



## **UNIT C: The Gospels**

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## Unit C The Gospels

**The aim of this unit is to help us see the Bible as a whole.** The New Testament is rooted in the Jewish heritage of Jesus and the first disciples. The Gospel writers tell us that Old Testament promises and prophecies find their fulfilment in Jesus. So the Unit will:

- Provide an introduction to the Gospels
- Introduce the key theological theme of God's Kingdom in the gospels
- Help you make connections between the New Testament and today, applying your learning to discipleship, ministry and worship

During this module you will be asked to read the whole of the Gospel according to Mark. Ideally, you should also find time to read the other three Gospels: the more you are familiar with them the more you will understand about Jesus and the beginnings of Christianity. You may prefer to listen to the Gospels. See 'Further Resources' below (page 90). Please read the Gospel passages **before** you look at the accompanying notes and, if you don't have time for both, read the Gospels rather than the notes!

As you read be sure to refer to the glossary given in the previous unit and at the end of this one for any words that are not familiar.



**Resource Section: Please read the following before Session 1**

### The New Testament:

The New Testament has 27 books, written between about 50 and 100 AD, and falling naturally into two sections: the Gospels, which tell the story of Jesus (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John); and the Letters (or Epistles), written by various Christian leaders to provide guidance for the earliest church communities.

### The Gospels

The Gospels were written to present the life and teachings of Jesus in ways that would be appropriate to different readerships, and for that reason are not all the same. They share some characteristics with other 'lives' written in the ancient world, but they are primarily an account of the way that Jesus is the promised 'Good News' for the world. (Gospel comes from the Anglo-Saxon word, *godspell*, which means good news).

The writer of Luke probably also wrote the Acts of the Apostles, which tells the story of how Christianity spread from being a small group of Jewish believers in the time of Jesus to becoming a worldwide faith in less than a generation.

**From Stephen Motyer, 'The Old Testament in the New Testament'**

"The New Testament authors generally assumed knowledge of the Old Testament context from which quotations were drawn. They did not want simply to jettison their Jewish heritage, but sought genuinely to understand how the 'word' spoken through the prophets related to the new 'word' now revealed in Christ.

The New Testament authors both use the Old Testament to explain Jesus and use Jesus to explain the Old Testament in a circular process in which each is illuminated by the other. All the great themes of the Old Testament are confirmed, even when they are also developed in various ways: God as the one creator and ruler of the nations, the election of Israel to be the light of salvation for the world, the presence of God with his people, the possibility (and actuality) of revelation through appointed instruments, history as moving toward God's purposed goal for the world."

*Stephen Motyer, 'The Old Testament in the New Testament' in Walter A. Elwell (ed.), Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House Company, 1996.*

**Read the following pairs of Bible passages.** In each case, how might knowing the Old Testament passage help us to understand the New Testament passage?

Psalm 22.1-8, 17-18      *and*      Matthew 27.39-46

Daniel 7.13-14      *and*      Mark 13.24-26

1 Samuel 2.1-10      *and*      Luke 1.46-55

Deuteronomy 18.15-18      *and*      John 6.14, 7.40-41

**Further reading, if you have time:**

**The world between the Testaments – Judaism and Hellenism**

What happened in the hundreds of years between the end of the Old Testament, when the Jews are re-settled in Israel, following exile in Babylon and the birth of Jesus? This history had a profound effect on the way the Jews thought of themselves and the world around

them. We need to look at the history of occupation and the influence of the spread of foreign ideas.

## **Judaism and Hellenism**

'Every book of the New Testament reflects to varying degrees an accommodation between Jewish religious and ethical values and traditions and Hellenistic forms of linguistic, literary, rhetorical and conceptual expression.'

*David E Aune, The New Testament in its Literary Environment, Cambridge, James Clarke and Co, 1988, p12.*

Jews had been influenced by Greek culture (Hellenization – 'Hellas' is the Greek name for Greece) since the fourth century BC. When Alexander the Great defeated the Babylonian empire Greek became the language of business and commerce. The Romans, though they defeated the Greek's governments, had great respect for Greek language and culture. This produced a kind of Greek city structure with Roman political and military might.

Hebrew fell into disuse, and a translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek made during the second century BC (the Septuagint, traditionally abbreviated LXX), became 'the Scriptures' for most Jews.

Some of the key information about Jewish history in this period comes from the books of the Maccabees. Written in Hebrew in the second century BC, they were included in the Greek Septuagint, and would have been well known to many Jews in the first century AD. (They are accepted as Scripture by Roman Catholics, but not by Protestants). 1 Maccabees is set a century after the conquest of Judea by the Greeks under Alexander the Great. The book covers the whole of the Maccabaeian revolt, from 175 to 134 BC. You can read 1 Maccabees chap. 1 in the section of the Bible known as the Apocrypha.

Hellenization raised a vital question for Jews: how far can you adapt to the world around without abandoning your faith? Some Jews appear to have seen Hellenization as an opportunity rather than a problem. They welcomed the links with the wider Greek speaking world, and assimilated many aspects of Greek life and thought. But others wanted to preserve Jewish distinctiveness. During the reign of Antiochus IV Epiphanes there was increasing tension between the two groups, and then open conflict.

In 167 BC pagan worship was introduced into the Temple, and the Greek rulers banned the practice of the Law of Moses in Judah and Jerusalem. Eating pork became a test of loyalty: those who refused to eat were seen as part of the rebellion. Many fled to the mountains to join a Jewish revolt under Judas Maccabeus. The aim was to liberate the Temple, the city, and the land from pagan abominations.

This aim was largely achieved, but it left unanswered the question of how Jews were to live in a largely pagan (Greek, then Roman) world. The Jews wanted the freedom to practise their own religion, but they also wanted to be part of the wider society. Especially in the wider Jewish Diaspora (outside the traditional lands) there was considerable adaptation to the wider culture. Even within Judah, in the aftermath of the Maccabaeian revolt, we see the emergence of various Jewish groups, each with their own answer to the question of what it means to be Jewish. Two of these were the Sadducees and Pharisees.

Broadly speaking, Sadducees were concerned to ensure the survival of the Jewish State, and were prepared to co-operate with foreign powers and Hellenization to achieve this aim. Pharisees were concerned with obedience to the Jewish Law – both the written Torah, and the traditions that had grown up about how it should be interpreted. They were nationalistic and opposed Hellenization.

