

**Introduction to the Bible**

Lesson Three – The Story of the New Testament

- I. Institutions and Parties in Judea and the Land of Israel
  - A. The Temple and Priesthood
    1. Jewish historians use the term “Second Temple Period” to refer to the time in Jewish history between the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem in 516 B.C. (following the Babylonian exile) and the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70
      - a. The temple that was initially rebuilt by the returning Jewish exiles was extremely modest
      - b. Four hundred ninety-seven years later (in 19 B.C.), Herod the Great began a major reconstruction of the temple in Jerusalem
        - (1) This reconstruction was part of an ambitious building program that Herod began after 31 B.C., following the extension of his realm by Caesar Augustus
        - (2) The first phase of the temple expansion occurred from 19 to 10 B.C.
        - (3) Work on the temple continued long after Herod’s death in 4 B.C. – not fully completed until A.D. 64
    2. Through the Second Temple Period, the empires that controlled Judea allowed considerable autonomy in local affairs and practiced a policy of non-intervention in the religious life of the Jewish people
    3. The high priesthood was the central office within Jewish society and gradually grew beyond its initial religious and ritualistic function
      - a. The Hasmoneans served as high priests themselves
      - b. Aristobulus, the last of the Hasmonean high priests, was murdered by Herod
      - c. Herod then gave the high priesthood to a succession of priestly families from the Egyptian diaspora
        - (1) They were legitimate priests
        - (2) However, they were Jews more influenced, as Herod was, by Hellenism
      - d. Herod also established the idea that the high priesthood was no longer the sole possession of one family (a position that was transferred from father to son), but an appointment decided by the reigning monarch (or, later, Rome)
    4. During Herod’s reign, there was the creation of a priestly oligarchy

5. After direct Roman rule was introduced to Judea in A.D. 6, the high priesthood was controlled by a small number of extremely wealthy, Sadducean families
  6. The New Testament portrays the “chief priests” as anxiously guarding their positions and standing opposed to Jesus because He was viewed as a threat to the existing system (John 11:48)
- B. The Sects
1. Pharisees
    - a. The name comes from the word *parash*, “to separate”
      - (1) They were those who sought to carefully keep the Mosaic law - distinguishing themselves by their care in such matters from the common people
      - (2) Open to any Jewish male who desired to embrace this discipline
    - b. Traced to the “Hasidim” (1 Macc 2:42ff) and, even earlier, to the reorganization of the Jewish community in Judea around the Law, under the leadership of Ezra
    - c. Associated with the synagogue
  2. Sadducees
    - a. The name is associated with Zadok, the most prominent high priest during the time of King David
    - b. The Sadducees were the wealthy and exclusive religious party to whom the high priests belonged
    - c. Associated with the Temple
    - d. Sadducees were the theological “liberals” of their day
  3. Essenes - exclusive, celibate religious sect devoted to ritual purity
  4. The Dead Sea Sect (Qumran community)
  5. Zealots
- C. The Synagogue
1. Developed during the exilic period
  2. Centers of Jewish community life and worship (the study of God’s Law)
  3. Synagogues played a key role in the early church
    - a. Synagogues throughout the world brought a knowledge of Israel’s God and religion to all Gentile cities in which there were Jewish communities
    - b. Synagogues provided the apostles with a base of operation
- D. The Sanhedrin
1. Josephus and the New Testament depict the Sanhedrin as primarily a political body, with the high priest serving in some capacity of leadership (this would be prior to the destruction of the temple)
  2. Rabbinic sources refer to the Sanhedrin as a legislative body that

determines rabbinic traditions, comprised of seventy (or seventy-one) elders (this would be after the reorganization of Judaism under Yohanan ben Zakkai, after the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70)

## II. The Messianic Hope

A. The Gospels record the following expectations with regard to the Jewish messianic hope:

1. The people expected the Messiah to appear (Jn 1:20,41; 4:29; 7:31; Lk 3:15)
2. The Messiah would be the son of David (Mt 21:9; 22:42)
3. While he was to be born in Bethlehem (Jn 7:42; Mt 2:5), there was a tradition that he would suddenly appear among the people from an obscure origin (Jn 7:27)
4. When the Messiah appeared, he would remain forever (Jn 12:34)

B. The most important expectation was that the Messiah would be the Davidic king (Mt 2:1-18)

## III. The Beginning of the New Testament Period

A. At the beginning of this period, the majority of the world's Jews lived outside the land of Israel

1. Large Jewish communities could be found throughout the Roman Empire and the Near East
2. However, the Jews of the Diaspora recognized the land of Israel, and especially the city of Jerusalem, as their true home – it was there that the temple stood, the heart of their national life

