Holy Trinity University

Department of Scriptural Studies

Title of the Course: - Introduction to the New Testament

Course Code: - _____

Credit Hours: - 3 Credit Hours

Introduction to New Testament

Course Description

The Holy Bible is a revealed truth, inspired by the Holy Spirit. Its contents are acknowledged by the Church as Word of God. As part of the Holy Bible, the New Testament provides the church and her members not only with the founding story of its Incarnate Lord and the salvation accomplished by Him, but also with a key provision for its ongoing sustenance and guidance. Therefore, the New Testament as a scripture is unique, holy, and possesses irreplaceable, infallible, canonical authority.

Any study on parts of the Holy Bible must take the original context in which the text is written into consideration. Detaching the context from the text leads to a critical misjudgment. To have a better understanding on the text, it's better to study in what specific culture it is written, the nuances of the language, the historical situation of the time, etc.

The approach to study the New Testament differs from Tradition to Tradition. The EOTC, together with other Eastern Orthodox Churches, especially the Orientals, follows a mystical approach. In contrast, the Western Churches follow a scientific and literal approach to grasp the inner message.

This course deals with these introductory issues to make the New Testaments book's history, culture, dogmatic contents … known as much as possible.

Objective of the Course

The course aims at introducing the historical and cultural backgrounds of the New Testament. Based on the texts of each part of the New Testament, exploring the theological message is also among the main objective of the course.

Structure and Contents of the Course

1. Introduction
2. The relationship Between Old and New Testaments
   - 2.1. The Old Testament as Promise and Preparation
   - 2.2. The New Testament as Fulfillment OT
3. The World of the New Testament
   - 3.1 The Jewish People in the Context of Roman Hellenism
   - 3.2 The Origin and Reliability of the Gospels
4. The books of the New Testament
   - 4.1. The Gospels
   - 4.1.1 Theology of the Synoptic Gospels
   - 4.2. The Johnnie writings
   - 4.3. St. Paul and His epistles
   - 4.4. St.Peter's and Other Epistles

Course Approach/Method

Lecture, Interactive Discussions, and reflections after Readings will be used.

Main References

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1. Introduction

The Bible is the book of the Church, written for those who believe in God. For the Christian of true worship, the Bible is the greatest sources of truth, virtue, and moral ethics. It is precious as a source of teaching doctrine and holiness. The Bible, composed of the Old and New Testaments, is a rich and diverse library of sacred writings or scriptures derived from the Jewish and Christian traditions. The Church values the Bible as Jewelers of great price and uses them as a source of living water from which divine teaching derives.

Theologically, the essential content and purpose of the Bible can be summarized in three points. Thsese three aspects define the substance of the Bible.

- First is the narration of the great deeds or 'wonders' of God (Acts 2:11), ranging from the act of creation to the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost. These great acts of God form the bedrock of revelation on which everything else depends.
- A second aspect is the disclosure of the will of God recorded in the form of commands, theological truths, moral teachings and spiritual wisdom concerning God and salvation. At this level of teaching and guidance the Bible offers innumerable instructions and admonitions about a way of life that pleases God and leads to salvation.
- The third and deepest aspect of the Bible is personal encounter and communion with God. At this level, knowledge about God leads to immediate knowledge of God in His loving presence and power, through prayerful reading and worshipful hearing of God's word. The overarching purpose of scripture is not the mere passage of religious knowledge but rather the personal self-disclosure of and intimate communion with the mystery of God. Scripture is never an end in itself but a sacred road map pointing to a spiritual world; what the Church Fathers called 'true realities', at the heart of which is the mystery of Christ and new life in him.[1]

The patristic theological heritage is fundamentally a biblical legacy richly enshrined in the prayers, hymnology, rites, theological writings, and doctrines of the church, an achievement of

[1] Theodore G. Stylianopoulos, "Scripture and tradition in the Church". The Cambridge companion to orthodox Christian theology, Mary B. Cunningham and Elizabeth Theokritoff (Edi.), 2008, p. 22.

astonishing theological coherence and normative value. Chief among these critical principles are the following:

- The unity, primacy, and centrality of the Bible;
- Christ as the vital criterion of salvation and of the interpretation of the Old Testament;
- The interdependence of church, Bible, and tradition; [2] and
- The hermeneutical role of tradition, including the living witness of the church in every age, as the final authority over disputed interpretations of the Bible, expressed through ecumenical councils and the process of reception in the church.[3]

Consequently, the Holy Bible is a revealed truth, inspired by the Holy Spirit and its contents are acknowledged by the Church as Word of God. The joint statement at the Moscow Conference held in 1976 between the Eastern Orthodox churches and the Anglicans, the attitude towards Scripture was expressed in valid terms. This joint statement, can be a good summary of the Orthodox view:

> The Scriptures constitute a coherent whole. They are at once divinely inspired and humanly expressed. They bear authoritative witness to God's revelation of Himself in creation, in the Incarnation of the Word, and in the whole history of salvation, and as such express the word of God in human language. We know, receive, and interpret Scripture through the Church and in the Church. Our approach to the Bible is one of obedience.[4]

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[2] Scripture finds its center in the mystery of the eternal Christ, veiled in the Old Testament and revealed in the New. Tradition in its theological substance is defined by the gospel, the sum of scripture's saving message. namely, the good news of God's saving work in Christ and the Spirit by which the powers of sin and death are over- come and the life of the new creation is inaugurated, moving towards the eschatological glorification of the whole cosmos. The Church itself, the ongoing living community of God's people, far from being a mere historical appendage, is the body of Christ and the temple of the Holy Spirit, constitutive of revelation. As such, the Church forms the very ground from which scripture and tradition emerge and together, in turn, make up a coherent source of revelation, the supreme norm for the life of the Church. Theodore G. Stylianopoulos, "Scripture and tradition in the Church". The Cambridge companion to orthodox Christian theology, Mary B. Cunningham and Elizabeth Theokritoff (Edi.), 2008, p. 21.

3 Theodore G. Stylianopoulos, "Bible". The Encyclopedia of Eastern Orthodox Christianity Vol. I, John Anthony McGuckin (Edi.), 2011, p.71.

[4] Rev. Kallistos, How to Read the Bible, The orthodox study Bible, p. 1757.

1.1 Divine Inspiration

The Bible is called the written Word of God. This does not mean that the Bible fell from heaven ready made. The words of the Bible are human words, for indeed, all words are human. They are human words, however, which God Himself inspired to be written in order to remain as the scriptural witness to Himself. As human words, the words of the Bible contain all of the marks of the men who wrote them, and of the time and the culture in which they were written. Nevertheless, in the full integrity of their human condition and form, the words of the Bible are truly the very Word of God.

It is believed that Christianity inherited the conception of the divine inspiration of Holy Scriptures from Judaism.[5] Whenever our Lord and His apostles quoted the Old Testament, it is plain that they regarded it as the word of God. This comes to light repeatedly in the New Testament records, but is explicitly affirmed in two passages in the later epistles:

> "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God" (2Tim 3:16)
>
> "For prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." 2 Pet. 1:21

These sentences make clear what was to be the church's attitude to the Old Testament and also towards the New Testament after it had been canonized as an authority coordinate with the Old.

The Greek speaking Jewish philosophers Philo of Alexandria (30BC - 45AD) regarded scripture as fully inspired, and argued that God used the authors of scriptural books as passive instruments for communicating the divine will.[6]

The issue of Divine inspiration of scripture began to surface as theoretically controversial at the time of the reformation, especially through the writings of John Calvin. Calvin was concerned to defend the authority of Scripture against two groups of people. On the one hand were those on the more catholic wing of the church. On the other were the more radical evangelical writers, such as Anabaptists who argued every individual had a right to ignore scripture altogether in

[5] J.N.D. Kelly, Early Christian Doctrines, pp.60-61.
[6] Alister E. Mc Grath, Christian Theology An Introduction, p.211.

favor of some direct personal divine revelation.[7] With the coming of the enlightenment, the idea of the bible having special status was called into question, largely on account of the presuppositions of the rationalism of the period, and increased interest in the critical study of Scripture. A number of approaches to the issue of inspiration which developed around this period are of interest.

- J.G.Herder, strongly influenced by the outlook of Romanticism,[8] argued that the idea of inspiration was to be interpreted in an artistic or aesthetic sense. He suggests that the most appropriate model for biblical inspiration was provided by works of art. Just as one might speak of a great novel, poem or painting as "inspired," so the same idea can be applied to scripture. Inspiration is thus seen as a human achievement, rather than a gift of God.
- Charles Hodge (1797-1878) and Benjamin B. Warfied (1851-1921), developed strongly supernatural theories of inspiration in opposition to Herder. "Inspiration is extra-ordinary, super natural influence … exerted by the Holy Ghost on the writers of our Sacred Books, by which their words were rendered also the words of God, and therefore, perfectly infallible." Warfied insist the writer's humanity was dominated that their words became at the same time the words of God, and thus, in every case and all alike, absolutely infallible. Moreover, he located the inspiration in the biblical text itself, thus implying that scripture was objectively, in itself, the word of God for all who read it.
- Augustus H. Strong (1836 -1921) held that inspiration was also to be regarded as God's guidance of the reader of scripture, which enabled that reader to recognize the word of God in the biblical text. In opposing Warfied's idea of objective view, this group argued for a subjective understanding of inspiration, by which the reader's perception of Scripture – rather than scripture itself was to be regarded as "inspired".

Among the church fathers, St. Justin Martyr cited many of the Old Testament texts with the words 'God speaks' or 'God says' as the immediate speech of God. The later Church Fathers continued this tradition and viewed the entire corpus of scripture, Old and New Testaments, as

[7] ibid

[8] A movement in the arts and literature that originated in the late 18th century, emphasizing inspiration, subjectivity, and the primacy of the individual.

directly inspired by God and disclosing God's express will. On that basis, because God is the main actor both behind and in the Bible, the Orthodox tradition advocates the supreme authority and primacy of scripture. At the same time, however, the Bible is also humanly expressed. It is an entire library of distinct writings, composed at varying times, by different persons in widely diverse situations. Each work in the Bible reflects the outlook of the age in which it was written and the particular viewpoint of the author. For God does not abolish our created personhood but enhances it. Divine grace cooperates with human freedom: we are "fellow-workers," "co-operators" with God (1Co 3:9).

Some early Christian theologians, such as Athenagoras (second century), and very likely many ordinary believers, believed that God whispered directly in the human author's ear just as the author's hand recorded God's exact words. In that case, every word would have to be taken literally and absolutely; one would be committed to the literal historicity of all events in the Old Testament and the literal truth of all religious and moral instructions in the entire Bible.

In contrast to that approach, the preeminent Church Fathers of the fourth century – Athanasius, Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian, Gregory of Nyssa and John Chrysostom – perceived an intrinsic human element behind the genesis of the Bible. The Bible is the word of God in human words. Without diminishing the divine inspiration of scripture in its saving message, those Fathers acknowledged that God's revelation inescapably involved human beings with intellectual and spiritual limitations.

They assumed a dynamic view of inspiration that allows for the contingency of human understanding. To speak of scripture as the 'word' of God pertains not necessarily to every word of the Bible, but to the Bible's saving message and to those of its passages and verses that communicate its saving message in various degrees of clarity. For example, the Bible in places appears to teach straight predestination (Jn 12:39; Mk 4:11; Rom 8:29). John Chrysostom called such instances 'idioms' of scripture which must not be taken at face value; otherwise, ideas unworthy of God would accrue, presenting him as an arbitrary and cruel tyrant. Again, in Revelation 20:2–4 we read about the expectation of a millennial Kingdom upon Christ's glorious return. These are but a few examples showing that the 'mind' (phronema) of the major Fathers

with respect to biblical interpretation held a flexible view of the Bible as a divine and human book.

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In the words of the second-century *Letter to Diognetus*, *"God persuades, He does not compel; for violence is foreign to the divine nature."*[10] So it is precisely in the writing of inspired Scripture. The author of each book was not just a passive instrument, a flute played by the Spirit, a dictation machine recording a message. Every writer of Scripture contributes his or her particular human gifts. Alongside the divine aspect, there is also a human element in Scripture, and we are to value both.

1.2 Bible as Revelation of God

God is not a God who is concealed from us, obscurely hidden in eternity and unavailable. He is present to us, dynamically alive, communicating with creation, and entering into a relationship with humanity. The Bible or Holy Scripture is the supreme record of God's revelation and therefore the standard of the church for worship, theology, spirituality, ethics, and practice. It is about how God shows the divine presence through words and deeds in history.

The Bible is above all a book of God and about God – God himself being the primary author and the subject matter of the scriptures. The Bible bears testimony to who God is, what great acts of salvation God has accomplished, and what God's revealed will for humanity is, communicated through inspired men and women "in many and various ways" (Heb. 1.1). These "ways" include

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[9] Theodore G. Stylianopoulos, "Scripture and tradition in the Church". The Cambridge companion to orthodox Christian theology, Mary B. Cunningham and Elizabeth Theokritoff (Edi.), 2008, pp. 22-23. አንዱዓለም ዳግማዊ፣ ሕይወተ ክርስትና በዐውድ ኮሮና፣ 2014፣ ገጽ 12።

[10] Cited in "The orthodox study Bible", p. 1758.

words, deeds, rites, laws, visions, symbols, parables, wisdom, ethical teachings, and commandments.

The overall message of the Bible is the narrative of salvation about creation, fall, covenant, prophecy, exile, redemption, and hope of final world renewal. The supreme revelation of the mystery of God is through the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, "the Lord of glory" (1 Cor. 2.8), who constitutes the center of biblical revelation and marks the unity of the Old and New Testaments.

1.3 Understanding the bible through the church

The Bible is the book of sacred writings for God's People, the Church. It was produced in the Church, by and for the Church, under divine inspiration as an essential part of the total reality of God's covenant relationship with His People. It is the authentic Word of God for those who belong to God's chosen assembly of believers, to the Israel of old and to the Church of Christ today and forever.

The Bible lives in the Church. It comes alive in the Church and has the most profound divine meaning for those who are members of the community which God has established, in which He dwells, and to which, through His Word and His Spirit, He has given Himself for participation, communion and life everlasting. Outside of the total life and experience of the community of faith, which is the Church of Christ, "the pillar and bulwark of the truth" (1 Tim 3.15) no one can truly understand and correctly interpret the Bible (2 Pet 1.20).

The Orthodox approach to the Bible is ecclesial. The words of Scripture, while addressed to us personally, are at the same time addressed to us as members of a community. Book and Church are not to be separated. In this regard, the interdependence of Church and Bible is evident in at least three ways.