'For the Pharisees, Jews were the people of the Torah. For the Sadducees they were the people of the land and of the State of Israel. To be sure, their differences were a matter of emphasis rather than exclusion. The Sadducees dominated the priesthood and controlled most of the positions of political power. For the Pharisees Jewish life rested on quite a different institution—the synagogue, the school and the Bet Midrash, the house of study.'  
(Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, *Jewish Chronicle*, June 1999).

### **1<sup>st</sup> century Jewish beliefs.**

There was considerable diversity of practice and opinion among Jews in the first century AD. Some scholars, Neusner, for example, write about the 'Judaisms' of this period. But the various groups also had things in common:

- Commitment to the ancient Scriptures of Israel as God's word to them (Though disagreed about which were authoritative),
- Explicit claim to be 'Israel', and criticism of other claimants
- The certainty that all who belong to this community are truly the people of God.

This definition would of course include most of the early Christian groups and it seemed that for some years after Jesus' ascension the Jewish Christians continued to worship in the synagogue and did not see themselves as having a separate faith.

One way of defining a religious group is to find out what they argue about – what they thought is important enough to argue about – rather than what they agree on. All the various Jewish groups; Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, Zealots, Scribes, others who didn't define themselves with any party label and the followers of Jesus thought that the following subjects were crucial issues to debate and commit themselves to:

- 1) being the heirs of Abraham and Moses, God's own people
- 2) being obedient to Mosaic Law, including the Sabbath and purity regulations
- 3) the way to keep festivals, rituals and where to pray
- 4) angels and the spirit world
- 5) the future hope

- 1) **The legacy of the past.** Who were the true children of Abraham, the people of the covenant? Were the Samaritans to be included? Those who had sinned, or become impure?
- 2) **Law** All agreed that Torah was vital. The first five books of the Old Testament explain the people's origins, their status as the chosen people of God, the conditions for the Covenant with God, and the regulations that mark the people out as distinctive. But there was much disagreement as to how to apply Torah to daily life.
- 3) **Temple and Festivals.** Central to the Covenant is the promise of the land. Since the return from Exile, this idea is focussed in Jerusalem. But Samaritans rejected the Temple at Jerusalem in favour of Mount Gerazim. The Essene Community at Qumran also rejected the Temple, because of its current state. Sadducees placed the Temple at the heart of their faith. For most other Jews, worship at the Temple was occasional, and centred around the pilgrim festivals, for which people travelled to Jerusalem. For these people, so far as everyday religion was concerned, the synagogue was more important. Some festivals could

be celebrated at home, such as Succoth. Jesus' followers had to decide whether to change their existing patterns of worship.

- 4) **Angels and the world of spirits** Ancient traditions described God as the leader of the heavenly host. In Torah, we meet angels who represent God and declare his will. Later biblical books (e.g. Daniel) describe a detailed angelology. There was also a developing belief in Satan, a power hostile to God. In the Old Testament, Satan is an accuser, or means of temptation (e.g. Zech. 3, 1 Chron. 21) but later we find Satan as the chief enemy of God with his own powers. Overcoming these is a major theme of later Jewish writing, though Acts 23, 8 tells us that the Sadducees did not believe in angels or spirits.
- 5) **The Future Hope.** - Eschatology refers to the eschata, the end things. The central theme is that God is going to act again, and his righteousness will appear in the world. For many first century Jews, the future hope and the promise of God's establishment of a new order in which his people would be vindicated were absolutely central to faith. Important ideas include the division of the future age into 'ages:' a period of disorder and upheaval ('birth pangs') before the new age arrived:

'This therefore shall be the sign. When a stupor shall seize the inhabitants of the earth, and they shall fall into many tribulations, and again when they shall fall into great torments' *Syrian Baruch 25.2-3, cf Mark 13.7 ff*

The new age would be **on earth**:

'The kingship and dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the holy ones of the Most High; their kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey them.' *Daniel 7.27.*

The idea of general resurrection had become central to many, including the Pharisees, but was not shared by the Sadducees, who rejected this.

## The hoped-for Messiah

After the end of the Babylonian captivity, there were hopes for a further restoration. Zechariah 6.13-14 tells of a 'Branch' who

'shall build the temple of the Lord; he shall bear royal honour, and shall sit upon his throne and rule. There shall be a priest by his throne, with peaceful understanding between the two of them.'

In the Old Testament, the word 'messiah' means '**anointed** with holy oil.'

- The word is used of 'the anointed priests' (Leviticus 4:3, 5, 16, 6:22; 2 Maccabees 2:10)
- The word is used of the king throughout 1 & 2 Sam. and in Psalms 2:2; 18:50; 20:6 etc.
- The word is used of Cyrus, a Persian (Isaiah 45:1)
- The word is used of the prophets (Psalm 105:15; 1 Chronicles. 16:22)

But there are very few uses of the word in the Old Testament to express the sort of hope seen in the 'branch' passage from Zechariah. One of the clearest examples is Daniel 9.25

'... from the time that the word went out to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the time of an anointed prince (*mashiach nagid*),

The word does however appear in other Jewish writings. Material from Qumran (the 'Dead Sea Scrolls') including the 'Community Rule' and the so-called 'Resurrection fragment' express clear **messianic** hopes (see Geza Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, 4<sup>th</sup> Edn. London: Penguin Books, 1998):

'Until there shall come the Prophet and the Messiahs of Aaron and Israel'  
(1Q IX.12, Vermes p110)

'And then [the Messiah of Israel shall [come]]' (1QSa 2:12; Vermes p159)

'... [the heavens and the earth will listen to His Messiah]' (4Q521, Vermes p391)

'He will heal the wounded, and revive the dead and bring good news to the poor'  
(4Q521, Vermes p392)

One of the fullest statements of the hope for a messiah is in the Psalms of Solomon. This collection of Psalms is NOT recognised by either Jews or Christians as Scripture. Probably written in the second century BC, Psalms of Solomon 17 tells of a human descendent of David, anointed by the spirit of God, at the end of the present age. His actions will bring about the new age for Israel. He will exercise a military role in ridding the holy city of defilement, and will reign over the nations.

