and using the skills you acquired in BIBL 210, Bible Study Methods, complete the following exercises.

a. Identify at least 4 things that you observe about 'faith' in these verses.

- 1) *It is the assurance of what we hope and the conviction of that which we do not see.*
- 2) *It is a certitude and a sure hope and a true reality.*
- 3) *The object of our faith is invisible at present (v.1, 3).*

² Some scholars, despite this interpretation of the evidence, suggest that John wrote his letters (1, 2 and 3 John) as well as Revelation between AD 85 – AD 95, fifteen to twenty-five years after the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple. John's silence on the matter in his letters is attributed to the fact that he was dealing with subject matter that did not call for a reference to a historical event. And in the case of the Book of Revelation, John made no reference to the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple because the revelation of the material for the book, did not include it as a reference.

- 4) *Faith inspires worship and acts of personal sacrifice (vv4-5). God commends the faith of those who have acted upon their faith (vv2, 4-6)*

b. Based upon your observations, how would you define 'faith'?

Faith is a conviction that God will act as He promised, to hold fast and act in consequence despite obstacles and the present climate, knowing that God will reward far beyond what we have sacrificed (lost, given up).

c. As verses 2, 4, 5 and 7 suggest, faith and action go together. In other words, because of faith, a believer is able to accomplish something for God.

i. What have you accomplished for God by faith?

Free answer

For example:

- *I hope that my daily actions are carried out for His glory and with the strength He gives me.*
- *Prayer, resting in Him and waiting patiently in Him play indispensable roles.*

ii. What do you think God wants you to accomplish for Him by faith?

Free answer

For example: Not to act out of a guilty conscience or outside condemnations, but to wait on Him and act freely by love.

Conclusion

With the preaching of the disciples and the missionary work of Paul and his colleagues, more and more people turned to faith in Christ and more and more churches were planted. In an effort to continue to encourage the believers in these churches and respond to personal and doctrinal issues that came up, Paul and other apostles, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, wrote and sent letters (epistles) to them. Many of these letters that God deemed important for the church throughout history were included in the Bible and serve to instruct and encourage men and women in the faith today.

Appendix 9: Roman Persecutions of the Church

Beginning with the Roman Emperor Nero, the Church experienced waves of persecution during the next 300 years (until the fall of Rome).

These persecutions include:

1. Persecution under **Nero** (c. 64-68). Traditional martyrdoms of Peter and Paul.
2. Persecution under **Domitian** (c. 81-96).
3. Persecution under **Trajan** (112-117). Christianity is outlawed, but Christians are not sought out.
4. Persecution under **Marcus Aurelius** (c. 161-180). Martyrdom of Polycarp.
5. Persecution under **Septimius Severus** (202-210). Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas.
6. Persecution under **Decius** (250-251). Christians are actively sought out by requiring public sacrifice. Could buy certificates (*libelli*) instead of sacrificing. Martyrdoms of bishops of Rome, Jerusalem and Antioch.
7. Persecution under **Valerian** (257-59). Martyrdoms of Cyprian of Carthage and Sixtus II of Rome.
8. Persecution under **Maximin the Thracian** (235-38).
9. Persecution under **Aurelian** (r. 270-275).
10. Severe persecution under **Diocletian and Galerius** (303-311).

Appendix 10: The Fall of Jerusalem and the Destruction of the Temple in AD 70

The **first Jewish-Roman War** (66-73), sometimes called **The Great Revolt** (Hebrew: המרד הגדול, *ha-Mered Ha-Gadol*), was the first of three major rebellions by the Jews of Judaea Province against the Roman Empire (the second was the Kitos War in 115-117; the third was Bar Kokhba's revolt, 132-135).

It began in the year 66, due to Greek and Jewish religious tension. It ended when legions under Titus besieged and destroyed Jerusalem, looted and burned Herod's Temple (in the year 70) and Jewish strongholds (notably Gamla in 67 and Masada in 73), and enslaved or massacred a large part of the Jewish population.

The defeat of the Jewish revolts by the Roman Empire substantially altered the Jewish diaspora, as many Jews were scattered or sold into slavery after losing their state.

First Jewish successes

According to Josephus, the revolt, which began at Caesarea in 66, was provoked by Greeks sacrificing birds in front of a local synagogue. The Greek-speaking Roman garrison did not intercede. In an act of defiance, the son of Kohen Gadol (High priest) Eliezar ben Hanania ceased prayers and sacrifices for the Roman Emperor at the Temple and subsequently led a successful attack on the Roman garrison stationed in Jerusalem. The pro-Roman king Agrippa II and his sister

Berenice fled Jerusalem to Galilee, where later they gave themselves up to the Romans. Cestius Gallus, the legate of Syria, brought reinforcements to restore order, but was soundly defeated at the Battle of Beth Horon. While retreating, Legio XII Fulminata even lost its aquila.