First, It is only within the living Tradition of the Church under the direct inspiration of Christ's Spirit that the proper interpretation of the Bible can be made.

Scholars of the Bible can help men to understand its divine contents and meaning. Through their archeological, historical, and literary studies they can offer much light to the words of the scriptures. But by themselves and by their academic work alone, no men can produce the proper interpretation of the Bible. Only Christ, the living and personal Word of God, Who comes from the Father and lives in His Church through the Holy Spirit, can make God known and can give the right understanding of the scriptural Word of God. ". . . . For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has made Him known" (Jn 1.1–18). Jesus Christ, besides being Himself the living incarnation of God, the living fulfillment of the law and the prophets (Mt 5.17), is also the One by whom the Bible is rightly interpreted. (Lk 24.25–27; 44–45; Jn 5.45–47).

Jesus Christ remains forever in His Church by the Holy Spirit to open men's minds to understand the Bible (Jn 14.26, 16.13). Only within Christ's Church, in the community of faith, of grace, and of truth, can men filled with the Holy Spirit understand the meaning and purpose of the Bible's holy words. Thus, speaking about those who do not believe in Jesus as the Messiah, the apostle Paul contends that when they read the Bible a "veil" hides its true meaning from them "because only through Christ is it taken away" (2 Cor 3.14-44).

In the New Testament, Christ not only provides the correct interpretation of the Bible, He also allows the believers themselves to be directly enlightened by the Holy Spirit and to be themselves "the letter from Christ. … written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone, but on tablets of human hearts" (2 Cor 3.3). Thus is fulfilled the prediction of the old covenant that in the time of the Messiah "they all shall be taught of God" by direct divine inspiration and instruction (Jn 6.45, Is 54.13, Ezek 36.26, Jer 31.31, Joel 2.28, Mic 4.2, et al.). It is only within the living Tradition of the Church under the direct inspiration of Christ's Spirit that the proper interpretation of the Bible can be made.

Second, we receive scripture through and in the church. The church tells us what is scripture. In the first three centuries of Christian history, a lengthy process of testing was needed in order to distinguish among what is authentically "canonical" scripture, bearing authoritative witness to Christ's person and message, what is "deutero-canon- ical" or "apocryphal", useful perhaps for

teaching but not a normative source of doc- trine, and what is "non-canonical". It was the church which decided which books would form the canon of the New Testament. A book is not part of holy scripture because of any particular theory about its date and authorship, but because the church treats it as canonical.

Thirdly, we interpret the Bible through and in the church. If it is the church that tells us what is scripture, equally it is the church that tells us how scripture is to be understood. We read the Bible personally, but not as isolated individuals. Coming upon the Ethiopian as he read the Old Testament in his chariot, Philip the Apostle asked him, “Do you understand what you are reading?” “How can I,” answered the Ethiopian, “unless someone guides me?” (Acts 8:30, 31). His difficulty is also ours. The words of Scripture are not always self-explanatory. The Bible has a marvelous underlying simplicity, but when studied in detail it can prove a difficult book. And our guide is the Church. We make full use of our private understanding, illuminated by the Spirit; we make full use of biblical commentaries and of the findings of modern research. But we submit individual opinions, whether our own or those of the scholars, to the judgment of the Church.

We read it as members of a family, the family of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church. We read it in communion with all the other members of the body of Christ in all parts of the world and in all generations of time. God does indeed speak directly to the heart of each one of us during the scripture readings, but this is always done within a frame- work and with a certain point of reference. The framework is the kingdom of God, "realized" proleptically in eucharistie divine liturgy (cf. again the custom of singing the gospel, as well as the apostolic readings), and the point of reference is the church.

2. The relationship between the Old and New Testaments

The relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament reflects both the continuity and discontinuity between the Christian and Israelite faiths. Christians believe God had one plan for salvation that was revealed first to the Israelites and then to all peoples through Jesus Christ. Then, the New Testament and Old Testament tell one ongoing story of salvation.

For the New Testament writers, the Old Testament was holy scripture. To tell the story of Jesus, those authors relied largely on the scripture that already existed in the Jewish world. According to one scholarly estimate, the New Testament has more than 4,000 references to the Old Testament. Many of these references are "according to the scriptures" and "fulfill what scripture said." Christ's birth, for example, "took place to fulfill what the Lord said through the prophet: 'Behold, the virgin shall be with child and bear a son' " (Matt. 1:22-23). He said his last words on the cross "(in order to fulfill the scripture), 'I am thirsty' " (John 19:28).

Consequently, this part of the course discuss concerning the major covenants of the old Testament as Promise and Preparation, the New Testament Understanding of the Old Testament and A New Testament View of the Old Testament.

2.1 The Old Testament as Promise and Preparation

Together with all the people of Israel, the writers of the New Testament looked to the Scriptures of Israel as the foundation of their faith and as the expression of their hopes. The divine inspiration of the *Tanak* (the threefold Jewish canon): *Torah* (Law), *Nebiim* (Prophets), *Ketubim* (Writings)—was taken for established. The Scriptures recounted the prehistorical stories of the creation and fall, Noah and the flood, Babel, and so forth, but especially beginning with Abraham they told the story of God entering into covenant relationship and making covenant promises to Abraham and his descendants that would remain in the hearts and minds of the people of Israel through the centuries. [11]

[11] According to the EOTC, there were many covenants that prolonged the hope of salvation. The five main covenants are, sacrifice of Abel, sacrifice of Noah, kindness of Abraham, offerings of Isaac and services of Aron. መጽሐፈ ቅዳሴ ንባቡና ትርጓሜው፣ ትንሣኤ ማሰተሚያ ድርጅት፣ 2010 ዓ.ም.፣ 32።

From the point of view of the New Testament writers, who believed that fulfillment had come in Christ, the Old Testament came to be regarded as a long story of preparation and promise. For them, Christ was the hermeneutical key that unlocked the ultimate meaning of the Scriptures, and as a consequence they saw the Scriptures as pointing repeatedly to Christ. It is fundamentally impossible to understand the New Testament without knowledge of the Scriptures of Israel.

It is clear that after Eden the world was no longer as God meant it to be at the beginning, the creation that he had repeatedly pronounced "good." This reality of a fallen world provides the backdrop for the remainder of the story of the Bible. God, however, begins to work to counteract the fall and its effects. With God's promises to Adam we have the beginning of the hope and history of salvation.

a. The covenant of Adam

The covenant of Adam is considered as the first agreement between God and His beloved creation man. The purpose of this agreement was to give Adam an everlasting life and it was considered as "the covenant of life". As it is written Ps. 8:4; it is the expression of God's love and the result of His grace.

In the book of Genesis, we read "And the Lord God commanded Adam, saying, 'You may eat food from every tree in the garden; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you may not eat; for in whatever day, you eat from it, you shall die by death'." 2:16-17

- here we have two parties (God and Adam) who are agreeing in a certain contract.
- The precondition for the agreement was keeping God's command.
- The goal of this covenant was to keep Adam from death and make him immortal.

However, Adam disbelieves God and committed sin. And God gave an earlier anticipation who wills to save His creation. Already in the seed of the woman in Genesis 3:15 the church saw a protevangelium, an allusion, detected in retrospect, to the redemption to be accomplished through Christ: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."

b. ***The Abrahamic Covenant***

God disclosed His plan of redemption when He called Abram out of his previous life in Ur and made promises to him and his descendants. The first statement of the covenant is found in Genesis 12:1–3, 7, but restatements of its elements occur in 13:14–17; 15:5–6; 17:1–8 (where Abram's name is altered to "Abraham" ["father of a multitude"]); 22:15–18.

The covenant promises are renewed to Isaac (26:3–4, 24) and Jacob (28:13–15; 35:9–12; 28:3–4; 32:9–12; 48:3–4, 16, 19). Among the various stories of Genesis, the promises of the Abrahamic covenant become a kind of governing motif. Thus Joseph's final words, at the end of the book, include a reference to the promise that "God will visit you, and bring you up out of this land to the land which he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob" (50:24). And, indeed, the promises of the Abrahamic covenant become of major importance in the thinking of Jews from that time onward. The identified promises of this covenant were:

- a great nation
- a blessing
- a great name
- a blessing to others
- in you shall all the families of the earth be blessed
- the land to you and your descendants
- descendants as the dust of the earth, the stars in heaven
- the father of a multitude of nations, kings
- an everlasting covenant
- I will be your and their God
- your descendants will possess the gate of their enemies

Already here we have some of the basic components that will characterize the Jewish faith through the centuries: election and covenant, both depending only on the grace of God. Also prominent among the covenant promises are those concerning descendants and the land.

c. *The Sinaitic Covenant*

The next major covenantal statement in salvation history is found in the events associated with the exodus and the revelation of the law at Sinai. The Sinaitic covenant is not a replacement of the Abrahamic covenant, but in some respects it can be regarded as an extension of it. On the heels of the miraculous deliverance of Israel from Egyptian bondage, God reveals his law on Mount Sinai in Exodus 19:3–6; 20:1–17, and much of the rest of the books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers, together with Deuteronomy (Deut. 4:13–14, 31, 40). Motifs from the Abrahamic covenant reappear. Note in Deuteronomy, for example:

- "Go in and take possession of the land which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give to them and to their descendants after them" (1:8 [cf. 3:18; 4:1; 6:10, 18, 23]).
- "The Lord your God has multiplied you, and behold, you are this day as the stars of heaven for multitude. May the Lord, the God of your fathers, make you a thousand times as many as you are, and bless you, as he has promised you!" (1:10–11; 7:12–14).

Moreover, election and covenant again emerge with explicit clarity: "For you are a people holy to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his own possession, out of all the peoples that are on the face of the earth". The Lord's love for Israel is explained as his "keeping the oath which he swore to your fathers". "Know therefore that the Lord your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations" (Deu. 7:6-9).

New items also begin to be emphasized: monotheism (Deut. 4:39; 6:4 [the Shema]) and, most dramatically and emphatically, the Torah (the law) (4:8; 5:3) again, two key elements that would continue to characterize the faith of Israel. With the law, of course, comes the instruction for the building of the tabernacle and the accompanying institution of its priesthood and its sacrifices.

In addition to the elements in common with the Abrahamic covenant, we may add the following aspects contained within the Sinaitic material:

- a corpus of commandments
- a temple and sacrifices

- my possession among all peoples
- a kingdom of priests
- a holy nation

d. ***The Davidic Covenant***

The other covenant of great importance is that made with David, in response to his desire to build "a house" for God—that is, a permanent temple. This too is properly regarded as extending the Abrahamic covenant, but advancing it further. In 2 Samuel 7:4–17 the prophet Nathan is instructed by the Lord to tell David that "the Lord will make you a house," by which is meant a lasting dynasty. Thus, along with other items, such as the promise of "a great name," victory over his enemies, a place (land) where Israel can dwell safely, the astounding promise is made concerning the descendant(s) of David that the Lord "will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever" (7:13).

Of the five promises of the Davidic covenant, the last two take us beyond what has been encountered in the previous covenants:

• I will give you rest from all your enemies
• a great name
• a place (land) for Israel
• the Lord will make you a house (dynasty)
• a kingdom and a throne established forever

New here are the framing of the expectation by means of the concept of kingship and kingdom and the idea of an eternal kingdom. The expectation of a future Davidic king becomes very important in the Jewish hope for a coming messiah. These promises dominated the thinking and perspective of the people who were the first to hear the preaching of the Nazarene. And when the NT writers tell the story of salvation accomplished in Jesus, they do so in terms of these covenantal promises.

2.2 The New Testament as Fulfillment of the Old Testament

The earliest Christians immediately regarded their faith as the fulfillment of the cumulative expectation that they knew so well from their Scriptures. It is no accident that St. Matthew refers to Jesus as "the son of David, the son of Abraham" (1:1), evoking both covenants. Nor is it

coincidental that Isaiah is by far the most popular prophetic book in the NT. All through the NT writings is the common theme of the fulfillment of the promises of Scripture. This intertextuality, exhibited in the hundreds of quotations and thousands of allusions of the OT in the NT, is fundamental to the identity of the first Christians.

Without question, then as now, there was disagreement between those who believed in Christ and those who did not about the meaning of specific texts. It is equally clear that the Christians employed a distinctive hermeneutic: a christological hermeneutic of fulfillment based on the conviction that Christ is the hermeneutical key that unlocks the meaning of the Scriptures. In effect, the first Christians started with the answer. They had witnessed the words and deeds of Jesus, and above all they had seen the risen Jesus.

This view enabled them to approach the Scriptures with new eyes and new understanding. The Scriptures, when seen with the eyes of faith, point unmistakably to Christ. Paul mentions to this fact when he writes of non- Christian Jews, “For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the veil is taken away in Christ. But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart. Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. ” (2 Cor. 3:14–16).

The covenantal promises reviewed above, together with the expectations of the prophets, can naturally be interpreted in more than one way. One may say that there are two levels of meaning in the OT texts: literal and non literal or *sensus plenior.* The Jews who were not persuaded by the gospel took the former approach; the Christian Jews who did accept the gospel took the latter approach.

Literal Use of the OT in the NT: A number of OT passages receive a literal treatment, that is, the NT records actual events or principles that satisfy the grammatical-historical sense of the OT passage. Several examples illustrate this.

- Matt 1:23 with Isa 7:14
- Acts 13:23 with Isa 11:1. Isaiah 11:1
- Matt 21:42 with Isa 28:16 and Ps 118:22
- Luke 3:4-6 with Isa 40:3-5
- Matt 3:16-17 and 17:5 with Isa 42:1

- Acts 8:32-33 with Isa 53:7-8

Non literal or *sensus plenior*: involves interpreting something in light of something else, the Christ event, but this is something significantly related to the OT expectation. "Throughout its history, the writers of Israel used images and figures of earlier events and figures to understand, explicate and describe the events and figures at hand."[12] For example, Noah, in Genesis 9:1-7, is blessed to preside over a renewed world which is described in the vocabulary and imagery of Genesis 1:26-31: Noah is presented in terms which make him a new Adam, establishing a typological relation between them. And what has been established with Noah, then becomes a paradigm for understanding subsequent events. So, for instance, after referring to the overflowing wrath which resulted in Israel being forsaken, in exile, Isaiah adds the following oracle: (Is 54:9-10).

The description of the divine wrath of the flood followed by the covenant of the natural order established with Noah is used to explain the divine wrath of the exile that will give way to eternal covenant of divine grace.