#### **Further resources for this Unit:**

**Read the New Testament** itself! It's surprising how many Church members haven't. Or listen, e.g.

New Testament and Classical Psalms on Pickwick Label (B003ASNWK), *or*

The Message, Oasis Audio (ISBN-10: 1598594567, ISBN-13: 978-1598594560)

*or listen to*

Complete Audio Bible, read by David Suchet (ISBN: 9781444786408)

*or watch*

A dramatic presentation: [https://www.amazon.co.uk/d/DVD-Blu-ray/Gospel-Mark/0745968716/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1485615147&sr=8-1&keywords=Mark%27s+gospel+dvd](https://www.amazon.co.uk/d/DVD-Blu-ray/Gospel-Mark/0745968716/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1485615147&sr=8-1&keywords=Mark%27s+gospel+dvd)

KNOWLES, Andrew, *The Bible Guide*. Lion: 2006 is an excellent overview of the Bible.

WRIGHT, N.T. *The 'Matthew, Mark, Luke, John for everyone'* series published by SPCK is recommended.

BURRIDGE, Richard, *Four Gospels, One Jesus*, SPCK, 2013.

GISBEY, Joseph, *Follow: walking in the dust of the Rabbi*, DLT 2015 gives the Jewish background to Jesus' ministry and describes the Gospels in that setting.

GOLDINGAY, John: *Reading Jesus's Bible - 'How the NT helps us to understand the Old Testament'* Eerdmans 2017.

## SESSION 1 Between Old and New Testaments



### Opening worship

Jesus and his first disciples were born Jews, and to start with his followers continued to live as devout Jews, attending the Temple and the synagogues. The land they lived in was now part of the Roman Empire, but has had a turbulent political history.

The books that make up the New Testament come out of this mix of cultures – a Roman political power that was strongly influenced by Greek beliefs and habits clashed with Jewish traditions and convictions. The NT books may have become over familiar to us so that we forget that what people believed and the way that they lived was different from our old world-view and life-style.



### Group Work

Either in the whole group or in four smaller groups, review what you have learned from comparing Old and New Testament passages.



### Tutor Input

Your tutor will review the extract from 1 Maccabees ([Further Resources, p. 90](#)) and in the Apocrypha), and provide an overview of the period between the Testaments. The extract from 1 Maccabees is quite long, and much of this story may be unfamiliar to most of the group. Take time for the group to become familiar with the passage, and respond to any questions that arise.

You may also want to refer to the other material provided in the Further Reading section. It is important to stress that the Maccabean revolt is not simply a war between 'Jews' and 'Greeks.' It is also an internal Jewish conflict. Adopting Greek language and assimilating aspects of wider Greek culture allowed Jews to settle and flourish throughout the Greek Empire. The revolt can therefore be seen as a conflict within Judaism between 'modernizers' (Hellenistic Jews) and 'traditionalists.'

Jewish nationalist groups continued to exist into the Roman period, and included the Zealots. Simon the Zealot is named as one of the 12 disciples (Mark 3.18). Finally in AD 66 there was a widespread revolt against Rome. This was crushed by the Roman general Titus in AD 70, when Jerusalem was largely destroyed.



### Refreshment break

## Tutor Led discussion

Christianity, in its earliest beginnings, remained part of Judaism. Some people might find this comment surprising but it is apparent that Jesus came first to save 'the lost sheep of Israel' and that His early followers continued to attend synagogue and keep the Jewish laws.

Your tutor will talk about Judaism in the time of Jesus and the first Christians. They may refer to the preparatory reading for this session. This will show how Jesus teaching and life were a response to the unresolved hopes and fears of the Jewish people of his time regarding:

- who were the heirs of Abraham and Moses, God's own people
- how to be obedient to Mosaic Law, including the Sabbath and purity regulations
- the way to keep festivals, rituals and where to pray
- angels and the spirit world
- the future hope
- reaction to foreign occupation.



### Group Work:

During the rest of this unit you are asked to make a note whenever you read something that Jesus said or did that relates to one of the six issues mentioned above. You may find it helpful to keep a chart for your records similar to the one below.

Some passages to get you started:

- Matthew 5 1-18
- Mark 13 1-27
- Luke 11 37-54
- John 18 33-40

	<i>Jesus' words</i>
A) who were the heirs of Abraham and Moses: God's own people?	
B) being obedient to Mosaic Law, including the Sabbath and purity regulations	
C) the way to keep festivals, rituals and where to pray	
D) angels and the spirit world	
E) the future hope	
F) reaction to foreign occupation	

Bring the whole group together and share your answers.



**Closing worship**



Please read the following before Session 2

### Introducing the Gospel of Mark

Before the next session, aim to read (or listen to) the whole of Mark's gospel, preferably in one sitting. (It will probably take about 45 minutes). Think about the following:

- What do we find out about Jesus' identity in Mark's Gospel?

- What do we learn about being a disciple?

- What do we learn about why Jesus dies?

**MARK** was written in Greek, as were all the books of the New Testament. It starts '**The beginning of the gospel of Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God.**' It is Jesus' proclamation of good news that is presented. The words that follow are not intended as biography as we know it. They are, rather, an account of Jesus' life, teaching and death.

The word 'gospel' is the Anglo-Saxon translation for good news, which is *euangelion* in Greek. It was a widely used word in Greek culture: Mark uses it many times in his account of Jesus and his work later became known as a 'Gospel.' The word *euangelion* is the source of the words evangelist and evangelism.

**Who was Mark?** We don't know. Some New Testament writers do give their names, e.g. Paul at the beginning of his letters. But none of the Gospel writers tell us who they are. We can only try to identify them from clues in the writing itself. We can see that the author was a Christian writer, probably belonging to a mainly gentile church, perhaps in Rome. The traditional name Markos/Marcus was the most common forename in the Roman Empire. He has sometimes been identified as the John Mark of Acts and or as a confidant of Simon Peter (who has a very important role in the book); but this is not certain.

### **When did he write his book?**

Probably in the mid-60s, at a time when Christians were undergoing or expecting persecution and when the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem (AD 70) could be foreseen (see chapter 13, and the many references to persecution, e.g. 8:34-38; 10:39).

### **Why was it written?**

We don't know – but perhaps the decision to write a 'life' of Jesus was prompted by the death of some of the Apostles. Mark appears simple at first, but as we look more closely, then the first gospel seems much more mysterious and enigmatic and Jesus much stranger.