B. Herod the Great died in 4 B.C., having reigned over Judea for 35 years

1. His political success was the result of his ability to maintain law and order, albeit ruthlessly; this was the primary reason for the continued support of Rome
2. Prior to Herod's death, Matthew tells us that Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea (Matt 2:1), possibly ca. 6 B.C.
  - a. Herod's fear led him to commit most of his crimes, especially those within his family
  - b. Matthew records his most notorious crime – the massacre of all the male children, two and under, in Bethlehem
3. In his will, Herod recommended his kingdom be divided between three sons: Archelaus, Antipas, and Philip
  - a. Archelaus received Judea, Idumea, and Samaria
  - b. Herod Antipas received Galilee and Perea
    - (1) He imprisoned and executed John the Baptist
    - (2) He met Jesus on the day of His crucifixion
  - c. Philip received the lands of Gaulanitis, Batanea, Trachonitis, Auranitis, and the district around Panias

- (1) He built Caesarea Philippi
      - (2) He proved to be an exceptionally good leader
    - 4. Archelaus proved to be an inept, unjust, and cruel leader
      - a. After ten years, Archelaus was banished and Rome ruled Judea directly, making it a Roman province ruled by prefects
      - b. Except for the short reign of Herod Arippa I (A.D. 41-44), Judea remained a Roman province from A.D. 6 to 66
  - C. The land of Israel under Roman rule
    - 1. The Romans set up their headquarters at Caesarea, on the coast
    - 2. In A.D. 14, Caesar Augustus died and was succeeded by Tiberius
    - 3. In A.D. 26, Tiberius named Pontius Pilate prefect (governor) of Judea
- IV. In the Fullness of Time
- A. John the Baptist
    - 1. In A.D. 27/28, John the Baptist (or Baptizer) began his public ministry
    - 2. Luke writes, *"In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, (2) during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness."* (Luke 3:1-2)
    - 3. John's preached the kingdom and the need for repentance
    - 4. The climax of John's ministry was the baptism of Jesus, whom John recognized as the Coming One
    - 5. John's execution at the hands of Herod Antipas marked the end of the era of the law and the prophets (Lk 7:24-28; 16:16)
    - 6. The memory of John remained for many years; twenty-five years after John's death, Paul met a group of people in Ephesus who claimed to have received John's baptism (Acts 19:3)
  - B. Jesus Christ of Nazareth
    - 1. Jesus is mentioned, directly and indirectly, in non-biblical literature
    - 2. However, the New Testament is our primary source for the life and teachings of Jesus
    - 3. According to Luke 3:23, Jesus was about thirty years old when He began His ministry
    - 4. After John the Baptist's imprisonment, Jesus moved from Nazareth to Capernaum (Mt 9:1)
    - 5. The Gospel's record the three years of Jesus' public ministry
      - a. Galilean ministry
      - b. Judean and Perea ministry
      - c. Focus given to the Passion week

6. The death, burial, resurrection, post-resurrection ministry, and ascension of Jesus Christ are recorded in the Gospels
- C. The Four-Fold Gospel
1. Mark's Gospel (mid- to late 50's) is the shortest and generally regarded today as the first Gospel to have been written
    - a. Thus, Mark's outline of Jesus' ministry has become the basic structure followed by Matthew and Luke through which His life has been traced
    - b. Mark is more a Gospel of action than of teaching
      - (1) Things happen "immediately" - one of Mark's favorite expressions; Mark records many miracles and healings
      - (2) Mark has only two discourses: the parables of the kingdom (4:1-33) and the eschatological discourse (13:1-37)
      - (3) Mark highlights Jesus as the suffering Son of Man
  2. The Gospel of Matthew (late 50's or early 60's) focuses on Jesus' relationship to Israel (the prophecies He fulfills) and explains Israel's rejection of Him
    - a. The message was not limited to Israel but included the whole world
    - b. Matthew has five major discourses are the "backbone" of the book (chapters 5-7; 10; 13; 18; 24-25)
    - c. As the promised King of the Jews, Jesus heals, teaches the real meaning of the Old Testament in all its dimensions, calls for a practical righteousness, inaugurates the kingdom
    - d. Matthew associates all of this with "the kingdom of heaven" - this kingdom is both present and yet to come
  3. Luke's Gospel (early 60's) is the longest
    - a. Luke provides a mix of teaching, miracles, and parables (Luke gives more parables than any other Gospel)
    - b. Jesus appears as the Messiah-Servant-Lord
  4. John's Gospel (mid-80's) emphasizes Jesus as the Sent One from God, who acts in unity with the Father
    - a. John highlights Jesus' uniqueness from the declaration of the incarnation, through a narration of seven signs, to the use of multiple discourses and dialogues
    - b. John's themes focus on Christology
    - c. Unlike the Synoptics, John speaks little of the kingdom
      - (1) Rather, it is eternal life that is the key theme
      - (2) The emphasis in the term "eternal life" is not only the duration of the life, but also its quality