- Luke 20:17-18 with Isa 8:14-15; Rom 9:32-33; 1 Pet 2:8
- Matt 4:12-16 with Isa 9:1-2.
- John 4:10, 14 with Isa 12:3.
- John 4:10, 14 with Exod 17:1-7
- Acts 13:3; Heb. 1:5 with Ps. 2:7

Many scholars find this non literal (*sensus plenior)* use of the OT in the NT to be arbitrary and indefensible. The creative aspect is based on the detection of analogical patterns together with the experience of a new revelation in the appearance of Christ. If we make an attempt to understand its underlying rationale, it is not as arbitrary as it may at first seem.The *sensus plenior* approach is based on four essential convictions:

- The sovereignty of God
- The inspiration of Scripture
- The unity of salvation history

[12] John Behr, The Formation of Christian Theology Vol. I: The way to Nicaea, 2001, p.24.

- Christ as the telos

The OT story of God and Israel from the NT point of view is, above all, the preparation of a meaningful context for the central redemptive act of God in Christ for the salvation of the world. As we have seen, the NT writers believe that the OT points consistently to Christ as its telos. The OT is vital to the understanding of the NT. The two constitute one Bible, and each part needs the other. As the ancients put it, the NT is hidden in the OT; the OT is made patent in the NT.

In addition, and of considerable importance, the OT is a great lesson book concerning the relationship between God and his people. The principles and patterns of obedience and disobedience, and their consequences, remain constant in both Testaments. This is what Paul means when, referring to the wilderness wandering of Israel, he writes, “Now these things happened to them as a warning, but they were written down for our instruction, upon whom the end of the ages has come” (1 Cor. 10:11). So too Romans 15:4: “For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope.”

3. The world of the New Testament

Students taking biblical courses are often hear that the key to understanding the Bible is its context. Without a context, texts easily become little more than pretexts. When someone read the NT, the following question may come to his/her mind.

- What is the reason that the NT books were written in Greek, while the Israelites language was Hebrew or Aramaic?
- How the Romans became the governor of the Palestine? How did the Jewish involved with new religious exercises which didn't exist in OT books (praying in synagogue, feast of dedication John 10:22)?
- In Luke 23:38 what was the reason that the superscription was written over the head of Christ's cross in letters of Greek, Roman (Latin) and Hebrew?
- How the Romans and Greeks mobilized with Jewish in Palestine? And why do we find them in the NT pages?

In order to give an answer for these questions, we need to have a clear understanding of the historical context of the NT times; which takes us to the early history of Israel.

The Exile

At its most basic level, the term "exile" refers to either one or both of two signal events in Israel's history: the deportation of the northern kingdom at the hands of the Assyrians in 722 BC (2 Kings 15–17) and, the more common reference, the subsequent removal of the southern kingdom by the Babylonians in 587 BC (2 Kings 24–25; 2 Chron. 36:17–20). the Solomonic temple, housing the holy of holies and symbolic of the presence of God with Israel, had come to a disastrous end, with its treasures carried off to Babylon. The upper strata of society—the artisans, the wealthy, the educated—were deported to Babylon. A sense of hopelessness and despair came over the exiled people. "By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion. . . . How shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?" (Ps. 137:1, 4).

After the conquest of the Babylonians in 539 BC by Cyrus[13], ruler of the Persians— named God's "anointed" by Isaiah (Isa. 45:1) after nearly seventy years of exile the people were

[13] Founder of the Persian empire, a prince, statesman and conquer of renown and an instrument employed by Jehovah in the execution of his designs of mercy toward the Jews, as foretold by Isaiah. 44: 28; 45:1-7; He was the

allowed to return to Palestine (see Ezra 1:2–4). They were even allowed to rebuild their temple, though at the beginning the second temple was a far cry from the previous Solomonic temple (see Ezra 3:12–13).

Greeks

In 332 BC the famous Alexander the Great defeated the Persia and added Palestine to the long list of nations that he had conquered. As is well known, with the conquests of Alexander came not only foreign rule but also the Greek language and the pervasive influence of Hellenistic culture. The fact that Greek became the lingua franca of the Mediterranean world would have enormous importance even centuries later, accounting not only for the Septuagint and for the use of Greek for the NT writings but also for facilitating the missionary work of the church in the countries surrounding the Mediterranean.

After the death of Alexander in 323 BC, his conquered territories were split up among his generals, and in turn their descendants: Syria, to the north, came under the rule of the Seleucids; Egypt, to the south, under the Ptolemies.[14] In the ensuing centuries these two Hellenistic kingdoms fought repeatedly for the possession of Palestine; at first the Ptolemies held it, but then, in about 200 BC, it came under the control of the Seleucids, and remained so until the time of the Hasmoneans.

From 167 BC until 36 BC, the remarkable family known as the Hasmoneans led an armed struggle for religious and political independence and then exercised national leadership. By far the most significant event in this period was the desecration of the temple[15] by Antiochus IV, the Seleucid king along with his attempt to impose Hellenism on Palestine. The Jews, with rival high priests who had bought their office from Antiochus and who were at one another's throats, were fighting among themselves and seemingly in revolt against Antiochus. He decided that he had had enough of this thorn in his flesh and resolved to destroy Judaism and to impose Greek

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son of Cambyses, king of Persia, and a nephew of Darius the Mede (Cyaxares). and united the crowns of Persia and Media. Cyrus died from a wound received in battle, B. c. 529. Philip Shaff (Edi.), Bible Dictionary,1880, 213.

[14] According to the historian Josephus, Alexander's generals divided his empire into several dynastic houses: Ptolemy in Egypt, Seleucis in Babylon, Lysimachus in Hellespont, Cassander in Macedonia, and Antigonus in Asia. The Orthodox Study Bible, 1452.

[15] Jn. 10:22

culture and customs on the Jews. He robbed the temple of its treasures, and in 167 BC he desecrated it by entering the holy of holies and setting an idol upon the altar of sacrifice.[16] Antiochus prohibited the practice of the Jewish faith and the observance of the law, including circumcision and the dietary laws, and forced the people to sacrifice to pagan deities. Those who refused to go along with these mandates were put to death.

Romans

From this time the so-called Hasmonean leaders, although constantly warring among themselves, ruled until the invasion of the Romans in 63. In that year the Roman general Pompey and his army invaded Jerusalem, and he defiled the temple by entering it. Israel and the land of Palestine now came under Roman rule, through puppet kings, for the remainder of its ancient history. In 37 Herod, son of the Idumean Antipater II, became the king of Judea. Herod the Great, as he came to be known advanced Roman Hellenism in Palestine and engaged in grand building projects, including the enlargement and beautification of the Jerusalem temple. After his death (4 BC) the kingdom was divided among three of his sons.

3.1 The Jewish People in the Context of Roman Hellenism

Without a knowledge of the great traditions that gave rise to Second Temple Judaism,[17] our understanding of Jewish beliefs and practices of Jesus' day and thus our understanding of Jesus' teachings and his followers would be weak. These great traditions include centuries of religious reflection and practice within Israel, God's people, especially as this was shaped by exile, and the cultural streams of Hellenism and life in the Roman Empire. The question that confronts us in this section is how the various forms of Judaism in the period just before and during the NT era framed what it would mean to remain faithful to God religiously, politically, and socialy.

This interesting period in the history of Israel is full of contradictions. At first glance, it looks like a time of fulfillment. The high priesthood is reestablished, but since the Hasmoneans were

[16] The "abomination of desolation" (Dan. 11:31; 12:11; note also reference to the later Roman violation of the temple in AD 70, using the same expression, in Mark 13:14; Matt. 24:15)

[17] A designation for the period in Jewish history before, during, and after the time of Jesus—roughly the late sixth century BC through the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in AD 70.

not of Zadokite descent many[18] regarded it as illegitimate. Nevertheless, this period served in a limited and imperfect way as an indication of the presence and power of God as well as a foreshadowing of what might yet come.

The rule of the Romans, like all foreign rule of the Jews in the land, was hated. In no way was it compatible with what God had repeatedly promised to Israel. The Jewish revolt occurred in AD 66–72, and it resulted not in the mere defilement of the second temple but in its final destruction with the fall of Jerusalem in 70.

From what we have seen so far, it will be no surprise to conclude that the Jewish mind from the exilic period onward was dominated by what may be called "the dilemma of Israel." That dilemma, not altogether new, consisted of the painful, blatant contradiction between the promises of God and the experience of Israel. God had said one thing; Israel had experienced another. In the search for the reasons behind this dilemma, again and again it was the sin of Israel that came to the mind of the Jews.

If this was the explanation of the dilemma, what was the answer? What could be done to enable Israel to avoid the disappointments and sufferings of the past and instead to experience at last the fulfillment of the promises? We have evidence from several sources about the emergence of groups with distinctive perspectives.

The first groups they were Jews who led their life in pursuing righteousness. The others were kept on violence against Rome to entertain the independence of the promised Israel. The third group were those customized themselves with the then foreign ruling power.

1. **Pursuit of righteousness**:

a. Hasidim

The term "*Hasidim*" is a general one that refers to a broad stream of people after the exile who resisted Hellenization and assimilation and promoted a new and serious adherence to the Torah. Their name means "holy ones" or "pious ones." They are, in a sense, the descendants of the

[18] For instance, the Qumran community didn't give recognition for them.

reformation brought by Ezra, the protoscribe, the new, vigorous champion of Torah righteousness. They are not properly a sect but rather a kind of general movement of the faithful. Although they receive no specific mention in the NT, they probably are represented by the pious individuals of the Lukan infancy narrative, such as Zechariah and Elizabeth, Simeon, and Anna, not to mention Joseph and Mary.

b. *Pharisees*

The Pharisees are the most prominent Jewish sect in the Gospels, and deservedly so, for they were very serious in their quest for righteousness. Their reasoning seemed convincing: the problem that Israel had in successfully obeying the Torah was caused by its lack of specifics. The commandments needed elaboration. for example, to know that one should not work on the Sabbath as the commandment said. The issue was the definition of work. What was work and what was not? So the Pharisees began to elaborate the written law by means of an extensive oral tradition that explained it. In so doing, they were building "a fence around the Torah" in order to ensure its obedience. Much attention was given to issues of ritual purity, a state of holiness of a different order than moral holiness This oral law, paralleling the written law, became known as the "tradition of the elders" (as in Mark 7:3, 5; Matt. 15:2–3; cf. Mark 7:8–9).

Most of all, the Pharisees are the primary opponents of Jesus and the early Christian movement. the Sadducees and Pharisees may appear united at times in their opposition to Jesus (e.g., Matt. 16:1), it is more often the Pharisees who come to dispute, sometimes accompanied by the scribes (e.g., Matt. 9:11, 34; 12:2, 38; Mark 7:5; 8:11; Luke 6:7). Their disputes with Jesus are primarily in areas of external piety, such as tithing, fasting, purity, and keeping the Sabbath. Acts 23:6 states that some were members of the Sanhedrin, along with some Sadducees. Paul describes himself as a Pharisee who was "educated strictly according to our ancestral law" (Acts 22:3) and belonged "to the strictest sect of our religion" (Acts 26:5).

The Pharisees' opposition to Jesus' activities on the Sabbath is a prime ex- ample of this emphasis on the strict observance of the law. For the Pharisees, Jesus' healings violate God's prohibition against doing work on the Sabbath (Matt. 12:9–14//Mark 3:1–6//Luke 6:6–11; Luke 14:1–6; John 9:1–41). Jesus challenges them with an alternative interpretation of the Torah,

arguing that what is lawful to do on the Sabbath is to do good and to save a life (Mark 3:4; Matt. 12:10–11). When the Pharisees confront Jesus over ritual purity regarding cups and dishes and the cleanness of one's hands, Jesus responds that people are defiled not by what goes into a person but by the things that come out, and that one should clean the inside rather than the outside (Matt. 15:1–20// Mark 7:1–23; Matt. 23:25–26//Luke 11:37–44). Thus Jesus proclaims that it is not external conformity to the law and being justified in the sight of others that counts but internal piety and the matters of the heart (Luke 16:15). Jesus' conflicts with the Pharisees also involve tithing and fasting (e.g., Matt. 23:23; Mark 2:18–20; Luke 18:9–14).

The Pharisees desired to arrive at a level of righteousness that would finally enable the gap between promise and Israel's experience to be closed.

c. *Essenes*

Yet another group that believed the answer to the dilemma of Israel lay in a more successful achievement of righteousness was the Essenes, the inhabitants of the monastic community near the Dead Sea at Qumran. In their view, what was needed was more focus on the living of the law. The ideal way to get this focus was to leave ordinary society for the monastic life, although there appear to have been gatherings of Essenes even within the villages and towns of Palestine. In the discipline provided by the isolated community there was the possibility of arriving at a high level of righteousness.

The Qumran community, like the early Christians, believed that they were the people of the promised new covenant spoken of in Jeremiah 31:31. They believed themselves to be on the edge of the eschatological fulfillment promised to Israel. In many ways, of course, they resemble the early Christian community. They believed in the imminent coming of not one but two messiahs: a priestly one of the line of Aaron and a kingly one of the line of David. Despite similarities, however, there was a crucial difference: Christians believed that the Messiah had already come, had been crucified, and had risen from the dead. For them, the new age was not merely about to happen; it had arrived and was present in an initial form.

The most dramatic discovery of ancient Jewish literature in the modern period is undoubtedly that of the well-known Dead Sea Scrolls. Between 1947 and 1956 a total of some 930

fragmentary manuscripts were found in eleven caves near Qumran, close to the northwest shore of the Dead Sea.

2. Violence Against Rome: *Zealots*

A second answer to the dilemma of Israel, violent acts against the Romans, was offered by *the Zealots*, freedom fighters known also as the *sicarii*, the "dagger men", because they were willing to assassinate those whom they recognized as the enemies of God. Luke mentions a certain Judas the Galilean, who "set himself up as leader" of the movement (Acts 5:37). Their argument seems to have been that Israel must force the hand of God by resisting the Romans. If they were brave enough to become involved in the great battle that would mark the end of the age, against insuperable odds, God surely would act on their behalf and enable victory, as he had a mere two centuries earlier. This was the way to arrive at the fulfillment of the promises that God had made to Israel.

The error of the argument of the Zealots seems confirmed by the two successive revolts (in AD 66–72 and 132–35) under their leadership that ended in defeat. But during the time of the ministry of Jesus, the Zealot mentality is clearly present. Indeed, one or two of the disciples of Jesus, Simon the Zealot (Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13) and possibly Judas Iscariot, seem to have been of the zealotic persuasion.