- Mark stresses Jesus' authority as a teacher; but he doesn't actually include much of Jesus' teaching. Apart from chapters 4 & 13, the Gospel is mainly about Jesus' mighty works (especially exorcisms and feedings) and his suffering and death.
- The disciples play a large part in the story; but they seem to misunderstand Jesus' teaching and fail to follow him (e.g. 8:14-21; 8:33; 10:13-14; 14:10-11; 14:50; 16:8).
- The book is about 'the Son of God' (1:1,11; 9:7; 15:39); but Jesus is usually referred to as 'the Son of Man', and the accent is on his suffering rather than his glory or divinity (see the foreshadowing of the cross in 3:6; 6:14-29; 8:31; 9:31; 10:32-34; 12:1-12).

Mark writes in plain Greek. In the first part of the story there is a very fast pace ('and ... immediately...'), then a marked change after Jesus' arrest, when Jesus is 'handed over' to be tried and executed. Though the language is simple, Mark's Gospel shows signs of very careful construction.

**And remember – as you read keep on recording in your table the words and actions of Jesus that relate to the six issues identified in the first session p.69).**



## SESSION 2 The Gospel of Mark



### Opening worship



### Group work

Discuss people's experience of reading Mark as a whole.

Encourage the group to share their answers to the three questions

What do we find out about Jesus' identity in Mark's Gospel?	
What do we learn about being a disciple?	
What do we learn about why Jesus dies?	



### Refreshment Break



Tutor Input. Led by the tutor, revisit the notes on the messianic hopes of Jews at the time of Jesus (See p. 66 for notes).



### Group work

- a) Peter first names Jesus as messiah at Caesarea Philippi (Mark 8.27). The word appears a further 4 times in Mark – 12.35, 13.21, 14.61, 15.32. In pairs or small groups, look at these five references. How is the picture they give us of Jesus as messiah similar to, and different from, the picture we get from the other Jewish writings we have looked at?
  
- b) Read Mark 8: 22-end together. Mark places Peter's declaration in the context of Jesus healing a blind man, talking about his suffering and death and describing the challenges of being his disciple. How does reading about these subjects together influence our understanding of them?



### Closing worship



### Please read the following before Session 3

1. **Read, or listen to, the Gospel of Matthew**, noting any similarities or differences to Mark's gospel in the information given about Jesus' identity, being a disciple and Jesus' death and resurrection.

2. **Read the following notes:**

From early times Matthew has been first in the order of the Gospels and the most prominent in the Church's teaching and liturgy. Yet the great majority of scholars think that Mark was written first.

Matthew is nearly twice as long as Mark. Many scholars think that Matthew wrote with a copy of Mark in front of him, adapting and expanding Mark to make a more practical manual for church teaching. Matthew adds much more of Jesus' teaching. It is presented in the form of five large 'sermons' or collections of sayings. Each collection ends with the formula 'When Jesus had finished these sayings ...' (Chapters 5-7; 10; 13:1-52; 18; 24-25).

Some scholars suggest that Matthew wants to echo the five books of the Law of Moses, and that Matthew sees Jesus as the replacement or fulfilment of Moses, or even of the Torah itself.

Because there is quite a lot of material that is in Matthew and Luke, but not in Mark, some scholars believe that Matthew and Luke must have had access to another written collection of Jesus' teaching - though such a document has never been found. The material shared by Matthew and Luke, but not in Mark, is referred to as Q (from the German *Quelle* which means source).

#### **Who was Matthew?**

Traditionally, the Gospel was named for the tax-collector and disciple of Jesus, but whether or not he wrote it is more disputed. Whoever he was, he was probably Jewish, well versed in the Old Testament and in rabbinic interpretation of it, and was also involved in controversy between Pharisees and Christians.

#### **When was it written?**

Probably during or after the permanent split between Synagogue and Church that was occurring in the 80s CE (see the bitter 'woes' in chapter 23, and see *Burridge, pp. 89-92, 2nd edn: pp. 90-93*). A major concern of Matthew is to define the Christian position vis-à-vis Judaism and the Torah (see especially Matthew 5:17-20). Matthew 18:15-17 'let such a one be to you as a Gentile...' gives us a clue about how Matthew's church see themselves.

#### **Why was it written?**

If Matthew does date from after the war with Rome and the fall of Jerusalem, it comes from a time when all Jewish groups need to make sense of how to be faithful to God when the Temple has gone and Jerusalem defeated. Matthew helps the Church identify itself as the

people of Jesus the Messiah. Matthew provides the Church with collections of Jesus' teaching. In the five 'sermons,' it is as though Jesus speaks directly to the reader.

When Matthew is compared with Mark, several of his distinctive emphases emerge, for example:

- the disciples understand Jesus' teaching (unlike in Mark where they do not understand) and are charged with handing it on (13:51-52; 28:19-20)
- there is stress on the rewards for right behaviour (6:20; 19:27 - 20:16), but also on the horrors of hypocrisy (7:21-23; 23:1-36): integrity and single-mindedness are a persistent theme, especially in the 'Sermon on the Mount' (chapters 5-7)
- Jesus is present in and with the Church (18:20) and the Gospel opens and closes with the promise of 'Emmanuel' (1:23; 28:20 – another contrast with Mark)
- there are detailed instructions about mission (chapter 10) and about church discipline (chapter 18)
- the Old Testament is seen as being 'fulfilled' in many precise ways, often with explicit quotations introduced by a standard formula (e.g. 1:22; 2:17; 4:14; 13:35)
- the gospel ends with much more about the Resurrection, and with the instruction to the disciples to 'Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them'... (28:19-210)
- The messiah in Matthew's Gospel: Matthew begins his gospel with 'an account of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah' (Matthew. 1.1) and goes on to use the word another 15 times (1:16, 1:17, 1:18, 2:4, 11:2, 16:16, 16:20, 22:42, 23:10, 24:5, 24:23, 26:63, 26:68, 27:17, 27:22). Compare the picture of Jesus the Messiah we get from these verses in Matthew, with the picture we get from Mark.

Matthew can be seen both as the most Jewish Gospel, and also as the most critical of Judaism – this isn't surprising if the author was a Jew who had come to see that Judaism was incomplete.