Fall

Emperor Nero appointed General Vespasian instead of Gallus to crush the rebellion. Vespasian made Caesarea Maritima his headquarters and with his legions, among them some 60,000 professional soldiers, methodically cleared the coast and the North. Some towns gave up without a fight. By the year 68, Jewish resistance in the North had been crushed. The leaders of the collapsed Northern revolt, John of Giscala and Simon Bar Giora, managed to escape to Jerusalem. Brutal civil war erupted: the Zealots and Sicarii executed anyone advocating surrender, and by 68 the entire leadership of the southern revolt was dead, all killed by the Jews, none by the Romans. After the death of Nero and with the backing of the army, Vespasian was proclaimed emperor in 69 and left for Rome to take the throne from Vitellius in a brief Roman civil war, the so-called Year of the four emperors.

Fall of Jerusalem

The siege of Jerusalem, the capital city, had begun early in the war, but had turned into a stalemate. Unable to breach the city's defences, the Roman armies established a permanent camp just outside the city, digging a trench around the circumference of its walls and building a wall as high as the city walls themselves around Jerusalem. Anyone caught in the trench attempting to flee the city would be captured, crucified, and placed in lines on top of the dirt wall facing into Jerusalem. The two Zealot leaders, John of Gischala and Simon Bar Giora only ceased hostilities and joined forces to defend the city when the Romans began to construct ramparts for the siege. Tens of thousands of crucified bodies encircled Jerusalem by the end of the siege.

Titus Flavius, Vespasian's son, led the final assault and siege of Jerusalem. During the infighting inside the city walls, a stockpiled supply of dry food was intentionally burned by Jewish leaders to induce the defenders to fight against the siege instead of negotiating peace; as a result, many city dwellers and soldiers died of starvation during the siege. Zealots under Eleazar ben Simon held the Temple, Sicarii led by Simon Bar Giora held the upper city. Titus eventually wiped out the last remnants of Jewish resistance.

By the summer of 70, the Romans had breached the walls of Jerusalem, ransacking and burning nearly the entire city. The Romans began by attacking the weakest spot which was the third wall. It was built shortly before the siege so it did not have as much time invested in its protection. They succeeded towards the end of May and shortly afterwards broke through the more important second wall. The Second Temple was destroyed on Tisha B'Av (July 29 or July 30), 70. Tacitus, a historian of the time, notes that those who were besieged in Jerusalem amounted to no fewer than six hundred thousand, that men and women alike and every age engaged in armed resistance, everyone who could pick up a weapon did, both sexes showed equal determination, preferring death to a life that involved expulsion from their country. All three walls were destroyed and in turn so was the Temple, some of whose overturned stones and their place of impact can still be seen. John of Giscala surrendered at Agrippa II's fortress of Jotaphta and was

sentenced to life imprisonment. The famous Arch of Titus still stands in Rome: it depicts Roman legionaries carrying off the Temple of Jerusalem's treasures, including the menorah.

Lesson 9: The Writings of John

Introduction

As you have seen through your study of lessons 1-8, the two major themes of the New Testament are the life of Jesus and the birth of the Church. Throughout these lessons an effort has been made to demonstrate that the New Testament is the continuation of God's story that was begun in the Old Testament and that the two volumes need to be taken together to understand God and His plan for creation.

The New Testament historical record in Acts ends with the imprisonment of Paul, sometime around AD 60, although some of the books of the NT were most probably written after this event. By this time several other prominent Christians had been put to death by Roman or Jewish authorities; namely, John the Baptist and James (the brother of the apostle John). In AD 54, Nero became the Roman Emperor. Ten years later he launched a vicious persecution of Christians, accusing them of starting the famous fire which destroyed much of Rome.

Historians record that Roman persecution of the Church continued off and on for nearly 300 years. As a consequence of such violence, all of the 12 apostles were apparently martyred except for Judas (who took his own life) and John, whose death is described briefly below.

To conclude this introduction to the New Testament, this lesson will focus on the writings of the Apostle John (who, together with his brother, James, were known as the 'sons of thunder' cf. Mark 3:17). As noted above, near the end of his life, the Apostle John was exiled to the Isle of Patmos from where he wrote the book of Revelation – a book that provides the most dramatic look at prophetic material in the New Testament. In addition, he also wrote the Gospel of John and three epistles bearing his name; 1, 2 and 3 John.