3. Aacceptance And Aadaptation: *Sadducees*

A third answer to the dilemma was to take the present reality seriously and simply trim down the expectations. This was the perspective of *the Sadducees*, who rejected the prophets with what they regarded as their exaggerated apocalyptic expectations and accepted the canonical authority only of the books of Moses. Of course, they did not thereby dissolve the problem of the dilemma altogether, but they did reduce the tension to a considerable extent. In the minds of these "realists," the future expectation amounted to little more than idealistic dreaming.

In the NT, the Sadducees consisted mainly of the aristocracy and the high priesthood (Acts 5:17). Along with the Pharisees, the Sadducees were members of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish high court (Acts 23:6–7). They appear with the Pharisees in the Gospels as opponents of Jesus (e.g., Matt.

16:1–12). The Sadducees, along with the high priest, have the apostles arrested (Acts 4:1–22; 5:17–18). Since Jesus spoke against the temple (e.g., Mark 11:15–19; 14:57–58; 15:29), the Sadducees' actions may reflect a concern for the temple.

We read in the NT that they denied the resurrection, instead believing that the soul died with the body (Matt. 22:23; Mark 12:18; Luke 20:27; Acts 23:8). In Acts, Paul uses this knowledge to provoke division between the Sadducees and the Pharisees, who do hold to the doctrine (23:6–10).

They are hardly to be thought of as secular in their attitude. The term "Sadducee" probably is derived from the name "Zadok," indicating their claim to be the legitimate descendants of the high priest of the Davidic era. They were in charge of the temple cultus and thus greatly concerned with matters of ritual purity. It seems clear, however, that they also had a vested interest in maintaining the status quo and appeasing the Romans wherever possible. Their openness to compromise in this regard did not endear them to the people, and they are spoken of negatively in the Talmud.

Yet another group that believed the answer to the dilemma of Israel lay in a more successful achievement of righteousness was the Essenes, the inhabitants of the monastic community near the Dead Sea at Qumran. In their view, what was needed was more focus on the living of the law. The ideal way to get this focus was to leave ordinary society for the monastic life, although there appear to have been gatherings of Essenes even within the villages and towns of Palestine. In the discipline provided by the isolated community there was the possibility of arriving at a high level of righteousness.

3.2 The Origin and Reliability of the Gospels

Skeptics have criticized the Gospels, the first four books of the New Testament, as being legendary in nature rather than historical. They point to alleged "contradictions" between Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. They also maintain the Gospels were written centuries after the lifetimes of the eyewitnesses. The late date of the writings allowed legends and exaggerations to increase, they say.

3.2.1 The Oral Tradition

Despite this early dating, there is a time gap of several years between the ascension of Jesus and the writing of the Gospels. There is a period during which the gospel accounts were committed to memory by the disciples and transmitted orally. The question we must answer is, Was the oral tradition memorized and passed on accurately? Skeptics assert that memory and oral tradition cannot accurately preserve accounts from person to person for many years.

The evidence shows that in oral cultures where memory has been trained for generations, oral memory can accurately preserve and pass on large amounts of information. In the beginning of the church the word of the gospel was oral, a living word rather than a written one. There are good reasons that the Gospels may not have been written sooner than this.

- First, since the earliest Christians expected Jesus to return in a short time, there must at first have seemed to be no need for written records.
- Second, and far more important, the words and deeds of Jesus were preserved in a well-formed and stable repository of oral tradition.

Oral instruction and memory of divine teaching was stressed in Jewish culture. It is a well-known fact that the rabbis had the O.T. and much of the oral law committed to memory. The Jews placed a high value on memorizing whatever wri ting reflected inspired Scripture and the wisdom of God. Commonly the Jewish culture was "a culture of memory."

Rainer Reisner presents six key reasons why oral tradition accurately preserved Jesus' teachings.[19]

- Jesus used the Old Testament prophets' practice of proclaiming the word of God which demanded accurate preservation of inspired teaching.
- Jesus' presentations of Himself as Messiah would reinforce among His followers the need to preserve His words accurately.
- ninety percent of Jesus' teachings and sayings use mnemonic methods similar to those used in Hebrew poetry.

[19]Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels,* pp. 27-28.

- Jesus trained His disciples to teach His lessons even while He was on earth.
- Jewish boys were educated until they were twelve, so the disciples likely knew how to read and write.

Finally, just as Jewish and Greek teachers gathered disciples, Jesus gathered and trained His to carry on after His death. We can have confidence then that the oral tradition accurately preserved the teachings and the events of Jesus' life till they were written down just a few years later.

3.2.2 The Date of the New Testament Writings

The Gospels are dated traditionally as follows: Mark is believed to be the first Gospel written in 60 AD; Matthew and Luke follow and were written sometime between 60 and 70 AD. John is the final Gospel written in 90-100 AD. Critics claim that the Gospels were written much later and this allowed for myths to proliferate the text. Most scholars agreed on that the New Testament was completed by 100 AD. There is excellent internal and external evidence to support his conclusion.

A. Internal Evidence for the Gospels

The internal evidence presents a strong case for a first century date for several reasons. The gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke present Jesus' prophesy regarding the fall of the Jerusalem Temple (Matthew 24, Mark 13, Luke 21) which occurred in 70 AD. However, the gospels do not record the fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy. It is strange that the gospel writers would not record this major event in Jewish history in their writings. Why is it that the gospel writers do not record the fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy? The soundest reason for this is that it had not occurred during the writing of the gospels. Also, in the book of Acts, the Temple continues to play a central role in Israel. This indicates that Acts was completed before the fall of the Temple as well.

Further confirmation stems from the fact that Luke completes the book of Acts before Paul's death in 64 AD. The book ends with Paul living under house arrest. It is noteworthy that Luke does not record the death of its two chief characters, Peter and Paul. We can conclude that the reason for this is Luke finished the book of Acts before their deaths in 64 AD.

Finally, Paul's epistles were written from 48-60 AD. Paul's outline of the life of Jesus matches with the gospels. First Corinthians is one of the least disputed books regarding its dating and Paul's authorship. In chapter 15, Paul summarizes the gospel and reinforces the premise that this

is the same gospel preached by the apostles. Even more compelling is that Paul quotes from Luke's gospel in First Timothy 5:18, showing us that Luke's gospel was indeed completed in Paul's lifetime (10:7). The internal evidence supports the conclusion that the gospels were written well within the first century, in the lifetime of the eyewitnesses.

B. External Evidence for the Gospels

Transmission of the New Testament Manuscript

New Testament scholars have a huge amount of ancient manuscript evidence totaling over 5000 documents. An important document is the Chester Beatty Papyri, dated 250 AD, which contains most of the New Testament writings, including most of the book of John. We can safely conclude that the original books of the New Testament were completed much earlier since there needed to be a sufficient time to write, copy, and collect the books of the New Testament.

Another important manuscript is the Bodmer Papyri. This manuscript contains most of the book of John and is dated to have been written in 200 AD. Third, we have the Ryland's Papyri that was found in Egypt and contains a fragment of John dated 120 AD. From this fragment we can conclude that the gospel was completed before 120 AD because not only did the gospel have to be written, it had to be hand-copied and make its way down from Asia Minor to Egypt. Since Matthew, Mark, and Luke precede John, we can support the first century date.

Another line of evidence is found in the writings of the church fathers. Clement of Rome, whose writings dates to 95 AD, quotes from three of the gospels and other portions of the New Testament. Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, writes a letter before his martyrdom in Rome in 115 AD quoting from the four gospels and other New Testament letters. Polycarp wrote to the Philippians in 120 AD and specifically mentions the gospels and New Testament letters. Justin Martyr (150 AD) cites John 3. Several church fathers from the first century are familiar with New Testament works, especially the gospels, and refer to them as inspired Scripture. From these writings we can conclude that the gospels were written and in circulation by the end of the first century AD.

Early dating is important for several reasons.

- First, since the gospels were written within the lifetime of the eyewitnesses, it is very likely they recorded a firsthand account of Christ's life.

- Second, the closer in date to the event, the more accurate the record. Early dating indicates that eyewitnesses were alive and able to attest to the accuracy of the newly circulating gospels. Apostles often appeal to the witness of the hostile crowd pointing out their knowledge of the facts as well (Acts 2:22, Acts 26:26).
- Third, the time period between the events and their written record is too short for myths to proliferate.
- Finally, with the brief time period from Jesus' ministry to the writing of the first gospel of Mark, there seems even less of a possibility that a "Q" document exists.[20] In conclusion, both the internal and external evidence show that the gospels are indeed written within the first century and within the lifetime of the eyewitnesses.

Archaeology and the Gospels

Archaeology confirms the historicity of the Bible, including the gospels. Archaeologist Randall Price states that when it comes to the Bible, there are over 100,000 discoveries related to Biblical references.

Among the gospel writers, Luke is found to be a very accurate historian. He names 32 countries, 54 cities, and 9 islands without error. Modern mariners have confirmed the accuracy of the details surrounding Paul's final journey from Palestine to Italy. Luke used titles of government officials, proconsuls, and tetrarchs. While some are unique, they are found to be accurate. For example, in Luke 3:1, he mentions "Lysanius tetrarch of Abilene." Scholars questioned Luke's credibility since the only Lysanius known for centuries was a ruler of Chalcis who ruled from 40-36 BC. However, an inscription dated to the time of Tiberius, who ruled from 14-37 AD, was found recording a temple dedication which names Lysanius as the "tetrarch of Abila" near Damascus.

In Acts 28:7, Luke gives Plubius, the chief man on the island of Malta, the title "first man of the island." Scholars questioned this unusual title and deemed it unhistorical. Inscriptions have recently been discovered on the island that indeed gives Plubius the title of "first man." Historian

[20] "Q" is a hypothetical document from which many scholars believe Matthew and Luke derive the material for their gospels.

Sir William Ramsey was once a skeptic who traveled to the Middle East to verify the accuracy of Luke's work. He seriously questioned Luke's credibility, but after years of research he concluded, "Luke is a historian of first rank…In short, this author should be placed along with the very greatest of historians."

Numerous archaeological discoveries confirm the events recorded in the gospels as well. In John 5:1-15, Jesus heals a man at the Pool of Bethesda. John describes the pool as having five porticoes. The existence of the pool was disputed until recently, when the Pool of Bethesda was discovered in the northeast quarter of the Old Town Jerusalem. Forty feet underground archaeologists discovered a pool with five porticoes and the description of the surrounding area matches John's layout. John 9:7 mentions another long-disputed site, the Pool of Siloam. However, this pool was also discovered in 1880, upholding the accuracy of John.

Pontius Pilate is mentioned in all the gospels. Evidence that he was the governor at Jesus' trial and the description of his character as described in the gospels has been affirmed. These few examples, along with numerous other discoveries, validate the historical accuracy of the Gospels.

Non-Christian Justification

Non-Christian sources also confirm the events of the gospels. There are Roman and Jewish historical records that confirm the essence of Christ's life as recorded in the gospels.

Tacitus, a Roman historian of the first century, confirms the New Testament designation of Pilate. He writes, "Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus. . . ."

Other Roman sources substantiate the gospel accounts as well. In 52 AD, **Thallus** wrote a historical work of Greece regarding the Trojan War. Although his work is lost, Julius Africanus in 221 AD quotes Thallus. In the third book of Africanus' histories he states that darkness covered the earth during the crucifixion of Jesus. He attributes the darkness to a solar eclipse. From his writings, it can be concluded that the passion story was known in Rome by 50 AD, and that the enemies of Christianity tried to give naturalistic explanations to the occurrence of darkness.

Another source is **Josephus w**ho identifies characters mentioned in the gospels including the Herods as well as Emperors Augustus, Tiberius, Claudius, and Nero. He also mentions the high priesthood families of Caiaphas, Ananias, and Annas. He also corroborates events in the gospels. In The Antiquities 18, he mentions that Gamiliel names Judas the Galilean as leading an uprising (Acts 5:37) and the famine in the days of Claudius is mentioned (Acts 11:28). The sudden death of Agrippa (Acts 12), the death of John the Baptist, and the death of James, the brother of Jesus, are also all mentioned. Archaeology and the historical records from Christian and non-Christian sources prove that the gospels are historical works and not fictional writings.

From the historical evidence, we can reject the critics charge that the gospels are legendary accounts of Jesus' life. There is an abundance of internal and external evidence that support an early date of the gospel writings. There are numerous archaeological and historical records corroborating the events of Jesus' life. Finally, the manuscript evidence assures us that we have a copy accurate to the originals.

4. The Books of the New Testament

The New Testament[21] is a name given to 27 canonized books of the Christians.[22] These books discloses the life, deeds and teachings of Jesus Christ as well as the establishment of the early Church. The books are divided in to four groups:

- The Gospels /Biography/ - the four canonized Gospels, Mathew, Marks, Luke, John
- History- the book of Acts by Luke
- Letters. The fourteen Pauline letters and other seven general epistles/catholic Epistles
- Prophecy - the book of Revelation

4.1 The Gospels

For many Christians today the word "gospel" quickly brings to mind one of the four written Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke or John. For the earliest Christians, however, the term "gospel" was not about books but about the central message of salvation itself, communicated with the living voice.

The word "gospel" (Gk. euangelion) refers at first not to a book but rather to the report of "good news." The term *euangelion*, rendered in Latin as *euangelium*, from which eventually came the contemporary word "gospel."[23] The term *euangelion*is composite term from two Greek words, *eu* ("good") and *angelia* ("announcement" or "message"). The term originally meant the reward given to a messenger bearing good news, for example about a victory by an army or the birth of a king. By the time of the rise of Christianity, the word had come to designate the news itself. The authors of the New Testament adopted this Greek term only in its positive sense and

[21] The New Testament also depicts the new covenant that is made by our Lord Jesus Christ through His Blood. The narrative of the Lord's Supper, set at pass over which a renewal of the Exodus event is told with covenant terminology "this cup is the new covenant in My blood." (Mat 26:26 MK 14:24, Lk 20:20, 1 Cor 11:25).

[22] According to the EOTC canon of Scriptures the NT books are 35.

[23] The English word "gospel" is derived form of the Anglo-Saxon "god-spell," meaning a message or story about a god or from a god, and it received a new meaning in the Christian tradition. Gospel as message should be distinguished from Gospel as literary type or genre evidenced by the four canonical and many other apocryphal Gospels.

only in the singular form *euangelion.* Most importantly, they put new content into it—the central Christian message of salvation in Christ.

Let us give some examples.