**And remember – as you read keep on recording in your table the words and actions of Jesus that relate to the six issues identified in the first session.**

## SESSION 3

### The Gospel of Matthew



Opening worship



Group work

Recap on what the preparatory reading told us about Matthew's Gospel and find out if there are any questions. You may like to add to the grid below:

What do we find out about Jesus' identity in Matthew's Gospel?	
What do we learn about being a disciple?	
What do we learn about Jesus' death and resurrection?	



**The tutor will** review the differences between Mark and Matthew's Gospel (p. 78 of preparatory reading) and explore the possible reasons for these.



Refreshment break



Group work

Divide into three groups, and allocate one section of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5, or 6, or 7) to each group. Read the chapter carefully. How does this teaching apply to the following?

A. To the disciples in Matthew's gospel	
B. To the book's first readers	
C To you and the Church today	

Choose ONE of the other collections of Jesus' teaching in Matthew and answer the question, **How does this teaching help us to live as the people of Jesus the Messiah?**

Chapter 10	
Chapter 13:1-52	
Chapter 18	

Chapters 24-25	



Closing worship



**Resource Section: Please read the following before Session 4: Introducing the Gospel of Luke**

**Read, or listen to Luke's Gospel**, noting the many references to prophecy and to the poor and underprivileged.

**Read the following notes on Luke:**

Luke is the first half of a two-volume work (Luke–Acts) that occupies a quarter of the NT. The scope of Luke's writing is bigger than any other NT writings, its Greek style among the most sophisticated, its story-telling riveting, and its influence on the imagination, self-understanding, liturgy and art of the later Church immense. **If you have access to pictures inspired by stories in Luke's Gospel or the Acts of the Apostles and can bring them to the group, please do so.**

**Who was Luke?**

Traditionally the author of the Gospel and Acts has been identified with the 'physician' mentioned in some of St Paul's later letters. The author seems to have had some connection with Paul or to have used the writings of a companion of Paul (hence the 'we'-passages after Acts 16:10). Like Paul, Luke emphasizes the 'Gospel for the Gentiles'.

But the picture of Paul we get in Acts is different from the picture we get from Paul's own letters. Acts has little about Paul's distinctive theology of justification and the Body of Christ and more about Paul's life and actions. So who was the author? We don't know for sure -but the author was probably Greek and a Gentile, who had a deep knowledge and love of the Hebrew scriptures.

**When did he write?**

Probably towards the end of the first century. *Acts* takes the history of the church up to about 62 AD, with the sense of the events belonging to the past and the split between church and synagogue being established. The *Gospel* uses Mark and much of Matthew's material; but it adds to those two gospels' structure the long central section or 'journey narrative' (9:51 – 19:27) and accounts of the infancy, resurrection and ascension of Jesus that are very different from any others.

**For whom were the two volumes written?**

Both are addressed in elegant Greek to 'most excellent Theophilus'. Was he a wealthy man who was a Christian or sympathetic to Christianity and so sponsored publication? Or (since the name means 'friend of God') is the work addressed to any interested Christian or enquirer? Luke is in differing measures *historian*, *biographer* and *theologian*; but he is also *apologist* for the Christian gospel and church, defending their integrity, their rootedness in Judaism and their place in the Roman Empire.

## The geographical structure

*Jerusalem*, symbol of the old covenant and the people of God, is the centre of Luke's story. The gospel stresses Jesus' childhood visits to the temple and his lengthy journey to the city; his resurrection appearances take place there (not, as with Matthew, in Galilee); and from Jerusalem (24:47) the good news and the church spread triumphantly in ever wider circles, until Acts ends in the imperial capital *Rome*.

This structure mirrors the subtle changes in atmosphere and style from the OT piety of the opening chapters to the thoroughly gentile world of the closing ones. It also reflects the pattern of the Spirit's work that Luke saw:

God's 'visiting' his people Israel *and*  
the leaders of Israel rejecting that visitation twice over (in Jesus and in the apostles) *and*  
the offer of salvation spreading to all the world.

### Other points to notice:

- The patterns of *prophecy* - Luke expands and refines Matthew's use of the OT and includes much 'internal' prophecy (e.g. by Zechariah, Mary, Simeon and Jesus himself); Jesus is presented as a prophet and 'righteous man' (Luke 23:47; 24:19; Acts 3:14; 7:52), and the characters of Acts reproduce the pattern of his life and death (e.g. Acts 3:7; 6:59f.; 13:45)
- The prominence of '*the poor*' - fulfilling Mary's words, Luke shows the Messiah reversing the order of society (Luke 1:51-53; 4:18-21); in Acts too, the lame, sick, sinners, women and Gentiles are specially favoured; and (unlike the other gospels) the people at large are on Jesus' side at his trial and death (see Luke 23:27, 35, 48)
- The emphasis on encounters with Jesus, (especially at table) and the focus on repentance.

**And remember – keep on recording in your table the words and actions of Jesus that relate to the six issues identified in the first session.**



## SESSION 4 The Gospel of Luke



### Opening worship



### Tutor led

Recap on what the preparatory reading told us about Luke's Gospel and find out if there are any questions.



Group discussion What does Luke contribute to our understanding of Jesus' identity, being His disciple and his death and resurrection?



### Group work

Either divide into three smaller groups, with each group taking a topic and then presenting their findings to the whole group, or address all three questions as a whole group.

- a) How is the gospel good news to the poor? Look especially at 1:46-55; 6:20-26; 14:7-14; 16:19-31 How does this teaching challenge our attitudes and lifestyle choice
  
- b) Look at the parables in 10:30-37, 15:11-32 and 19:11-27. What do these parables have to teach us? What response do they require?
  
- c) Look at the accounts of encounters with Jesus in 10:38-42, 17:11-19, 19:1-10. What does the encounter with Jesus entail for each of these people who meet him? What do these encounters teach us, and what response do they require?



### Refreshment break

The introductory notes said that Luke's Gospel had inspired much art and music, partly because the stories are told with great imagination and colour. It is commonly thought that Luke was also the author of the Acts of the Apostles, which is written in a similar style. In this session look at any art which group members or the tutor has brought and recall songs and hymns inspired by Luke.

What can we learn from such art and music that is not so well communicated in words?