A. The Gospel of John

1. The writer of this Gospel, John the Apostle, has his first encounter with Jesus in an unusual setting. Read Luke 5:1-11 and describe the scene.

Jesus climbed into Simon's fishing boat to teach the crowd. Then he told Simon to put out to deeper water and cast his nets, which filled immediately with many fish. The disciples left everything they had and followed Jesus. Jesus called them to be fishers of men.

2. In Luke 6:12-16, Luke summarizes the selection of the 12 disciples of Jesus of whom John is one. John is not singled out by name in most of the rest of the Gospel accounts however we do find him again mentioned in Galatians together with Peter.

a. Read Galatians 2:7-9 and describe the scene.

John, Peter and James officially recognised the ministry of Paul to the nations.

b. What do you think it means that John (together with Peter and James) is described as a ‘pillar (of the Church)’?

This means that their teaching carried the authority of Jesus Christ. As Apostles, founders of the Church, they had the responsibility to maintain the purity of the message of the Gospel and to approve or refute all doctrine/messenger.

3. Sprinkled throughout John’s Gospel are a few references to a “disciple whom Jesus loved”. Most scholars believe that this is John’s way to refer to himself in his own Gospel. Read John 13:23, John 19:26 and John 20:2. What sort of privileges and responsibilities did this ‘disciple whom Jesus loved’ have?

He was reclining close to Jesus the night of the last supper with the disciples. He was at the foot of the cross where Jesus gave him the responsibility of the future care of his mother. He was the first, with Peter to see the empty tomb. Responsibility: pillar of the Church; authority as an apostle to found the Church.

It is clear that the Apostle John had a privileged position from which to observe and learn from Jesus. As a result of this intimate vantage point, John is able (by the leading of the Holy Spirit) to provide a highly developed theological picture of Jesus. In so doing, however, John develops his Gospel account in a way that significantly differs from the Gospel accounts written by Matthew, Mark and Luke (known together as the synoptic gospels). In some cases, John does not include events or teachings that are common to the synoptics and in some cases, John includes things that are found nowhere else.

4. Briefly skim over the first 3 chapters of the Gospel of John. Note in the table below the verses which recount the major events listed. If John does not discuss the event, write ‘not discussed’ in the space provided.

Gospel	Event		
	Birth of Jesus	Jesus baptised	Jesus tempted in wilderness
Matthew	1:24, 25	3:13-17	4:1-11
Mark	not discussed	1:9-11	1:12-13
Luke	2:1-7	3:21-23	4:1-13
John	<i>1.14</i>	<i>1.31-34</i>	<i>Not discussed</i>

5. Instead of describing the historical events surrounding the birth and early ministry of Jesus, how does John begin his Gospel account?

He describes the existence of the Son of God, the eternal Word, before coming to earth as a man. Then he describes the effect of his appearance amongst men (how he was received).

6. How does John's introduction help you understand who Jesus is?

It helps us to see from a divine perspective, eternal instead of from a human perspective, physical (historical). It completes and enriches the texts which describe historical events and the ancient prophecies which relate to his coming.

The key theme in the Gospel of John is that of faith (or belief). In verses 20:30-31, commonly understood to be the key passage in the Gospel, John writes, "Many other signs therefore Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book, but these have been written (so) that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that (by) believing you might have life in His name."

7. Read John 3:1-7.

a. Who has come to question Jesus?

Nicodemus, a Pharisee and ruler of the Jews.

Note for the group leader: Member of the Sanhedrin, the high council of elders.

b. What does Jesus tell him he must do?

He must be born again in order to enter the kingdom of God. Jesus uses the Greek word which has two meanings 'again' or 'from above' to describe this birth through the Holy Spirit. It is an act of God which transforms a person.

8. Read John 3:16. What here is the key to eternal life?

It is necessary to believe that Jesus Christ is the Messiah who died in our stead to forgive us our sins.

9. What does John say happens to those who do not believe (John 3:17-18)?

They are condemned for having refused this act of love towards them because of their unbelief and pride.