- The Evangelist Mark intimates that the entire ministry of Jesus is good news when he opens his own Gospel book with the words: The beginning of the gospel (*evangelion*) of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (Mark 1:1).
- The Evangelist Matthew employs the same term to identify the central message of Jesus as good news: "And he went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel (*evangelion*) of the kingdom and healing every disease and every infirmity among the people" (Mat 4:23; 9:35).
- The apostle Paul regards the task of his entire apostolic ministry of preaching the gospel as a sacred "liturgy." He writes about "the grace given me by God to be a minister (literally *leitourgos* or "liturgist") of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering (*prosfora*) of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit" (Rom 15-16).

In its Christian usage the term *evangelion* generally signified the announcement of the extraordinary good news of God's saving activity in Christ, including of course the blessings and ethical implications of God's saving work on behalf of humanity. The most frequent usage occurs in the letters of Paul for whom the death of Christ by crucifixion is good news because it is the source of redemption (1 Cor 1:22-24, 30). Likewise, according to the Gospel of John, despite its lack of explicit use of the term *euangelion*, the message about the death of Christ is about His "hour of glory," the zenith of the work of redemption crowned by His resurrection.[24]

The verb *evangelizesthai*("to evangelize" or "to proclaim the good news") is also frequently employed in the New Testament. This verb designates either the act of the announcement or the content of the good news, or both. It connects the Christian gospel with the language of the Old Testament referring to the good news of God's saving activity on behalf of His people, as in

[24] John 3:14-15; 12:27-33; 14:18-20; 16:19-22; 17:1-5.

Psalm 95:2 which declares: “Sing to the Lord, bless his name; proclaim from day to day the good news of his salvation.” And Jesus viewed His own work as saving good news when He applied the words of Isaiah 61:1-2 to His ministry:

> The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach the good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord (Luke 4:18-19; cf. 7:22).

Similarly, the apostle Paul invoked the text of Isaiah 52:7 which he interpreted as a promise now fulfilled in the ministry of the Christian preachers of the gospel: “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news” Rom 10:15. The early Christian preachers and authors used the language of *euangelion*to proclaim the message about what God had accomplished in Christ as glorious good news for humanity.

In reality there is only one gospel: the “good news” of the coming and work of the Messiah Jesus. For that reason, it is proper to speak, with the early church, of the gospel of Jesus Christ “according to” Matthew, according to Mark, according to Luke, and according to John. Indeed, these were the actual titles given to the Gospels already in the second century. It is true that we have four differing portraits of the life and ministry of Jesus, but it is nonetheless also true that in the four we encounter recognizably one and the same story, one and the same Christ, one gospel.

The gospels tell of the life and teaching of Jesus, but none of them is a biography in the classical sense of the word. The gospels were not written merely to tell the story of Jesus. They were written by the disciples of Christ, who were filled with the Holy Spirit after the Lord’s resurrection, to bear witness to the fact that Jesus of Nazareth is indeed the promised Messiah-Christ of Israel and the Savior of the world.

In the Orthodox Church, it is not the entire Bible, but only the book of the four gospels which is perpetually enthroned upon the altar table in the church building. This is a testimony to the fact that the life of the Church is centered in Christ, the living fulfillment of the law and the prophets, who abides perpetually in the midst of His People, the Church, through the presence of the Holy Spirit.

In the Tradition of the Orthodox Church, a tradition often expressed in the Church's iconography, the four gospels are considered to be symbolized in the images of the 'four living creatures' of the biblical apocalypse, the lion, the ox, the man and the eagle, with the most classical interpretation connecting Matthew with the man, Luke with the ox, Mark with the lion and John with the eagle (Ezek 1.10, Rev 4.7). The four gospels, taken together, but each with its own unique style and form, remain forever as the scriptural center of the Orthodox Church.

4.1.1 Theology of the Synoptic Gospels

The gospels of Saints Matthew, Mark and Luke are called the synoptic gospels, which means that they "look the same".[25] These three gospels are very similar in content and form and are most probably interrelated textually in some way, exactly how being an ongoing debate among scriptural scholars. They each were written sometime in the beginning of the second half of the first century, and the texts of each of them, as that of St John, have come down to us in Greek, the language in which they were written, with the possible exception of Matthew which may have been written originally in Aramaic, the language of Jesus.

Hypothetical Patterns of the synoptic problems

1. The Augustinian hypothesis:

This view obviously is based on the canonical order of the Gospels. It was defended by Augustine (354–430)7 and is the view that the church held until it was challenged in the eighteenth century.

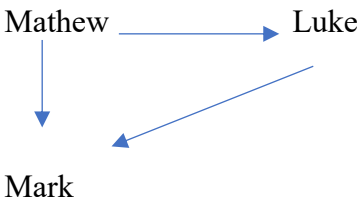
Matthew → Mark → Luke

2. The Two Gospel hypothesis:

This view also accepts the priority of Matthew, but it puts Mark as the last of the Synoptics. Although anticipated by Henry Owen as early as 1764, this hypothesis is named after Johann Griesbach, who first mooted it in 1783 and then worked it out in detail in 1789. It is also referred to as the Two Gospel hypothesis, which is to be carefully distinguished from the Two Source hypothesis, to be considered next. According to this hypothesis, Mark abbreviated the narratives

[25] The study of the hows and whys of the similarities and differences among these books and to other gospels is known as the **synoptic problem**.

of Matthew and Luke. As Griesbach put it, Mark omits so much of the other two Gospels because "he sought brevity, as one who wanted to write a book of small compass." But that there was no need for an abridgment of Matthew, such as Mark represents according to the Griesbach hypothesis, is clear from the neglect of Mark in the church once Matthew became available.



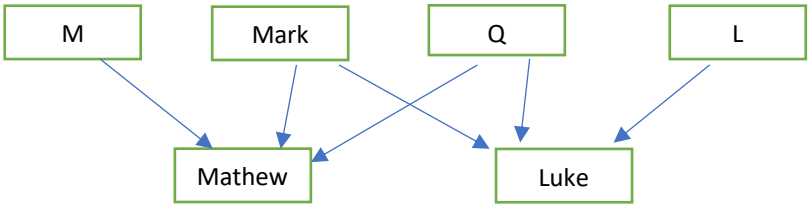
3. **The Markan Priority or Two Source hypothesis, sometimes referred to as the Oxford hypothesis:**

Supplementary to this hypothesis is the addition of M to account for the special material in Matthew, and L for the special material of Luke, thus giving us the Four Source hypothesis.

The idea that Mark, not Matthew, is the earliest of the Gospels and was used by Matthew and Luke is relatively recent in the history of the church and the study of the Gospels. Some are uncomfortable with the idea that up until this time the church had held the wrong conviction about which Gospel had been written first.

In the eighteenth century it became increasingly obvious, especially with the emergence of the notion of Markan priority, that the material held in common by Matthew and Luke but not found in Mark required explanation. The majority of scholars saw as unconvincing the possibility that this material could be explained by Luke's use of Matthew or by Matthew's use of Luke. This gave rise to the postulation of a hypothetical sayings source that would receive the designation "Q."[26]

[26] "Q" probably derives from the German word *Quelle*, meaning "source." R. H. Lightfoot (*History and Interpretation in the Gospels*, 27n1), however, relates a story concerning Armitage Robinson, who believed that he might have been the first to use the designation "Q." According to his own account, Robinson was lecturing in Cambridge (in the 1890s) on the Gospel of Mark, which he regularly referred to as "P," considering it to be the reminiscences of Peter. Because "Q" is the next letter in the alphabet, he used it to describe the putative sayings source common to Matthew and Luke. This was several years before the symbol began to be used in Germany at the beginning of the twentieth century. This is challenged by W. F. Howard, "The Origin of the Symbol 'Q.'" For the ongoing discussion, see Neirynck, "The Symbol Q (=Quelle)"; Schmitt, "In Search of the Origin of the *Siglum* Q."



Each of the synoptic gospels follows basically the same narrative. Each begins with Jesus' baptism by John and His preaching in Galilee. Each centers on the apostles' confession of Jesus as the promised Messiah of God, with the corresponding event of the transfiguration, and the announcement by Christ of His need to suffer and die and be raised again on the third day. And each concludes with the account of the passion, death, resurrection and ascension of the Lord.

A. The Gospel of Mark

The gospel of Saint Mark is the shortest, and perhaps the first written, of the gospels, although this is a matter of debate. As with the other gospels, the exact date of writing is uncertain. Because of its connection with Rome and its lack of any clear reference to the destruction of Jerusalem (13:2), the Gospel of Mark may be dated shortly before the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70. Its author was not one of the twelve apostles and it is the common view that this gospel presents the "tradition" of Saint Peter. He traveled with Paul and Barnabas and later aided Peter (1Pt 5:13). According to tradition, Mark subsequently used Peter's teaching as his primary source for this gospel, adding to it his personal experience and other church traditions.

The gospel begins immediately with Jesus' baptism, the call of the apostles, and the preaching of Jesus accompanied by his works of forgiveness and healing. In this gospel, as in all of them, Jesus is revealed from the very beginning by His authoritative words and His miraculous works as the Holy One of God, the divine Son of Man, Who was crucified and is risen from the dead, thus bringing to the world the Kingdom of God.

The very next words in Mark, following the title, are "As it is written in Isaiah the prophet." Immediately the reader knows that this is the continuation of an earlier story, indeed, moving toward the climax of that story. These words introduce John the Baptist, the one who prepares the way of Jesus the Messiah. Already at this early point we know that this is the astounding announcement of the fulfillment of the promises of Scripture and the hopes of Israel.

All through Mark this motif of fulfillment is present (e.g., 4:12; 7:6–7; 11:9–10; 12:10–11, 36; 13:26; 14:27, 62), since this was a common element of the preaching of the early church from the beginning. It is something that becomes even more emphatic in the other Gospels. Early Christianity regarded the fulfillment of the Scriptures in Jesus Christ as of supreme importance.

As abovementioned, the essence of the good news of the "gospel" is the announcement of the arrival of the kingdom of God. Thus Mark 1:15: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel." This early sentence provides the theme of Mark1 and of the other Synoptic Gospels. All of Jesus' ministry, including his death, stands under the rubric of the kingdom of God. Everything that Jesus says and does is related to this overarching con- cept of the presence of the kingdom.

Major Theme—Jesus Christ as Servant and Sacrifice. Subthemes include:

The suffering Messiah: Christ, who acts with power and authority, is nevertheless a suffering Messiah (8:27–33), One who has come to serve and give His life for many (10:45). Jesus is clearly the Son of God (1:1,11;9:7;14:61,62), who has power over demons, heals the sick, and forgives sins (1:23–25;2:10,11). But Heals opossesses a full humanity, expressed through the agony of Gethsemane and the suffering on the cross.

The messianic secret: Mark under scores the fact that Jesus veiled His messianic identity. He commanded demons, the people He healed, and even the disciples to keep silent about His messiahship (1:34,44;8:30) until He Himself revealed the mystery before the Sanhedrin (14:62). In this gospel Peter confesses Jesus only as "the Christ" (8:29; contrast Mt 16:16; Jn 6:69). Only after the Resurrection do His followers recognize Him as God (16:14).

Discipleship: Though the word "disciple" never occurs in Mark, discipleship is expressed as an important theme. From the start, Jesus calls individuals to follow him (1:16–20; 2:14). There is unmistakable irony in that the disciples—who desired the glory, with its privilege and power, of association with Jesus in his kingdom (10:35–37)—must learn that discipleship means following Jesus in self-denial, suffering, and even death (10:38–39). Immediately after the first announcement of the passion, Jesus defines discipleship as following in his steps: "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever

would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it" (8:34–35). Greatness is to be found in the service of others, again in the pattern being set by Jesus (10:42–45).

B. The Gospel of Matthew

The gospel of Saint Matthew, who was one of the twelve apostles, is considered by some to be the earliest written gospel. There is also the opinion that it was originally written in Aramaic and not in the Greek text which has remained in the Church. It is a commonly-held view that the gospel of Saint Matthew was written for the Jewish Christians to show from the scriptures of the Old Testament, that Jesus, the son of David, the son of Abraham, is truly the Christ, the bearer of God's Kingdom to men.

The gospel of Saint Matthew abounds with references to the Old Testament. It begins with the genealogy of Jesus from Abraham and the story of Christ's birth from the Virgin in Bethlehem. Then recounting the baptism of Jesus and the temptations in the wilderness, it proceeds to the call of the disciples and the preaching and works of Christ.

The gospel of Saint Matthew contains the longest and most detailed record of Christ's teachings in the so-called Sermon on the Mount (5–7). Generally, in the Orthodox Church, it is the text of the gospel of Saint Matthew which is used most consistently in liturgical worship, e.g., the version of the beatitudes and the Lord's Prayer. Only this gospel contains the commission of the Lord to His apostles after the resurrection, "to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (28.19).

Matthew could have been written as early as AD 50, but it is more likely that it was written after the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70. It was probably written over a period of years while Matthew resided in Antioch, where the church was a strong, mixed community of Jewish and Gentile Christians. St. Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch AD 67– 107, is one of the earliest witnesses to the existence of this gospel.

Major Theme: Christ, the Incarnate God, Immanuel, has inaugurated the kingdom of God and the new covenant, which is realized in the true Israel, the Church. Subthemesinclude:

The fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy: Matthew shows conclusively that Christ, the incarnate Son of God, fulfills the prophecies of the Old Testament. He establishes the new covenant through His death and Resurrection and will continue to guide His Church, the true Israel of God, to the end of the age.

The revelation of the kingdom of God: Jesus proclaims that God's reign has come (4:17, 23), His power being manifested in His Son, but the fullness of the Kingdom will be consummated at Christ's Second Coming.

A call to discipleship (4:18–22;8:18–22), through mission (ch.10;28:18–20), and the beginning of the Gentile Church (8:11,12;21:43; 28:19).

C. The writings of St. Luke

The early sources emphasize that the third gospel was written by Luke, who is mentioned in Colossians 4:14; 2 Timothy 4:11; and Philemon 24. By birth Luke was a Gentile from Antioch, and by profession a physician. He was a fellow worker of Paul's: the plural “we” (Acts 20:6) indicates Luke was with Paul as he traveled the coast of Asia Minor on his way to Jerusalem.Together with the book of Acts, also written by Saint Luke for a certain Theophilus, this gospel forms the most complete “history” of Christ and the early Christian Church that we have.

The gospel of Saint Luke, alone among the four gospels, has a complete account of the birth of both Jesus and John the Baptist. Traditionally, the source for these events recorded by Saint Luke is considered to be Mary, the mother of Christ.