## Resource Section: Please read the following before Session 5: The Gospel of John

The Fourth Gospel is distinctively different from the first three. As soon as we start looking, we find differences. In John:

- Jesus regularly visits Jerusalem
- There are three Passovers 2.13; 6.4; 11.55 (only one in Synoptics)
- The disciples are never called 'Apostles'
- The Kingdom of God is only mentioned twice in John (3:3-5). In the other gospels Jesus talks about the Kingdom of God/Kingdom of Heaven. In John, Jesus talks about himself.
- Jesus does not appear before the Sanhedrin, but has a dialogue with Pilate
- instead of a large number of healing miracles and exorcisms, there are a small number of 'signs' interpreted as clues to the nature of Jesus and of relationship with him
- instead of anticipating the return of Jesus (*parousia* or coming of God's kingdom) John speaks of *eternal life now*.
- the timing of the passion is different: Jesus dies on the day of the Passover (at the time the lambs were slaughtered), not the day after as in the synoptic gospels.

There are also some significant episodes that ONLY appear in John, including e.g. water into wine (2.1-12), Nicodemus (3.1-15), the raising of Lazarus (11.1-41), washing the disciples' feet (13.1-20) and the appearance to Thomas (20.26-29).

Both the narration and the speeches of Jesus use quite a small vocabulary, repeating certain words and images in a poetic way. John has long been seen as more 'spiritual' or 'theological' than the others and often as less historically reliable - though this is increasingly contested, as readers grow more aware of how much theology there is in the first three gospels and how much concern with fact and evidence in the fourth.

### Who wrote the Fourth Gospel?

The final chapter identifies the writer of the previous 20 chapters as 'the disciple whom Jesus loved' and who is mentioned several times in them (21:24). So unlike the first three evangelists this writer presents himself as a character in his own book. But this doesn't provide us with a name for him.

Irenaeus (about 180 AD) states that 'John the disciple of the Lord, who leaned on his breast, also published the Gospel while living at Ephesus in Asia' *Against Heretics* 3.1.1. Some scholars still defend this traditional view; others say that there is nothing in the text itself to identify the author as the son of Zebedee, and conclude that the author must remain unknown.

### When did he write?

Probably about the last decade of the first century. The place of writing could be Ephesus, Syria or Palestine. The *First Letter of John* is in a similar style and possibly by the same writer: both works seem to be written for a small Christian community with a strong sense of its separation from 'the world.'

## Why did he write a gospel?

The reason for writing is explicitly stated at 20:31, '... so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.'

**The differences** between John and the synoptic gospels can be exaggerated: all contain teaching and miracles of Jesus and recount his trial, death and resurrection, and all are written with faith in him as the revelation of God. But there are inescapable divergences in style and content: for example...

- The construction of the Fourth Gospel is meticulous, like that of a poem, with every word and episode carefully placed (though 7:53 - 8:11 is probably an addition and chapter 21 a later appendix).
- The unique *prologue* (which really includes the whole of chapter 1) introduces Jesus as the Word of God (Greek *Logos*) full of grace and truth, making known the Father; in symbolic dialogue it shows the possibility of discipleship and communion with him ('following', 'seeing', 'abiding', 'believing').
- From chapter 2 there follow seven *signs*, interpreted in different ways through the seven 'I AM' sayings (bread of life, light of the world, good shepherd, etc.). Much seems unclear at this stage because Christ's 'hour has not yet come'. But after the final discourses of chapters 13-17 the *passion and resurrection* - almost a single event - enact the hour of his 'glory' which the signs have pointed to. That's it: new life is here and now.

**And remember – keep on recording in your table the words and actions of Jesus that relate to the six issues identified in the first session.**



## SESSION 5 The Gospel of John



Opening worship



**Tutor led discussion**

Recap on what the preparatory reading told us about John's Gospel and find out if there are any questions. In particular, the reaction of group members to the information about the differences in timing and emphasis should be discussed.



**Group work**

- a) The 'I am' sayings are unique to John. I am the bread of life (6.35), I am the light of the world (8.12, 9.5), I am the gate (10.7,9), I am the good shepherd (10.11,14), I am the resurrection and the life (11.25), I am the way, the truth and the life (14.6), I am the vine (15.1,5). What do the 'I am' sayings teach us about Jesus? What does this teaching add to our knowledge about Jesus from the other three Gospels?
  
- b) What does John say about the work of the Holy Spirit ? See: 14:16-18, 15:26, 16:8-11, 16:13-15.



Refreshment Break



**Group Work**

- Group members should now have a picture of the four Gospels, possibly in the form of the two tables on the following pages. Either in small groups or, as a whole, review what has been recorded. In what ways did Jesus fulfil the hopes of the people – and in what ways did he exceed them?

	Mark	Matthew	Luke	John
What do we find out about Jesus' identity in the Gospel?				
What do we learn about being a disciple?				
What do we learn about Jesus' death and resurrection?				

	Mark	Matthew	Luke	John
Who were the heirs of Abraham and Moses, God's own people				
How to be obedient to Mosaic Law, including the Sabbath and purity regulations				
The way to keep festivals, rituals and where to pray				
Angels and the spirit world				
The future hope				
Reaction to foreign occupation.				



Closing worship

## Further Reading and Resources



### Further Reading

Richard A Burridge: Four Gospels, One Jesus? SPCK 2005 2nd edn

Luke T Johnson: The Writings of the New Testament SCM 2010 3rd edn.

Tom Wright: Mark for everyone, SPCK 2001

Tom Wright: Matthew for everyone Part 1 SPCK 2002, Part 2 SPCK 2002.

### 1 Maccabees 1 (NRSV)

#### Alexander the Great

1 After Alexander son of Philip, the Macedonian, who came from the land of Kittim, had defeated King Darius of the Persians and the Medes, he succeeded him as king. (He had previously become king of Greece). He fought many battles, conquered strongholds, and put to death the kings of the earth. He advanced to the ends of the earth, and plundered many nations. When the earth became quiet before him, he was exalted, and his heart was lifted up. He gathered a very strong army and ruled over countries, nations, and princes, and they became tributary to him.

After this he fell sick and perceived that he was dying. So he summoned his most honoured officers, who had been brought up with him from youth, and divided his kingdom among them while he was still alive. And after Alexander had reigned twelve years, he died. Then his officers began to rule, each in his own place. They all put on crowns after his death, and so did their descendants after them for many years; and they caused many evils on the earth.