- V. The Early Church in Jerusalem and Beyond
- A. The Book of Acts (originally “Book Two” of Luke’s two-part work on the life and ministry of Jesus Christ) traces the growth of Christianity – as the good news of Jesus Christ goes from “...*Jerusalem...all Judea...Samaria and to the end of the earth*” (Acts 1:8)
1. Acts tells how God directed the inclusion of Samaritans and Gentiles and took the message from Jerusalem to Rome, the capital of the empire – how an originally Jewish movement came to include all peoples
  2. The central figures in the book are:
    - a. Peter (chapters 1–5 and 10–12)
    - b. Evangelists from the Hellenistic believing community, such as Stephen (the first martyr) and Philip (chapters 6–8)
    - c. And Paul (chapters 9 and 13–28)
  3. Discourses are important to the book, whether they be missionary speeches to call people to belief or defense speeches where the Christian mission is explained
- B. The Apostle Paul (came to faith ca. A.D. 35)
1. Paul’s background is one of the best known in the New Testament
  2. The Book of Acts records Paul’s Missionary Journeys
    - a. First journey (A.D. 47 to 48)
    - b. Jerusalem Council (A.D. 49)
      - (1) Various “parties” within the Church
      - (2) The role of James
    - c. Second journey (A.D. 49 to 52)
    - d. Third journey (A.D. 53 to 57)
  3. Paul was arrested in Jerusalem and taken to Rome (A.D. 59 to 62)
  4. Paul’s New Testament letters (in chronological order)
    - a. Galatians – A.D. 48
    - b. First and Second Thessalonians – A.D. 49-51
    - c. First Corinthians – A.D. 53-55
    - d. Second Corinthians – A.D. 55-56
    - e. Romans – A.D. 57
    - f. Philippians – A.D. 62
    - g. Colossians – A.D. 62
    - h. Ephesians – A.D. 62
    - i. Philemon – A.D. 62
    - j. First Timothy – A.D. 62-64
    - k. Titus – A.D. 62-64
    - l. Second Timothy – A.D. 65
  5. Paul was beheaded ca. A.D. 65 (probably part of the persecution which broke out in Rome in A.D. 64 under Nero)

- C. "...the fortunes of Judean Christianity during the twenty years between the promulgation of the Jerusalem decree and the destruction of the Temple and city by the Romans under Titus are for the most part unchronicled"<sup>1</sup>
- D. Of the Jewish mission entrusted to James, Peter, and John (Gal 2:1-10), very little is known
  - 1. It appears Peter and John traveled
  - 2. James did not; although, his epistle hints at a wider sphere of authority beyond Jerusalem (Jam 1:1) –
    - a. James wrote his epistle ca. A.D. 44
    - b. James was martyred in A.D. 62
      - (1) At some point between the death of James and the outbreak of the revolt against the Romans (A.D. 66), the church received an oracle to leave the city
      - (2) The saints in Jerusalem settled in Pella, one of the cities of the Decapolis
  - 3. Peter wrote two letters
    - a. First Peter – A.D. 62-63
    - b. Second Peter – A.D. 64-65
  - 4. John wrote three letters, all dated between A.D. 85 to 95
    - a. He also wrote Revelation while on the island of Patmos in the mid-A.D. 90's (persecution under Domitian [A.D. 81-96])
    - b. Tradition says John died in Ephesus around the year A.D. 100, the last of the twelve apostles of Jesus Christ
- E. Remaining New Testament epistles
  - 1. Jude (the brother of James) – mid- A.D. 60's
  - 2. Hebrews (author unknown) – A.D. 60-70
- F. The Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed in A.D. 70 by General Titus
  - 1. The destruction of Jerusalem was part of a larger campaign against the Jews, known as the "First Jewish War"
  - 2. This war lasted from A.D. 66 to 72 (the fall of Masada)
- G. By the end of the first century, Christianity was well-established in the Roman world and had spread throughout the empire and beyond

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<sup>1</sup>F.F. Bruce, *New Testament History*, page 368