Saint Luke’s gospel is noted for the detail of its narrative, and especially for its record of Christ’s great concern for the poor and for the sinful. Certain parables warning against the dangers of riches and self-righteousness, and revealing the great mercy of God to sinners, are found only in the gospel of Saint Luke, for example, those of the publican and the pharisee, the prodigal son, and Lazarus and the rich man, There is also a very great emphasis in this gospel on the Kingdom of God which Christ has brought to the world and which He gives to those who continue with Him in His sufferings.

In his preface to the gospel (1:1), Luke indicates knowledge of other written sources. Most scholars believe he used Mark as a source. He probably wrote his gospel either from Greece or from Asia Minor around late AD 60.

Moreover, St. Luke is also the writer of the book of the Acts of the apostles.[27] It is believed that the Acts is a continuation by Luke of the account given in his gospel. His gospel covers over 30 years of Christ's earthly life; Acts covers over 30 years of early Church life. The Acts of the Apostles is a spiritual and theological record of how the Church developed, as seen through the actions of the early Christians. It is of great importance for understanding the organization and structure of the Church; its method of resolving controversies; the role of apostles, bishops, priests (elders), and deacons; and the spiritual life of the Church.

Major Themes in the writings of St. Luke:

The universality of the gospel message and the spread of the gospel by the apostles from Jerusalem to the whole world

Luke has been called an "historian" because he dates biblical events by reference to secular history (2:1, 2; 3:1). Since this is a gospel written for Christians of Gentile background, it emphasizes more than the other gospels the challenge of mission and evangelization. Salvation is described as "a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles" (2:32). At the end of the gospel, the risen Lord instructs His disciples to preach repentance and the forgiveness of sins "to all nations" (24:47).

In the Book of Acts recounts the triumphant march of the Christian mission from Jerusalem throughout the Roman empire. This achievement points to the work of the Holy Spirit, who

[27] Acts is the story of the proclamation of the kerygma and the response to it that created house churches throughout the Mediterranean world. It is the story of the birth of Christianity as a worldwide faith. The Content of the Kerygma had seven elements; these are: the fulfillment of prophecy, Jesus as the son of David, the death of Jesus, His burial, His resurrection, His exaltation to God the Father's right hand, and His return as judge.The key elements in the kerygma are the death and the resurrection of Jesus. It is the resurrection above all else to which the Apostles are witnesses.

descended on the early Church, empowering the apostles and other missionaries to carry the good news of salvation.

Subthemes include:

***Prayer**:* The early chapters portray righteous men and women at prayer (1:10, 13, 46–55, 64; 2:20, 28–32). Jesus is portrayed frequently at prayer (3:21; 5:16; 6:12; 9:18, 28; 11:1; 22:32, 41; 23:46). The gospel ends with the disciples “continually in the temple praising and blessing God” (24:53).

One of the striking features of the book of Acts is its attention to prayer. The first reference to prayer in Acts is in 1.14, "These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brethren". While the early references to prayer in Acts would correspond to the believers following the Jewish prayer times, we cannot fault their attitude in continuing in the activity so fundamentally important to Christian continuation. The words prayer, prayers, prayed, praying and pray are found 29 times in Acts. 1.14,24; 2.42; 3.1; 4.31; 6.4,6; 8.15,22,24; 9.40; 10.2,4,9,30,31,48; 11.5; 12.5,12; 13.3; 14.23; 16.13,16,25; 20.36; 21.5; 22.17; 28.8.

***The activity of the Holy Spirit**:* The inspirational work of the Holy Spirit is ev ident every where in the gospel. Mary is “ov ershadowed” by the Spirit (1:35). Jesus conducts His ministry in the fullness of the Spirit (3:22; 4:1, 18; 10:21). The disciples were to embark upon their world mission after receiving “power from on high” (24:49), the gift of the Spirit.

In the book of Acts, It is on the day of Pentecost that the promise of the Spirit is fulfilled: “They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance” (2:4). Peter interprets the event as the fulfillment of the prophecy from Joel that in the “last days” God will pour out his Spirit upon all flesh (2:17). We can observe how the Acts of the Spirit enables the ministry of the disciples.

- Peter is “filled with the Holy Spirit” while he was standing before the Jewish authorities to defend his preaching, (4:8).

- The seven Hellenistic Jewish Christians of Acts 6, chosen to relieve the Twelve from their social work, were "of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom" (6:3). Stephen, who becomes a key figure and the first Christian martyr, is described as "a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit" (6:5; 7:55]).
- Philip, another significant Hellenistic Jewish Christian, is led by the Spirit to the Ethiopian eunuch (8:29; cf. 8:39).
- In a summary passage Luke writes, "So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was built up; and walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort [paraklēsis] of the Holy Spirit it was multiplied" (9:31).
- At a crucial turning point in the narrative, where the gospel is first brought to the Gentiles, Peter is led by the Spirit (10:19; 11:12).
- So too the very important conclusion of the apostolic council in Jerusalem is directed by the Holy Spirit "it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us" [15:28]).

In short, in the book of Acts the Holy Spirit equips, empowers, and directs the early church at every stage of its early development.

A deep concern for sinners*:* Luke reports Jesus' concern and love for sinners, with a confident hope of their repentance and forgiveness (5:1–11; 7:36–50; 9:51–56; 10:29–37; 19:1–10; 23:39–43).

4.2 **The Johnnie writings**

According to tradition, St. John the Apostle (also called the Theologian because of the profundity of his gospel) wrote this gospel. John, "the beloved disciple" of Christ (13:23; 21:7, 20), served as the leading authority of Ephesus for most of his ministry and wrote his gospel there. He was almost one hundred years old when he died, c. AD 96–100.

This gospel, written about AD 96, is usually considered the last of the four gospels to be written, supplementing the other three. He also wrote three epistles and the book of Revelation.

First John is a polemic against two identifiable groups: (a) false teachers with a gnostic bent; and (b) former members of the Church who were a threat to the faith of those remaining (2:27; 3:7).

The polemic is mostly pastoral and positive, to protect God's people. While the addressee is not mentioned, this may be an encyclical to John's diocese of Asia.

Second John is addressed to “the elect lady” (v. 1), most likely a church under John's oversight. The Church, a feminine word in Greek, elsewhere is called the “bride” of Christ the Lord (*kyrios*), and thus she is easily called *kyria*, the feminine of *kyrios*. John is warning his readers against the “deceivers” (v. 7), heretics who deny the Incarnation of the Son of God. These false apostles visited various churches, posing as true disciples and taking advantage of Christian hospitality.

One of the churches under John's oversight is having a jurisdictional dispute. Evangelists sent out by John have reported back to their home church, probably Ephesus, testifying that Gaius—full of love and loyalty—had liberally supported their mission. On the other hand, Diotrephes, apparently the local bishop or aspiring to be so, has vigorously opposed them and lorded over the church instead of leading it. He was resistant to apostolic oversight (v. 9) and forbade the welcoming of missionaries from John. It may be that Demetrius (v. 12) is another missionary whom John is intending to send that way and who also will be in need of hospitality. Thus, John writes to Diotrephes’ church, but he does not trust Diotrephes with his letter (v. 9).

Revelation: The early Church was convinced the Second Coming was near (Acts 2:16, 17; Heb 1:1; 1Jn 2:18). John's vision was first of all a reminder from God to the churches not to give in to their adversaries, but to hold fast to their faith. The book can also be seen as prophecy addressing a time far distant from its era of composition, predicting actual future events; or as an exposition of the ongoing relationships and conflicts between God and His kingdom, humanity, and Satan.

This book was only gradually accepted as canonical in many parts of Christendom. In addition, in the second and third centuries Revelation was widely twisted and sensationally misinterpreted, and the erroneous teachings brought troublesome confusion to Christians—a trend that continues to this day.

Major themes in the Books of St. John: -

- **The eternal Son of God has come in the flesh.** The gospel was written "that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name" (20:31).
- **Tests of true Christian life, true Christian care Jesus Christ, and Genuine leadership versus false leadership.** (The three epistles)
- **Faithfulness in tribulation.** "Revelation" in this case the final triumph of the kingdom of God. (The Book of Revelation)

John's writings has also many theological themes. They include the following:

The Trinity: In his gospel, John is quite explicit about the Persons of the Trinity and their relationships: They are three Persons in one nature. The Father is the Unbegotten, the Son is the Only Begotten (1:18; 3:16, 18), and the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father (15:26).

Glory: The glory of God is preeminently manifested in Christ's earthly ministry —His Person, words, and works—but is also experienced by the Church in the power of the Holy Spirit, the Helper or Paraclete (14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7).

The spiritual dimension: The mystical, theological perspective dominates this gospel.The revelation of divine life and light is resisted by this age, resulting in great spiritual warfare: the kingdom of God versus "the world" as a fallen entity in rebellion against God.

The sacramental dimension: John stresses the my sterious and sacramental presence and activity of God in the world, linking the sav ing work of Christ to baptism (3:5) and the Eucharist (6:52–59).

The Church: The Gospel of John testifies to a strong sense of community among the disciples, expressed through the plural "we" (1:14, 16). True disciples are those who believe in Jesus as the incarnate Son of the Father, who are united with Him, and who here and now express the life of divine love given by Christ.

The Paschal Theme: Three Pass overs are specifically mentioned in John, hence the tradition that the public ministry of Jesus encompassed a three-year period. During the final Passover, Jesus, the Lamb of God (1:29, 36), leads His followers to a new Passover through His Death and Resurrection.

The Redemption of the World: In John's perspective, the Divine Word, the Son of God, came in to the world to save the world and, through the life of the Church, to offer the whole world up to God. Christ and His Church begin this transformation now.

4.3 St. Paul and His Epistles

St. Paul and Judaism

Because of Paul's view of the law and his strong polemic against Jews who do not accept the gospel, Paul has often in the past been thought of as un-Jewish if not anti-Jewish. But, Paul is very emphatic on this point: "If any other man thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law a Pharisee, as to zeal a persecutor of the church, as to righteousness under the law blameless" (Phil. 3:4–6; Rom. 11:1).

Paul was, a Hellenistic Jew, with both elements being important, but with the emphasis being on the noun. Before his conversion to Christ, his worldview, his life, his very being, were marked by Judaism rather than Hellenism. Probably at about the time of his bar mitzvah, at the age of thirteen or so, he moved from Tarsus to Jerusalem where he became a talmid, a student of the Scriptures, eventually coming to study under one of the greatest scholars of the day: "I am a Jew, born at Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, educated according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God as you all are this day" (Acts 22:3); to this we may compare Galatians 1:14: "I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers." When in Philippians 3:5 Paul refers to himself as a "Hebrew born of Hebrews," he indicates that he spoke Hebrew rather than Greek at home, and his facility in Hebrew is also indicated in Acts 21:40; 22:2; 2 Cor. 11:22), where he is able to address the crowd in their own tongue.

Paul's claim was that there was nowhere in the world a purer Jew than he. He made the same claim when he wrote to his friends "If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless." (Philippians 3: 4-6). When he wrote to the Church at Rome, he made the proud statement: "I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin" (Romans 2: 1). Again and again there breathes through the thought of Paul his pride and joy in the privilege of being a Jew, one of the chosen people of God.[28]

From Paul's Letters we see the ongoing influence of his background and formal training in rabbinic or Pharisaic Judaism. The subjects that he occupies himself with are Jewish subjects: law, covenant, righteousness, christology, salvation, eschatology granted, all understood anew. He constantly cites the Scriptures and frequently he employs these texts in a midrashic way (i.e., with commentary-like interpretation, as in Gal. 3:15–18; 1 Cor. 9:8–12; 10:1–13), no doubt the sort of practice that he had learned as a talmid. It is obvious, as we will see, that for all of the difficulty of understanding his view on the subject, Paul continues to maintain a fundamental loyalty to the law again, however, in a new way. Furthermore, Paul's method of arguing is often Jewish in format.

Paul was a man of one book,and that book was the Old Testament. When Paul uses the Old Testament, he uses it as a Jew would use it. When Paul uses the Old Testament, he often allegorises it as a Jewish Rabbi would. For instance he takes the law of Deuteronomy 25:4 which says that the ox must not be muzzled when it is treading out the corn as an allegory of the fact that the Christian apostle and preacher must receive the material support of the Christian Church (1 Cor. 9: 9). In Galatians 4: 22-31 he works out a long allegory of the old and new covenants based on the story of Sarah and Hagar. In I Corinthians 10: 4, he uses the rock from which the Israelites received water in the desert as an allegory of Jesus Christ. When Paul used scripture in

[28] 1Corinthians 10:1; Romans 4:1; Romans 9: 10 Galatians 6: 16; Romans 9: 3; Acts 21:39; Acts 22:3

that kind of way, he was using it an a way that any Jew would recognise, appreciate and understand.

Not only did Paul know the Old Testament as a devout Jew might know it; he was also a trained Rabbi and he Knew the Old Testament as a Rabbi knew it. He knew not only the Old Testament; he also knew the special traditions of the Rabbis. He says in Galatians 3 : 19 that the Law was given through angels (Acts 7: 53; Hebrews 2: 2). In the Old Testament itself there is no mention of angels in regard to the Law; in the old story, the Law was given direct by God to Moses. But as the years went on the sheer distance between God and man began to be stressed. Men began to be fascinated by what is called the transcendence of God. They began to hold that God could never have had first-hand dealings with any man, not even with Moses, and that He must necessarily have used angels as His intermediaries; and so the Rabbinic tradition arose that the Law came to men from God by the mediation of angels. Paul knew that tradition and used it for his purposes.[29]

We have seen the essential Jewishness of Paul; and we must now turn to the other side of the picture. If there was one thing of which Paul was certain it was that his unique privilege was to be the apostle to the Gentiles.

St. Paul and Hellenistic relish

Paul the Jew was fully a citizen of the Hellenistic world. Diaspora Jews felt free to take in Hellenistic culture more deeply than did their Palestinian counterparts. They used the Greek language, took Greek names, and were more open to, and readily influenced by, their Hellenistic environment. Paul was born and spent at least his early childhood in Tarsus, a city some miles from the Mediterranean coast, in eastern Asia Minor (modern Turkey). According to an account in Acts, Paul identifies himself with these words: “I am a Jew from Tarsus, in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city; and I implore you, permit me to speak to the people.” (Acts 21:39). When he addressed the hostile mob, he began by giving his credentials: “I am a man which am a born in

[29] The same Rabbinic tradition is found in Gal.3:17; 1Cor. 10:4;

Tarsus,[30] verily Jew, a city in Cilicia." (Acts 22: 3.) In addition, Paul was a Roman citizen by birth, as the result of Roman citizenship having been granted to his father or possibly to his grandfather (Acts 22:27–28). Being a Roman citizen afforded Paul certain privileges, including freedom from certain forms of punishment, such as tormenting (Acts 22:25–26) and execution without due process, as well as the right of final appeal to Caesar (Acts 25:11–12).