#### Antiochus Epiphanes and Renegade Jews

From them came forth a sinful root, Antiochus Epiphanes, son of King Antiochus; he had been a hostage in Rome. He began to reign in the one hundred thirty-seventh year of the kingdom of the Greeks.

In those days certain renegades came out from Israel and misled many, saying, 'Let us go and make a covenant with the Gentiles around us, for since we separated from them many disasters have come upon us.' This proposal pleased them, and some of the people eagerly went to the king, who authorized them to observe the ordinances of the Gentiles. So they built a gymnasium in Jerusalem, according to Gentile custom, and removed the marks of circumcision, and abandoned the holy covenant. They joined with the Gentiles and sold themselves to do evil.

When Antiochus saw that his kingdom was established, he determined to become king of the land of Egypt, in order that he might reign over both kingdoms. So he invaded Egypt with a strong force, with chariots and elephants and cavalry and with a large fleet. He engaged King Ptolemy of Egypt in battle, and Ptolemy turned and fled before him, and many were wounded and fell. They captured the fortified cities in the land of Egypt, and he plundered the land of Egypt.

After subduing Egypt, Antiochus returned in the one hundred forty-third year. He went up against Israel and came to Jerusalem with a strong force. He arrogantly entered the sanctuary and took the golden altar, the lampstand for the light, and all its utensils. He took also the table for the bread of the Presence, the cups for drink offerings, the bowls, the golden censers, the curtain, the crowns, and the gold decoration on the front of the temple; he stripped it all off. He took the silver and the gold, and the costly vessels; he took also the hidden treasures that he found. Taking them all, he went into his own land. He shed much blood, and spoke with great arrogance.

Israel mourned deeply in every community, rulers and elders groaned, young women and young men became faint, the beauty of the women faded. Every bridegroom took up the lament; she who sat in the bridal chamber was mourning. Even the land trembled for its inhabitants, and all the house of Jacob was clothed with shame.

Two years later the king sent to the cities of Judah a chief collector of tribute, and he came to Jerusalem with a large force. Deceitfully he spoke peaceable words to them, and they believed him; but he suddenly fell upon the city, dealt it a severe blow, and destroyed many people of Israel. He plundered the city, burned it with fire, and tore down its houses and its surrounding walls. They took captive the women and children, and seized the livestock. Then they fortified the city of David with a great strong wall and strong towers, and it became their citadel. They stationed there a sinful people, men who were renegades. These strengthened their position; they stored up arms and food, and collecting the spoils of Jerusalem they stored them there, and became a great menace, for the citadel became an ambush against the sanctuary, an evil adversary of Israel at all times. On every side of the sanctuary they shed innocent blood; they even defiled the sanctuary.

Because of them the residents of Jerusalem fled; she became a dwelling of strangers; she became strange to her offspring, and her children forsook her. Her sanctuary became desolate like a desert; her feasts were turned into mourning, her Sabbaths into a reproach, her honour into contempt. Her dishonour now grew as great as her glory; her exaltation was turned into mourning.

Then the king wrote to his whole kingdom that all should be one people, and that all should give up their particular customs. All the Gentiles accepted the command of the king. Many even from Israel gladly adopted his religion; they sacrificed to idols and profaned the Sabbath. And the king sent letters by messengers to Jerusalem and the towns of Judah; he directed them to follow customs strange to the land, to forbid burnt offerings and sacrifices and drink offerings in the sanctuary, to profane Sabbaths and festivals, to defile the sanctuary and the priests, to build altars and sacred precincts and shrines for idols, to sacrifice swine and other unclean animals, and to leave their sons uncircumcised. They were to make themselves abominable by everything unclean and profane, so that they would forget the law and change all the ordinances. He added, 'And whoever does not obey the command of the king shall die.'

In such words he wrote to his whole kingdom. He appointed inspectors over all the people and commanded the towns of Judah to offer sacrifice, town by town. Many of the people, everyone who forsook the law, joined them, and they did evil in the land; they drove Israel into hiding in every place of refuge they had.

Now on the fifteenth day of Chislew, in the one hundred forty-fifth year, they erected a desolating sacrilege on the altar of burnt offering. They also built altars in the surrounding towns of Judah, and offered incense at the doors of the houses and in the streets. The Books of the Law that they found they tore to pieces and burned with fire. Anyone found possessing the book of the covenant, or anyone who adhered to the Law, was condemned

to death by decree of the king. They kept using violence against Israel, against those who were found month after month in the towns. On the twenty-fifth day of the month they offered sacrifice on the altar that was on top of the altar of burnt offering. According to the decree, they put to death the women who had their children circumcised, and their families and those who circumcised them; and they hung the infants from their mothers' necks. But many in Israel stood firm and were resolved in their hearts not to eat unclean food. They chose to die rather than to be defiled by food or to profane the holy covenant; and they did die. Very great wrath came upon Israel.

### **Psalms of Solomon 17.21-41**

'Behold, O Lord, and raise up unto them their king, the son of David, at the time known to you, O God, in order that he may reign over Israel your servant. And gird him with strength, that he may shatter unrighteous rulers, and that he may purge Jerusalem from Gentiles who trample [her] down to destruction.

Wisely, righteously he shall thrust out sinners from (the) inheritance; he shall destroy the arrogance of the sinner as a potter's jar. With a rod of iron he shall shatter all their substance; he shall destroy the godless nations with the word of his mouth. At his rebuke nations shall flee before him, and he shall reprove sinners for the thoughts of their heart. And he shall gather together a holy people, whom he shall lead in righteousness, and he shall judge the tribes of the people who have been made holy by the Lord his God. And he shall not suffer unrighteousness to lodge any more in their midst, nor shall there dwell with them any man who knows wickedness, for he shall know them, that they are all sons of their God.

And he shall divide them according to their tribes upon the land, and neither sojourner nor alien shall dwell with them anymore. He shall judge peoples and nations in the wisdom of his righteousness. And he shall have the gentile nations to serve him under his yoke; and he shall glorify the Lord in a place prominent (above) all the earth. And he shall purge Jerusalem, making it holy as of old. So that nations shall come from the ends of the earth to see his glory, bringing as gifts her sons who had been driven out, and to see the glory of the Lord, wherewith God has glorified her.