10. Throughout his gospel, John records a number of incidents in which Jesus reveals more of who He is and what He has come to do. Complete the table below by reading the indicated passage and answering the question, "who does Jesus say that He is?". *The first answer is provided as an example.*

Passage	Truth about Jesus
John 6:35, 48	<i>I am the bread of life</i>
John 8:12, 9.5	<i>I am the light of the world</i>
John 10:7, 9	<i>I am the door</i>
John 10:11, 13	<i>I am the Good Shepherd</i>
John 11:25	<i>I am the resurrection and the life</i>

John 14:6	<i>I am the way, the truth and the life</i>
John 15:1, 5	<i>I am the true vine</i>

Note to the group leader: Work out the meanings of each 'I am' together

11. Much of the material that John includes in chapters 15 to 17 is unique to his Gospel and includes some very important theological teaching. In chapter 15, John describes the relationship of God the Father to the Son and individual believers through an illustration of a vineyard and its vines. In chapter 16, John discusses the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. In chapter 17, John records Jesus' prayer for Himself, for His disciples and for all (future) believers.

a. Read John 17:1-5.

i. How does Jesus describe the work He came to do?

His work is to glorify the Father by giving eternal life to those whom the Father gave him to save. His work is to make the Father known.

Note for the group leader:

Here are a few optional additional questions:

- *Who are those who have life? (Those who know the only true God and Jesus whom he sent.)*
- *What resemblance is there with the confession of faith of the 2nd world religion? (v3) (It is like the shahada but we put the name 'Jesus' in the place of 'Mohamed.' Faith in the glorified Jesus gives the promise of life, which is never guaranteed in Islam.)*

ii. What does Jesus ask God the Father to do?

To glorify the Son and restore the glory he had before the world existed.

b. Read John 17:6-19.

i. What does Jesus say that believers have understood and believed? (vv. 7, 8)

That Jesus is the Son of God come down from above to speak the words of God to them.

ii. What does Jesus ask God the Father to do for these believers? (vv. 11, 13, 15, 17,)

To keep them as one (11) in the joy of Christ (13) keep them from the evil one (15) sanctify them in the truth, the word of God (17).

c. Read John 17:20-26.

i. Who does Jesus pray for in these verses?

For all those who will believe in Christ and be one in faith as the Father and the Son are one.

ii. What does Jesus pray will be true for them? (vv. 21, 22, 23, 24, 26)

He prays that they be one in faith even as the Father and the Son are one. He prays also that they may see his glory and know his love.

12. From what you have read and studied from the Gospel of John, describe in your own words what it means to believe in Jesus.

Free answer

For example: Believe in Jesus = understand who is Jesus Christ – the Son of God come down from above who give life to those who have responded to the call of God and put their trust in him.

B. The Epistles of John

In addition to his Gospel, the apostle John also wrote three epistles or letters to believers he knew and with whom he must have had some pastoral relationship. There is little to indicate when and from where John wrote these letters and it is equally unclear exactly to whom they were written. Regardless, the themes and obvious pastoral tone of each serve to make these letters important to the life of faith of believers down through the centuries.

1. Read 1 John 1:1-4. What does John say is the purpose of his letter?

He wants to witness to Jesus Christ so that those who receive his letter might know eternal life in him and be part of the joyful fellowship of churches that follow the teaching of the apostles.

2. According to 1 John 1:6-10, how would you describe the ‘problem’ that John is writing to address?

The problem of sin in the life of the believer in Christ – how should that person be dealt with?

Note to the group leader:

John suggests a balance between 2 opposing errors:

1) Say there is no sin in one’s life (v. 8, 10) and

2) tolerate unholy practices in one’s life (v. 6, see also 2:3-6).

Recognise the sin, confess it, give it up and accept the grace of the Lord with thanksgiving (v. 8, 2:1-2. See also Level 1, Course 102, lesson 5.)

3. Read 1 John 2:1, 7, 12, 18 and 28.

a. What words does John use to indicate that his readers are believers?

My little children (2.1); Beloved (2.7); Little children (v. 2.12); Children (2.18)

b. How would you describe his tone? (Is he angry, disappointed, frustrated, anxious, pleading, etc...)

John addresses them tenderly – as a father or a grandfather who encourages his grandchildren.

4. As is common to the epistles of the New Testament, John encourages his readers by reminding them of who they are (in Christ) because of what God has done for them and challenges them to appropriate behaviour; warning against wrong behaviour (do not do or think this) and

encouraging right behaviour (do, believe, think this). One major theme that he develops is most fully discussed in chapter 4.

a. Read 1 John 4:7 to 5:3

- i. What is the theme that John develops here?

Love

- ii. What is the reason why believers should demonstrate this type of behaviour?

We have received and benefitted – we have tasted and seen that this love transforms us (v. 10-11).

To know God who is love, is to be transformed and to become like him (v. 8).