Moreover, Paul was brought up in a Greek city; all the wealth of Greek literature lay open to him; yet at the most he only quotes a heathen writer twice. In Acts 17: 28 he quotes the phrase: “we are also his offspring," from Aratus, a Greek poet, and in Titus i : 12, the condemnation of the Cretans, “the Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, slow bellies," is from a poet called Epimenides. Although all the wealth of Greek literature lay open before him, Paul's book was the Old Testament.

Paul stayed in Tarsus in his formative years, a city known for its university as well as its philosophy, we might conclude that it was there that he acquired the marks of Hellenism. But Paul, as we will see, moved away from there as a very young man, though he was to return in later years (Acts 9:30; 11:25). As it is, we may safely say only that at Tarsus Paul received his firm grounding in the Greek language. His knowledge of other Hellenistic philosophy and religions he would have acquired later and by no means only from Tarsus.

In numerous ways Paul reveals that he was a Hellenistic Jew. His letters are written in the customary Greek format and employ typical Hellenistic rhetoric. His style of argument (Rom. 2; 3:1–9; 1 Cor. 9) and his ethical teaching often show a degree of influence from the Cynics and Stoics (e.g., “self-sufficiency” 2 Cor. 9:8). His metaphors and analogies often are drawn from the

[30] Tarsus was in the province of Cilicia, and it was one of the great centers at which the trade of the Mediterranean and of the hinterland of Asia Minor converged. It was especially famous for the manufacture of goats' hair felt, out of which tent-cloth, hangings, blankets, clothing, belts and saddles were made and one of its greatest sons was a tent-maker. Its greatness in trade was its own notable achievement. But not only was Tarsus a great commercial city; it was also a university town. It possessed a Roman stadium and gymnasium, and became famous as the seat of one of the three great universities of the world, ranking next to Athens and Alexandria. Philip Schaff (Edi.), Bible Dictionary, 849.

Greek games or from the commercial, political, slave trade, and military language of the Hellenistic world. And apparently he was familiar with Greco-Roman writers of the time.

St. Paul was the man of two worlds, the man who was Jewish to the last fibre of his being, but also the man who knew the Romans and the Greeks as few Jews knew them. Here indeed was the man prepared by God to be the bridge between two worlds, and to be the bridge by which the Gentiles might come to God.

Features of St. Paul's Epistles

Epistole is the Greek word from where the English word, 'epistle' is derived. A lot of studies on the preserved ancient documents have shown that the Greco Roman and Jewish letter writing followed very regular conventions. In other words, ancient letters had a certain form. This is very much like the conventional letter writing style of the modern day. It has to be noted however that these forms are not sacred as they could be changed. Studies have shown that there were four general elements of ancient Greco-Roman letters, namely:

- opening salutation which will contain the writer's name, the recipient's name, and a greeting
- a prayer, blessing, or thanksgiving
- the body of the letter (what the sender wanted to say that occasioned the letter), and
- final greeting and farewell

As we have said earlier, the letters do not have to follow the forms rigidly; there are variations which would be considered very important.

a. The Forms of Pauline Epistles

As we have said above, each part of the ancient letters was determined by the conventional style which in the Hellenistic world included an opening, the body and the closing or conclusion. It was this conventional style that St. Paul adopted for his epistles. As also indicated above, Paul did not all follow the stereotype but occasions determine what part to omit or include. A normal letter form of Paul would however have the following sections:

Opening

In the opening of most of his letters, Paul follows the conventional Hellenistic style which indicates the writer (or writers) and the recipients, which is followed by greetings. However, this conventional style would usually be extended to point to the specific purposes of the epistle. Let us take the opening of the first epistle to the Corinthians as an example. The opening in this epistle would be found in 1 Corinthians 1:1-3:

> 1 Corinthians 1:1 Paul, called as an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother,
>
> 1 Corinthians 1:2 To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours:
>
> 1 Corinthians 1:3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

In verse one above, Paul described himself as an apostle of Jesus Christ and identified Sosthenes, his co-worker as at the time the epistle was written, as the brother, which identifies as a fellow Christian as Paul and the recipients of the letter. In verse two, the recipient is identified as "the church of God at Corinth" and they are described as "sanctified ones" and "saints by calling". In place of the Hellenistic greeting, Paul would use "grace and peace" as in the third verse above. It is important to note that the later part of verse two is an identification of the relationship of both the Corinthians on the one hand and Paul and Sosthenes on the other hand within the umbrella of the Church.

Introductory Thanksgiving or Blessing

Paul, here also follows the conventional Hellenistic style wherein intimate letters begin with a thanksgiving to the gods for personal benefits received. Thus, immediately after the opening, Paul would express gratitude to God for what he has done in the lives of the "saints". Paul's style here reveals two basic structures. The first one usually has seven basic elements which will begin with thanksgiving and conclude with a *hina*[31] (purpose) clause (or any of its equivalents). In using this style, the apostle would spell out the content of his intercession for the readers.

[31] Hina (ἵνα) is a greek particle commonly seen as a form which functions to introduce purpose clauses.

Examples can be found in Colossians 1:3 -14; 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3; 2:13 and Ephesians 1:15-19. The second type was simpler in form. It usually begins with the giving of thanks and concludes with a *hoti clause*[32] in which the reason for the gratitude is given. A good example is found in 1 Corinthians 1:4-9.

It is also important to note that though the structure of Paul's thanksgiving was Hellenistic, the contents are usually influenced by the Old Testament and Jewish thought. Some also have a didactic function by setting forth important theological themes. At times the apostle would use a typical Old Testament and Jewish prayer form as in 2 Corinthians 1:3-4.

The Body of the Epistle

It is within the body of the letter that Paul's initiative comes up most because the different epistolary situations would be reflected, and the writer is at freedom to abandon the epistolary structure. Studies have revealed that the body of Paul's letters can be determined through the use of the *parakaleo*[33] sentences (such as ―I urge you, my brothers) as in 1 Corinthians 1:10; the disclosure formula (such as ―I want you to know) as in Romans 1:13 and the expression of astonishment in Galatians 1:6.

Usually, when Paul is changing the subject matter at hand, he uses a formula to indicate that there is a change. You will notice this most in 1 Corinthians. The conclusion of the body however is usually signaled by eschatological statements as in Romans 11:25-36 or his own travelling ministry as in Colossians 4:10-17.

[32] ὅτι • (hóti) subordinating conjunction. after verbs of perception and emotion, introducing a noun clause expressing a fact: that (with the same mood as the corresponding independent clause) after verbs of perception, emotion, saying, or hearing, introducing an indirect statement: that (with indicative or optative).

[33] to address, speak to, (call to, call upon), which may be done in the way of exhortation, entreaty, comfort, instruction, etc.

- to admonish, exhort
- to beg, entreat, beseech
- to console, to encourage and strengthen by consolation, to comfort
- to encourage, strengthen
- exhorting and comforting and encouraging

The Closing

At the closing again, Paul turns to the Hellenistic style. However instead of using the traditional health wish or the Greek word for exit, Paul would use a benediction or doxology. Common to Paul in the closing are references to his writing or his amanuensis and at times the phrase "a holy kiss".

b. Other Literary Traditions in Pauline Epistles

Paul's literary creativity is also attested to by the way he used other literary traditions in his epistles. The two notable ones are the use of the liturgical forms and the use of the Greco-Roman rhetoric which would be examined here briefly.

The Use of Liturgical Forms

It has been generally accepted that because most of Paul's epistles were intended to be read aloud to the congregations, the use of liturgical forms are most appropriate. The following are classed as liturgical forms: the grace benedictions, the blessings, the doxologies, the hymns and the confessional statements.

The Greco-Roman Rhetoric

Though Paul's letters are written, they are, however similar to oral speeches. This has made scholars to call for a rhetorical analysis of his arguments.

a. The Exordium, that is, the introduction

b. The Narratio, that is, the statement of facts

c. The Probatio, that is, the argument

d. The Peroratio, that is, the conclusion

In Greco -Roman rhetoric, the introduction and the conclusion were supposed to influence the audience and it concludes by recapitulating the arguments and then makes an appeal. Hence Paul's letters consist of three elements: the conciliatory in which he commends the readers for

their past performance; the middle segment which consists of the advice and the final section is the paraenesis.

Main themes of the St. Paul's Epistles

1. **The Book of Romans**

The book of Romans was probably written in AD 55–57 during the latter part of Paul's third missionary journey (Acts 20:3–21:16), most likely while he was in Corinth.

Major Theme:- God's righteousness revealed in Christ for our salvation (1:16, 17). Righteousness is the basis of a faithful relationship between God and humanity. God Himself freely offers this living and growing relationship to all through Christ.

Background:- Paul's logic in Romans proceeds largely from the use of dichotomies, in which two concepts are placed in opposition to each other; and synergies, in which two concepts work together. However, many modern commentators have seen opposition between pairs of concepts where Paul intends cooperation. These pairs of concepts include: law and grace; faith and works; Old Testament and New Testament; nature and grace; spirit and body; reality and symbol; God's faithfulness and humanity's faithfulness; secular and sacred; Church and state. The areas in which Paul truly sees opposition are fewer and more fundamental: living faith versus dead faith; living works versus dead works; good versus evil; righteousness versus unrighteousness; natural versus unnatural; faithfulness versus unfaithfulness. Romans is the most significant, the most logical, and the most doctrinally oriented of Paul's epistles, and the only one he wrote to a church he had not yet visited.

2. **The First Book of the Corinthians**

First Corinthians was probably written from Ephesus around AD 55, during Paul's third missionary journey (Acts 19:1–20:1).

Major Theme:- Communion with God versus communion with darkness. We are created for communion (Gr. koinonia) with God and with each other. Koinonia is concretely experienced in the life of the Church, which is the Body of Christ and the temple of the Holy Spirit. But

communion is not automatic; we pursue it. And while we may cooperate with evil, we are created to cooperate with God and with each other.

Background:- There were a number of problems in the Corinthian church to which Paul responds in this letter. These problems include:

- Church disunity. Many Corinthian Christians had broken into several factions based on improper loyalty to particular Christian leaders (1:12).
- Doctrinal speculations. Erroneous teaching thrived in Corinth, particularly that of the gnostic variety. (c) Moral failure. The Corinthian church, free from persecution, became spiritually weak and succumbed to the moral failure the city was famous for.
- Dealing with pagan religions. Christians in Corinth could not agree about how to respond to idolatry.
- Self-centeredness and spiritual gifts. Corinth was brilliantly endowed with spiritual gifts, perhaps as the Holy Spirit's counter to the hedonism there. But the self-centeredness of the gifted ones brought dishonor to God.

3. The Second Book of the Corinthians

Second Corinthians was written the same year as 1 Corinthians (c. AD 55) from Macedonia, where Titus rejoined Paul with a report about the Corinthian church.

Major Theme:- Reconciliation and communion. This theme is clearly seen in Paul's attempt to be reconciled to the Corinthian church.

Background:- For the historical setting of 2 Corinthians, see the Introduction to 1Corinthians. A major purpose of this second epistle is Paul's defense of his apostleship and his polemic against false apostles in Corinth. Outsiders have shown up in Corinth calling themselves “the most eminent apostles” (11:5; 12:11) or “super-apostles.” They claim to be better than Paul, alleging that he does not measure up (13:5–7). They seek to prove Paul an impostor, bringing all kinds of outrageous charges against him. In their preaching they elevate themselves (4:5) and present a different gospel from Paul's (11:4). They teach that Christians must have exalted spiritual

experiences and lead successful, painless lives, and should not be concerned about moral purity and holiness (6:14–7:1).

Paul perceives all this false teaching as a vain, earthly show, having nothing to do with God, the gospel, or the Kingdom (5:11–19). He reveals the false apostles as agents of Satan (4:3, 4; 6:15; 11:3, 13–15).

4. The Book of Galatians

The references to time and place in Galatians are unclear; therefore its exact historical setting and date are uncertain.

Major Theme:- The true gospel versus the false gospel. After initially believing in the gospel of Jesus Christ as a gift of God, many in Galatia had turned to the teaching of the Jewish legalizers, who claimed that Christians must also follow the laws of the Old Covenant. Paul writes to call them back to "the grace of Christ" (1:6).

Background:- St. Paul had established churches in a number of cities in the Roman province of Galatia in Asia Minor. This is the only New Testament letter Paul addressed to a group of churches (1:2).

5. The Book of Ephesians

St. Paul probably wrote Ephesians from Rome during his imprisonment in AD 61– 63, as recorded in Acts 28:16–31.

Major Theme:- The riches of Christ in the Church. The mystery of salvation in the Church, the body of Christ, is not only for all mankind but for all creation, affecting this age and the age to come. The body of Christ is the center and life of all.

Background:- Some of the early manuscripts do not have "in Ephesus" in verse 1. Further, the content of Ephesians is general, which gives it the character of a book rather than a letter. It includes no personal greetings, although it is addressed to a city where Paul had spent two and a half years in the midfifties AD (Acts 19:8, 10; 20:17, 31). It is probable, then, that this letter was

intended not just for the Ephesians, but also for circulation among the churches of western Asia Minor that Paul had founded from Ephesus during his third missionary journey. It is possible Ephesians is the "letter to the Laodiceans" mentioned in Colossians 4:16.

6. The book of Philippians

St. Paul probably wrote Philippians while he was under house arrest in Rome in about AD 61–63 (Acts 28:16–31). At that time, he was free to receive visitors and to correspond by letter.

Major Theme:- The dynamic of our life in Christ. Salvation is a dynamic, ongoing experience that is not merely personal, but shared among believers. St. Paul urges the believers in Philippi toward continued unity, humility, selfless generosity, and joy in Christ.

Background:- The church in Philippi was noted for its generosity in support of the apostolic ministry (1:5, 4:15, 16; Acts 16:15, 40). Recently, it had sent Epaphroditus to visit Paul in prison with a financial gift for the apostle and with instructions that he remain there with Paul. But Epaphroditus apparently was so devoted to his work that he forgot his own physical health (2:30). The Philippian church heard this and was concerned for him. In the meantime, Paul's trial had started (1:7) and he hoped for an early release (1:25; 2:24). Thus, the apostle wrote this letter of thanks to Philippi with the comforting word that he would send Epaphroditus home (2:25–30) and that he would shortly dispatch Timothy to Philippi (2:19).