God has given us new birth (v. 7)

He has given us His Spirit (v. 3).

We are to obey his commandments (4.21; 5.2-3).

b. In verses 20-21, John argues that the real proof of our love for God is shown in our love for others.

- i. Describe how you have been the recent recipient of this kind of love.

Free answer

For example: When a family learned of our tight financial situation a few months ago, they gave us a special gift.

- ii. Describe how you can show this kind of love this week to someone in your neighbourhood, family, workplace, school.

Free answer

For example: Be ready to listen to the youngsters, call them from time to time.

5. Read 2 John 1-13. In this letter, the Apostle John shows his concern for the wellbeing of “the chosen lady” and her children. Bible scholars are divided over whether John is writing to an individual woman and her family or if “the chosen lady” refers to the Church in general and its young disciples. Regardless, what he has to say has application for all of us.

a. What two things does John encourage the chosen lady and her children to do? (cf. vv. 5, 7-10)

Remain in the love of God by following the commandments of Christ. Watch out for those who would come and teach that which is contrary to the teaching of Christ such as was transmitted by the apostles (i.e. Jesus is the Messiah come as a man).

b. In verses 5-6, John says, “and this is love, that we walk according to His commandments”. This is nearly identical to his directive from Gospel, chapter 15, verses 9-10.

- i. Why do you think love and obedience are linked together in John's view of the Christian life?

If we love God, we will trust him and have no problem doing that which he demands of us.

- ii. How does this idea contradict those who say that you became a Christian so that you could do whatever you wanted?

God liberated us to love. He who knows God loves as he has loved. Those who know neither God nor his love find that difficult to understand.

6. Read 3 John 1-14. In this epistle, John addresses a friend, Gaius, and encourages him to continue to walk faithfully.

- a. Describe the problem that John is writing to Gaius about. (vv 8-10)

One of the church leaders, a certain Diotrephes, set himself against the brothers of John's community who visited as preachers and evangelists. He spoke wicked nonsense about them and would not receive them.

- b. Summarize John's advice.

He exhorts them not to imitate this evil (do not be influenced by Diotrephes), but to continue to receive Demetrius and collaborate with him.

- c. What does this epistle of John add to our understanding of the Church and how to live appropriately as representatives of it?

We must recognise the authority of the apostles by conforming to the teaching of the Bible and associating with other communities who do likewise – be careful of those who isolate themselves and seek to control everything and everybody.

We must identify those who cause trouble and expose the problem.

We must recommend those who are faithful to give them a greater part in ministry.

C. Revelation

The final written work of the Apostle John was the book of Revelation. Tradition has it that John wrote this book while in exile because of his faith on the Island of Patmos off the coast of Greece near the end of the 1st Century.

The book of Revelation, due to its theme and future orientation, is different from all other New Testament literature. Its use of symbols, numbers, and images tied to apocalyptic themes strongly resembles similar Old Testament prophetic material found in Daniel and Ezekiel. Though scholars differ as to the meanings of the various elements that John portrays and describes, there are many things in the book that are clear and which contribute to our knowledge of God and His plan, and serve to increase our faith.

1. Read Revelation 1:1-20.

a. Why did John write this book?

God told him to write to the seven churches (v. 10-11) to show his servants what he saw (v. 11, 19) and what will soon happen (v. 1, 19).

b. To whom is the book primarily addressed?

To the servants of Jesus Christ, « to the seven churches. »

c. How did John get the information for this book?

The Spirit of God took hold of him that he might see and hear God's revelations (v. 10-11 ff).

d. How does John describe Jesus?

Resplendent in glory, wearing a long robe with a gold sash, white hair, eyes as flaming fire, feet as burnished bronze, a voice like thundering water (v. 13-16) and with supreme authority even over death (v. 17-18).

e. What does this description of Jesus tell you about His person, His role and His authority?

He reigns over his church, he judges the living and the dead, he is all powerful, over the universe, he is both man (v. 13) and God (v. 7-8, 17-18).

f. How is this image of Jesus different from the picture that the Gospel writers portray?

In the Gospels Jesus is presented as coming to earth in a humble and simple state. His glory was hidden. Now no longer.

g. Why is Jesus portrayed differently in the book of Revelation?

Jesus is glorified before the Father. He reigns now in heaven awaiting his return to establish his reign on earth. (As he asked in Jn 17).

2. After this striking introduction to this book, John addresses each of the seven churches specifically.

a. Read Revelation chapters 2 and 3 and complete the table of information below. *The filled-in data is given as an example.*

Name of Church	Passage	Praise	Condemnation
<i>Ephesus</i>	<i>2:1-7</i>	<i>Good deeds, perseverance, do not put up with evil men, suffering for the Name of Christ</i>	<i>Left your first love</i>
<i>Smyrna</i>	<i>2:8-11</i>	<i>Rich despite tribulation and poverty</i>	<i>None</i>
<i>Pergamum</i>	<i>2:12-17</i>	<i>Holding fast to the faith despite tribulation</i>	<i>Doctrine of idolatry and immorality tolerated</i>

<i>Thyatira</i>	<i>2:18-29</i>	<i>Good deeds, love, faith, service and perseverance, increased good deeds</i>	<i>Tolerates 'Jezebel' who leads the believers into immoral and idolatrous behaviour</i>
<i>Sardis</i>	<i>3:1-6</i>	<i>Some people amongst them are keeping themselves holy/pure</i>	<i>Spiritually dead</i>
<i>Philadelphia</i>	<i>3:7-13</i>	<i>Good deeds, kept His word and not denied His name</i>	<i>None</i>
<i>Laodicea</i>	<i>3:14-22</i>	<i>Some works not acceptable</i>	<i>Neither cold nor hot, unaware that they are wretched, miserable, blind, poor and naked</i>

Scholars are divided over whether the instructions to these churches are intended solely (or primarily) for these local churches that were scattered across Asia Minor in the first couple of centuries AD or if the references are symbolic, speaking to types of churches, or even of various eras in church history. Nevertheless, what John records is instructive for all.

b. In each of the mini-messages addressed to each of the churches listed, what do you understand to be Jesus' overriding desire?

Jesus wants his churches to persevere by faith until death and so the believers inherit in victory in the eternal Kingdom.

3. Take a look at the chart of the book of Revelation in the appendix. (Note: Instructions on making a chart of a book can be found in BIBL 210, Bible Study Methods). Notice that the book of Revelation is divided into 3 main sections (See Revelation 1:19):

“the things which you have seen” chapter 1,

“the things which are” chapters 2 and 3, and

“the things which shall take place”, chapters 4 to 21.

Following instructions to the churches, the book of Revelation begins a lengthy section describing “the things which shall take place”. The bulk of this section (chapters 6 to 19) describes the ‘tribulation period’ during which time God is actively pouring out retribution on the Earth in response to its wickedness. Scholars take differing views on the meaning to be derived from these chapters. Several different views are summarized in the appendix. One common approach understands that the events in chapters 4-21 are future events, which tell of a literal return of Christ to the earth to judge and to rule for 1000 years before a final re-creation of a New Heavens and New Earth.

a. Read the passages noted and complete the table on the next page. *The information given is provided as an example.*

Passage	Type of Judgment	Effect of Judgment
6:1-2	Seal	One of the 4 horsemen sent to conquer Kingdoms of men resulting in death
6:3-4	Seal	A red horse whose rider received power to take peace from the earth, conflicts break out
6:5-6	Seal	Another of the 4 horsemen sent to cause the supply of food to decrease and prices increase resulting in poverty
6:7-8	Seal	A pale horse whose rider received power to kill a quarter of the earth's inhabitants
6:9-11	Seal	Persecution of the saints
6:12-17	Seal	The earth and the universe were shaken and removed from their places. People sought to hide from God's judgment
8:1-5	Seal	Storms and earthquakes
8:6-7	Trumpet	Hail and fire with blood thrown upon the earth, everything was burned up
8:8-9	Trumpet	Poisoning of the oceans and seas resulting in diminished food supply, 1/3 of ships destroyed
8:10-11	Trumpet	A great star fell to earth, rivers were turned into Wormwood, many deaths
8:12-13	Trumpet	Darkening of the skies by 1/3, much woe on the earth
9:1-12	Trumpet	Unleashing of diabolical forces to torment mankind
9:13-21	Trumpet	Armies provoked to go to war, 1/3 of mankind killed
11:15-18	Trumpet	Judgement of the nations, judgement of the dead
16:1-2	Bowl	Sores and infections upon those who worshipped the anti-Christ
16:3	Bowl	Death of sea creatures
16:4-7	Bowl	The rivers and springs of waters become blood
16:8-9	Bowl	Death by radiation of the sun
16:10-11	Bowl	Sores, pain and darkness upon those who did not repent and turn to Christ
16:12-16	Bowl	Unleashing of Satan's armies for the final battle before the return of Christ

16:17-21	Bowl	Severe hailstorms and a massive earthquake flattening all mountains and destroying all islands
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b. What do you learn about God from these accounts of judgment that He has prepared for the inhabitants of the Earth?