7. The book of Colossians

Colossians was written at the same time as Ephesians and Philemon. These letters, along with Philippians, were most likely composed during Paul's Roman captivity, about AD 61–63 (see 4:3, 10, 18; Eph 3:1; 4:1; 6:20; Phm 9, 10, 13).

Major Theme:- Living by the will of God versus dying by false human schemes. The primary purpose of this epistle was to combat a form of Gnosticism that was taking hold in the Colossian church. Paul preaches the true gospel to the Colossians once more, emphasizing those aspects the prevalent heresy disputed (see below).

Background:- The Colossian heresy was a local blend of Jewish (perhaps Essene) and Oriental ideas. The heretics thought they were "supplementing" apostolic Christianity, which they saw as primitive, with greater knowledge and better access to spiritual things. They imagined that:-

- the hierarchy of celestial powers (the "angels" in some Jewish thought) was supreme, rather than Christ;
- Christ was not unique in His divine nature nor in His actions, for He was not God but one of several mediators;
- sin resulted from a lack of knowledge (Gr. gnosis), a particular sort of knowledge in which the heretics were specialists; and
- salvation consisted in having this gnosis imparted by a series of rituals and ascetic practices (among which Jewish rites were prized, but Christian baptism was considered a mere low-level initiation).

8. The First Book of the Thessalonians

First Thessalonians was written in Corinth in AD 50–51, about six months after the church in Thessalonica was founded. It is probably the first of Paul's New Testament epistles, and perhaps the first of all the twenty-seven New Testament books to be written.

Major Theme:- A holy life leads to eternal life. Paul calls believers to be holy (3:13; 4:3; 5:23), with particular calls to:-

- continue as examples to others (1:7),
- walk worthy of God's calling (2:12),
- stand fast in the faith (3:8), and
- maintain moral purity (4:3).

The letter closes with instruction and comfort concerning the Second Coming of Christ (4:13—5:11), along with other exhortations concerning the spiritual life.

Background:- The church in Thessalonica was founded in the summer of AD 50 during Paul's second missionary journey (Acts 15:36—18:22). Built on the Aegean Sea, Thessalonica was the

most prominent city in the Roman province of Macedonia and served as a naval and commercial center. While many of the early churches were composed primarily of Jews who believed in Christ, the Thessalonian believers were mostly Gentiles, former idol worshipers (1:9).They experienced persecution by fellow citizens, stirred up by the Jews (1:6; 2:14; Acts 17:5–9), and had difficulty adhering to Christian values in a pagan setting.

9. The Second Book of the Thessalonians

Date—This epistle was written in AD 51, probably from Corinth.

Major Theme:- Stand fast by means of apostolic teaching. Some of the Thessalonians had been shaken in their faith by speculations on Christ's return; some even said the day of the Lord had already come (2:2). As a result, these people had lost holiness of life. Paul counters such traditions of men with apostolic tradition (2:15; 3:6). Subthemes include Paul's gratitude for the people's faithfulness (1:3; 2:13) and for God's faithfulness to His people (3:3).

Background:- Paul had not paid a return visit to Thessalonica since the establishment of the church a year earlier. St. John Chrysostom observes he was "filling up by his writings what was lacking of his presence." But a few months after writing 1 Thessalonians, Paul received another report. The Thessalonians' faith amidst persecution was still firm, but speculations concerning the Second Coming were increasing, claiming to be based on Paul's teaching (2:2). Some became so excited about the end times that they abandoned their jobs and lived off the charity of the church (3:6–13). Others grew despondent and wavered in hope (2:13–17). Paul writes to encourage them to stand fast.

10. The first Book of Timothy

Probably AD 64–65. The Pastoral Epistles, 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus, appear to have been written after the events of Acts 28. If so, 1 Timothy was written before Paul's second imprisonment in Rome, perhaps from Macedonia (1:3).

Major Theme:- Pastoral care of the faithful. The Church is to manifest the kingdom of God on earth. Therefore, how the Church is run relates to both apostolic doctrine (1:1– 20; 3:14–4:5) and

worship (2:1–15). Subthemes include: The role of clergy; Combating heresy; Care for women, widows, and slaves; Money and ministry

Background:- First Timothy is both personal and pastoral. Whereas most of Paul's letters are addressed to the Church in a particular location, the pastoral epistles are written to instruct specific leaders—in this case Timothy, Bishop of Ephesus. Paul speaks as an experienced mentor instructing his student, his "son," as apostle to younger apostle or bishop to youthful bishop.

In Ephesus, some church members were promoting a variety of theological opinions —from the irrelevant to the dangerously heretical (1:3–7; 4:1, 2, 7; 6:3–5). These heterodox ideas were a mosaic of Jewish (1:4, 7), ascetic (4:1–5), gnostic (4:4, 5), and docetic (2:5; 3:16; 6:13) thought. The Church was also dealing with external pressures of Hellenistic piety, the mystery religions, which made much use of the terms "salvation" and "savior," and with the cult of emperor worship, according to which Caesar is "Lord."

These letters hold incomparable insight into the historical workings of the early Church as guided by the Holy Spirit and are a foundational source for pastoral theology, for clergy and their relationship to the Church.

11. The Second Book of Timothy

Date—AD 65–67. This letter was written from Rome (1:17) when Paul was chained, suffering, and near his execution.

Major Theme:- Overcoming hardship in the ministry. Ordained ministers use their spiritual gifts in the Church to keep and pass on her living tradition (1:13, 14; 2:2, 8, 11– 13, 15; 3:14–17; 4:3). Through living tradition—the Bible and the ongoing life of the Holy Spirit in the body of Christ—the Church remains essentially as she was at her inception.

Background:- Paul has been a prisoner in Rome for some time. Although no one stood with him at his first hearing, he successfully defended himself and "was delivered out of the mouth of the lion" (4:16, 17). Nonetheless, he has no hope for acquittal. He knows his end is at hand (4:6–8).

Worse, friends have turned against him (1:15; 4:16–18); only Luke is assisting him. Paul longs to see Timothy once more.

This is probably Paul's last letter. He knows his martyrdom is near and looks forward to being with the Lord (4:8). Paul was martyred under Emperor Nero about AD 67.

12. The Book of Titus

Date—AD 63–65. The circumstances, content, and organization of Titus are similar to those of 1 Timothy. The two books were probably written about the same time. Paul's work with Titus on Crete does not fit into the time covered by the Book of Acts, so it probably occurred after Paul's release from his first imprisonment in Rome.

Major Theme:- Overseeing the Church according to the true faith. As the Church grew, it naturally developed theology and structure and encountered heresy and sub-Christian behavior among its members, as had been prophesied. Paul here advises Titus as he faces these issues.

Background:- Titus was a Gentile converted to Christ by St. Paul (1:4). After Paul was released from prison in Rome about AD 63, he and Titus visited Crete (1:5). When Paul moved on, he appointed Titus as apostolic overseer there. After Paul left Titus in charge of consolidating and organizing the church on the island of Crete, he found theological problems there similar to those being confronted by Timothy in Asia Minor: elements of Judaism binding Christians, and early Gnosticism. But the native culture of Crete was more vicious than those found in Asia Minor. Further, whereas Timothy was restoring order in established churches, Titus was establishing order in young churches.

13. The Book of Philemon

Date—AD 61–63. Philemon was written at the same time as Colossians, most likely from Rome during Paul's first Roman captivity.

Major Theme:-No longer slaves, we are brothers and sisters in Christ. Background—Philemon (Gr. “affectionate”) had been converted by Paul (v. 19) and was a member of the church in Colosse (Col 4:9). Onesimus (Gr. “useful”) had been an “un useful” slave of Philemon, for he

had run away, providing for his needs from the stolen treasury of his master—an offense punishable by death. Somehow Onesimus reached Paul, who brought him to Christ. He then became “useful” to Paul.

According to Roman law, Onesimus still belonged to Philemon. So, Paul sent Onesimus back to Colosse with this letter under the care of Tychicus, who was also carrying the letters to the Colossians and the Ephesians. Paul urges Philemon to receive Onesimus with forgiveness as a brother in the Lord, and hints that he would not be displeased if Philemon released Onesimus from bondage in order to free him for service to Paul.

According to ancient tradition, Philemon was consecrated bishop of Colosse and later martyred. Onesimus may be the same Onesimus whom Ignatius mentions as bishop of Ephesus, forty years after this incident.

14. The Book of Hebrews

Author—In the early centuries of the Church, several differing opinions circulated as to who wrote Hebrews. By the fourth century most witnesses ascribed Hebrews to St. Paul, including St. John Chrysostom (d. AD 407) and St. Athanasius (d. AD 373). Church historian Eusebius (d. c. AD 340) included Hebrews in his list of Paul's epistles, but noted that Rome rejected the letter because it was not Pauline. A Council at Carthage (AD 397) canonized Hebrews as one of fourteen epistles of Paul. All Orthodox lectionaries introduce Hebrews with “the reading from the Epistle of the Holy Apostle Paul to the Hebrews.” Nevertheless, most biblical scholars today agree authorship of the letter is uncertain.

Date—The content of the epistle and the witness of the early Church argue for some time near AD 70.

Major Theme:- Persevering faith in the incarnate Son. Jesus Christ is superior to the prophets, angels, Moses, and Aaron. He offers a better priesthood, sanctuary, and sacrifice, for in His worship we enter heaven. Therefore, we must faithfully hold fast to Him.

Background:- Hebrews seems to be written to Greek-speaking Jewish Christians, perhaps in Palestine, who was being drawn back to Judaism. Indeed, some had returned to their roots, partly because of a low view of Jesus. Hence the subthemes: the superiority of Christ and His sacrifice over Judaism, and encouragement to continue in the Christian faith.

4.4 St.Peter's and Other Epistles

The book of James

The author identifies himself as "James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ" (1:1). Early Church tradition ascribes this letter to James, the "brother" or kinsman of our Lord and first bishop of Jerusalem, known as James the Just.

Date:- AD 55–60. James the Just was martyred about AD 62. Some consider his letter the first New Testament book, written after the martyrdom of Stephen and the dispersion of Christians from Jerusalem (Acts 8:1).

Major Theme:- The harmony of faith and works. The letter has many direct parallels with the Sermon on the Mount. James does not teach we are saved by works, but he does teach that a dead faith, one without works, does not save. This is an early polemic against invisible religion, wherein salvation by faith has no visible works, and against antinomianism, the teaching that moral behavior is irrelevant to salvation. James is clear: the human will is not bypassed in salvation; grace does not nullify personal responsibility.

Background:- Unlike most New Testament letters, James does not address a particular church, or even a geographical region, but "the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad" (1:1). Though James was a Jewish Christian and assumes the recipients are familiar with the Old Testament, the letter is written in elegant Greek. There is no indication that it addresses only Jewish Christians. The people James addresses are experiencing various trials: persecution, deception, economic injustice and poverty, apostasy and personal fragmentations in the Church. James uses his authority as bishop to rekindle true living faith and encourage repentance, patience, and self-control.

The First Book of Peter

After Peter had helped to establish the church in Antioch, he preached to Jews and converts to Judaism throughout northern Asia Minor (1:1). Later, in Rome, hearing the churches of Asia Minor were being persecuted, he wrote them this letter of encouragement.

Date—First Peter was composed at Rome (5:13) sometime in AD 50–67. The exact date Peter arrived in Rome is unclear; tradition says he was martyred there later in Nero's reign, c. AD 67.

Major Theme:- Rejoice in sharing the sufferings of Christ. The First Epistle of Peter is an exhortation for Christians suffering persecution to remember and live in their baptism. As baptism is a death and a resurrection, so Christians must enter into unjust suffering with a spirit of death and resurrection. Our goal is the fulfillment of baptism—heaven. This requires unwavering commitment now to (a) holiness (1:3–2:10), (b) submission in the roles we have in life (2:11–3:12), (c) patient suffering in this age as we prepare for the age to come (3:13–4:19), and (d) disciplined unity in the Church (5:1–11).

Background:- The dispersion of which Peter speaks (1:1) is unknown. After the martyrdom of Stephen (c. AD 33), many Christians fled from persecution in Jerusalem. Or Peter may be speaking more generally, of Christians at large, who were often ill- treated and forced into exile because of their faith. We are told these Christians live in five provinces of Asia Minor (1:1), located in the central and northern segments of the peninsula.

The Second Book of Peter

Given Peter's authorship, the date is likely AD 63–67, during Peter's imprisonment in Rome.

Major Theme:- True knowledge versus false knowledge. Though the world disbelieves, deceives and mocks, Christians must maintain apostolic doctrine and an orthodox Christian way of life. We are to grow continually in holiness and virtue and pursue an entrance into “the everlasting kingdom” (1:11) which is to come.

Background:- Of the 27 New Testament books, the canonicity of 2 Peter has been questioned most. However, there is unmistakable evidence it was known and used in the early Church, and its canonicity was settled in the fourth century.

Peter apparently wrote his second epistle from Roman imprisonment. The people addressed know the author (1:16) and seem to be Gentiles, former pagans, in territory evangelized by Paul (2:18, 20–22; 3:15, 16).

The Church has been infiltrated by gnostic-sounding, antinomian (lit., "against the law") teachers, who taught that faith saves apart from repentance, works, or virtue. They deny that the Second Coming is a physical, historical event and that morality is irrelevant to salvation. The whole Church is threatened, especially the new converts; some have already fallen away.

The Book of Jude

Jude, a relative of Jesus (called the "brother" of the Lord in Mt 13:55; Mk 6:3) and the brother of James the Just. This is not the Jude who was one of the Twelve, also called Thaddaeus or Lebbaeus (v. 17; see Mt 10:3; Mk 3:18; Lk 6:16; Acts 1:13).

The date of the letter is uncertain, but sometime in the period AD 60–80 seems reasonable.

Major Theme:- Contending earnestly for the faith. Jude is a polemic directed against false teachers within the Church who are jeopardizing the salvation of many. Jude bases his attack on examples from the Old Testament and the tradition of God dealing harshly with those who assault His people.

Background:- To whom Jude writes is difficult to discern. Some scholars have suggested that the addressees are Christians from a Hellenistic Jewish background. The heresy Jude opposes seems to be an early form of gnosticism. These heretics are still members of the Church (vv. 4, 12, 22, 23), carrying on an aggressive campaign of propaganda and subversion. Jude's mode of attack is more ad hominem, that is, a censure of persons, than theological: We will know them by their fruits, he says. These heretics are obviously bad trees; they are not to be honored with a theological rebuttal.