God is sovereign, all will be done according to His will. He watches over all, He directs everything, He will judge with equity and then Jesus will come again

c. According to Revelation 11:15-18, 14:6-12 and 16:8-11 on whom is judgment sent? Why?

The nations because they did not acknowledge God, they even blasphemed His name and they did not believe His Christ

d. What happens to believers during this period of time? Are they protected from the effects of judgment? (see Revelation 6:9-11 and 7:9-14)

The believers suffer during this time and go through many torments. God protects them even though many die. They live in the eternal salvation which is already theirs and spend the time praising and worshipping God.

e. Throughout chapters 6 to 19, John gives a terrifying account of the judgments that God brings on the Earth. However, interspersed among these descriptions, John also records several other scenes that describe what else is going on in Heaven. Read Revelation 7:9-17

i. Who are the people in this scene?

Believers from all nations, tribes, peoples and languages.

ii. From where do they come?

They have come from the great tribulation (13-14).

iii. What are they doing while the judgments of God are being poured out?

They are worshipping God before His throne and giving Him all the glory.

4. Finally, the book of Revelation provides very striking images of the final 'chapter' in God's plan for His creation.

a. Read Revelation 20:11-15.

i. Describe the scene.

A magnificent and for some, a terrifying scene. It is the Day of the Lord, the resurrection of all the dead. All are standing before the judgment seat of God. God reads the books including the Book of Life and judgment is passed.

ii. On what basis are people judged?

On their life works.

iii. Are believers included in this judgment? How do you know?

No. The believers have their names written in the book of life. They are not then judged by their works and will not be condemned to the second and eternal death.

iv. Verse 12 says that the dead are judged from the things which were written in the books according to their deeds. If according to the Gospel we are saved by grace apart from works (Ephesians 2:8-9), why are people here being judged for their deeds?

Ephesians 2:8-9 is talking about those who were dead in their sins (their works) (1,5) and who have been made alive in Christ (5). They are saved by grace through faith and not by works. This judgment does not concern those who have received this faith. Only those who have not believed are being judged for their deeds.

b. Read 2 Peter 3:7-13 and Revelation 21:1.

i. What do Peter and John say happens to the present heavens and earth?

They will disappear, be burned up and dissolved.

ii. According to Isaiah 65:17-25 and Revelation 22:1 - 5, what kinds of things can we expect to experience in the New Heavens and New Earth?

No memory of what was before

Rejoicing and gladness

No more tears of grief or distress

There will be peace and harmony between men and with nature in the presence of God for ever.

We shall worship and enjoy God for ever and reign with Him.

Conclusion

The apostle John, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, contributed significantly to the contents of the New Testament through his Gospel, his epistles and the book of Revelation. His dual emphases of belief and love mark his writings and have served as gauges of Christian faith in the lives of believers down through the centuries. The book of Revelation is the only New Testament book given over to prophetic material. Here John describes Jesus as the glorified judge, gives instructions with regards to faith and obedience to churches, describes the coming judgment and portrays the final chapter of God's plan for His creation.

1. Explain briefly two things that you have learned about God from your study of John's writings.

Free answer

Examples:

- I have learned that truth is primordial but that harmony is also possible because God is love and draws us together to love one another unconditionally as He loves us.*
- I have learned that I am precious in God's sight and that He gave His only up to death so that I may live.*
- I have learned that through the resurrection of Christ, death is defeated and evil shall not prevail.*
- I have learned that God will judge the wickedness of men but His promises towards His children shall prevail.*

- *I have learned the importance of believing the Scriptures through which God has revealed His plan and His love for man since eternity and for eternity.*
- *I have learned that by faith I am made alive and there is no condemnation on me.*
- *I have learned that Jesus will come again and make all things new.*

2. How does knowing the 'end of the story' help you live out your faith more confidently today?

Free answer

Examples:

- *When I suffer, I know it is only for a time.*
- *There will be an end to suffering when Christ returns.*
- *That wickedness will be judged and there will be eternal joy*
- *I will see God face to face and live in His presence for eternity*

Appendix 11: A Chart of Revelation

Focus	"Things which you have seen" 1:19	"Things which are" 1:19	"...things which shall take place after these things" 1:19				
References	1:20-2:1	3:22-4:1	5:14-6:1	16:6-19:7	19:21-20:1	20:15-21:1	22:21
Topic	The Lord Jesus	The 7 churches	The Judge	The Tribulation Period	The 2 nd Coming of Jesus	Millennium	Eternal State
Theme	A Vision of Jesus Christ	Evaluation of the churches, exhortation to persevere	A Vision of Final Judgment and the Beginnings of the Eternal State				
	Theophany	Instructions	Trials and Tribulations - Return and Reign - Glory				

Chart adapted from introduction to the book of Revelation, The Open Bible, Expanded Edition, Thomas Nelson Publishers.

Appendix 12: A Summary of Differing Views of Revelation 4 to 21

Taken from: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, Introduction to Revelation, John A Walvoord

a. The “allegorical or non-literal” view

This view was popular in the Alexandrian school of theology in the 3rd and 4th centuries. It considers the entire Bible to be an extensive allegory to be interpreted in a non-literal sense... A liberal variation of this view in modern times considers Revelation simply as a symbolic presentation of the concept of God’s ultimate victory.

b. The “preterist” view

This view considers Revelation to be a symbolic picture of early church conflicts which have been fulfilled (“preterist”, from Latin “preter” meaning “past”). This view denies the future predictive quality of most of the book of Revelation. In varying degrees this view combines the allegorical and symbolic interpretation with the concept that Revelation does not deal with specific future events.

c. The “futurist” view

This view considers that chapters 4-22 of Revelation present events that are yet future today. According to this view, the content of chapters 4-18, describes the last seven years preceding the second coming of Christ and emphasizes the Great Tribulation occurring in the last three and one-half years before his return.

d. The “prophetical” view

Revelation is a complete historical survey of the story of humanity and the Church. It is the story of the conflict between good and evil until the end of time. According to this point of view, the 1st century readers of John had to interpret the visions as being a reference to the Roman Empire and to the anti-Christian authorities in power, but the book also has “futuristic” value as it speaks of that which will come to pass when God’s final judgment on humanity will be imminent.

Lesson 10 : Revision and Exam Questions

BIBL 211 New Testament Survey

1. Describe the political, social and religious context in Palestine during Jesus' time. What was his message to his contemporaries? What would his message be for our contemporaries today?
2. What was the expected Messiah to be like as the Jews long awaited his coming? What prophecies concerning the Messiah were cited as accomplished during the events of Jesus Christ's birth?
3. Tell a parable of Jesus and ask 3 or 4 questions that bring out the teaching of this parable. Then explain the problem you want to address and the message you want to bring out of this parable.
4. Jesus Christ is the model human being for every Christian. What do observe in his life on earth that we should imitate?
5. A major portion of the gospel narratives are consecrated to the last events of Jesus' life. What happened and what is the message that the gospel authors wanted to communicate?
6. Your friend insists that Jesus did not die but that God called him to heaven to spare him the suffering and shame of the cross. What can you answer based on the biblical texts?
7. In Acts 1:8 Jesus revealed his future plan to his disciples after his resurrection. What is this plan? What could the first disciples understand of this plan when they first heard it? How did the Holy Spirit teach and accompany the apostles in their understanding of this plan step by step?
8. What message did the author of the Acts of the Apostles try to communicate? How do the outline and contents of the book develop this message? What traps must we avoid in the interpretation of these historical accounts?
9. What happened on the first day of Pentecost after the resurrection? How does this day mark the beginning of the Church?
10. What was Paul's missionary strategy? What applications can we make in our own ministry ?
11. What is the importance of the first Council of Jerusalem 1) in the New Testament and 2) for the faith of every Christian?

- 12.** The two first epistles were addressed to very different recipients. Identify these epistles. Who were the recipients of each letter? What circumstances and what challenges did they face? What is the principal message of each?
- 13.** Describe the importance of Paul's 2nd missionary voyage. What epistles did he write during this voyage? Under what circumstances and for what purpose did he write each one? What message should we apply to our own lives today?
- 14.** Describe the itinerary and priorities of Paul's 3^e missionary voyage. What epistles did he write during this trip? For each one, provide the circumstances and purposes for which he wrote.
- 15.** Identify the prison epistles. What was the particular message of each one? What do these letters tell us about Paul's attitude towards his own imprisonment?
- 16.** Identify the pastoral epistles. For each epistle, give the author, the recipients, the times and circumstances of their writing and the principal message the author sought to communicate.
- 17.** What traits distinguish the writings of John in the New Testament? Cite six (6) key texts you can use 1) to evangelize non-believers (3 texts) and 2) to encourage believers (3 texts). Explain the importance of each text.
- 18.** To whom did John address his book of Revelation? What was his message to them? How can we benefit from this book today?