And he will be a righteous king over them, taught of God. And there shall be no unrighteousness in his days in their midst, for all shall be holy and their king the Lord Messiah. For he shall not put his trust in horse and rider and bow, nor shall he multiply for himself gold and silver for war, nor shall he gather confidence from a multitude for the day of battle. The Lord Himself is his king, the hope of him who is mighty through (his) hope in God. He shall be compassionate to all nations who (shall be) in fear before him. He will smite the earth with the word of his mouth for ever. He will bless the people of the Lord with wisdom and gladness, and he himself (will be) pure from sin, so that he may rule a great people. He will rebuke rulers, and remove sinners by the might of his word; and (relying) upon his God, throughout his days he will not stumble.

For God will make him mighty by means of (His) holy spirit, and wise by means of the spirit of understanding, with strength and righteousness. And the blessing of the Lord (will be) with him: he will be strong and stumble not; his hope (will be) in the Lord: who then can prevail against him? (He will be) mighty in his works, and strong in the fear of God, (He will be) shepherding the flock of the Lord faithfully and righteously, and will suffer none among them to stumble in their pasture. He will lead them all in holiness, and there will be no pride among them that any among them should be oppressed.'

## Jesus and the Kingdom of God.

### There are lots of references to the Kingdom of God in the Gospels:

**Mark** 1:15, 3:24, 4:11, 4:26, 4:30, 9:1, 9:47, 10:14-15, 10:23-5, 11:10, 12:34, 14:2, 15:43.

**Matthew** 3:2, 4:17,23, 5:3ff, 5:19ff, 6:10, 6:33, 7:21, 8:11-12, 10:7ff, 12:25-8, 13:24,31,33, 13:38,41,47, 13:52, 16:28, 19:12, 19:23-4, 20:1ff, 20:21, 21:31,43, 22:2, 23:13, 24:13, 25:1, 25:34.

**Luke** 1:33, 4:43;8:1, 6:20, 7:28, 8:10, 9:2ff, 9:62, 10:9-11, 11:2, 12:32, 13:18-20, 13:28, 14:15, 17:20-21, 18, 19:11-15, 21:31, 22:16-18, 22:29, 23:42.

- The phrase is frequent in the synoptic gospels - over a 100 uses of Kingdom of God or Kingdom of heaven. (Matthew prefers to use 'Kingdom of heaven' - perhaps out of respect for Jewish readers who prefer to avoid using the sacred name of God). In John, the focus of Jesus' teaching is on life/eternal life (except John 3:3-5)
- The phrase already had a long history in the Jewish Bible and in non-biblical texts. It was used by others in Jesus' own time and after him. In trying to understand his teaching about the Kingdom, we must be aware that Jesus was taking up and using a widespread Jewish idea about the reign of God. Many Jews looked forward to an age to come that would be characterised by the vindication of God's people, when there would be righteousness, peace and justice. It would be the kingdom of **God**, not the Roman empire or any other power!

### What will the Kingdom be like?

Jesus did not speak in literal language about life in the future Kingdom of God. Instead, he chooses to use parables and images. We are told: 'the Kingdom is like...' and we are given images, such as that of the banquet. Perhaps the nearest we can get to a summary is to say that the Kingdom is about the reign of God, and when it comes opposition to God will be eliminated.

### What do the Gospels tell us?

- Kingdom is related to God's covenant. The Kingdom of God is the community of those who have accepted God's covenant. Entering the Kingdom involves a personal acceptance of God's rule
- When the Kingdom comes there will be a new social order which will involve Jesus and the disciples Luke 22:28ff, Mark 10:35ff, Mark 14:25. There will be a reversal of values - the last shall be first. The Kingdom belongs to the poor - Matthew 5:3/Luke 6:20 and will include sinners Mark 2:16ff Matthew 21:30 Luke 7:37

- The call of 12 disciples is linked to a hope for the restoration of the 12 tribes of Israel, but Jesus also expected Gentiles to share in the age to come: the whole world will be changed Luke 13:28
- Jesus looked to God to destroy the old Temple and found a new one.
- When the Kingdom comes, the righteous will be separated from the wicked e.g. Matthew 13:40ff, 16:27
- With the Kingdom will come a heavenly figure and the angels - Matthew 16:27, 24:30ff
- The Kingdom is still to come - or, at least, its fulfilment is still to come. Mark 1:15; Matthew 11:5, 12:28; Luke 17:20.
- Jesus does NOT employ the image of the warrior God leading angels into the final battle at the end of the present age (unlike e.g. Assumption of Moses, Qumran War Scroll; Daniel; Revelation).

### **When will the Kingdom come?**

The references are overwhelmingly about the future, but there are **two** passages that refer to the present:

#### **Matthew 5:3-10 (in the Beatitudes)**

'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven' v3

'Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven' v10

But all the other beatitudes are future.

#### **Luke 17:21 'For, in fact, the kingdom of God is among you.'**

The answer to 'now or future' is probably – both!

Jesus had 'the strong and unwavering feeling that the Messianic time was imminent ... and in moments of prophetic vision perceived the opposing kingdom of Satan as already overcome and broken'. (*J Weiss, quoted by C Rowland - Christian Origins 2<sup>nd</sup> edn SPCK 2002 p 134*)

# A Basic Vocabulary of Biblical Studies For Beginning Students

Based on: Fred L. Horton, Jr., Kenneth G. Hoglund, and Mary F. Foskett © 2000

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**Apocalypse** 'revelation.' A written account of a vision of the heavenly world and/or of the future. As a genre the apocalypse is characterized by bizarre imagery which the prophet does not understand and which must be explained to him by a heavenly guide. The imagery reflects an understanding of the present time in relation to the heavenly world and about the future.

**Apocrypha or Deuterocanonical Books** The books in the Greek Septuagint but not in the Hebrew Bible. These books are accepted as canon among most Christian churches, though rejected as canon by the Protestant churches in favour of the shorter list of books found in the Hebrew Bible. Though the exact list differs from church to church, the main collection of 'extra books' consists of Tobit, Judith, Wisdom of Solomon, Ben Sira (Ecclesiasticus), Baruch, 1 and 2 Maccabees, and additions to Esther and Daniel.

**Aramaic** A language which came to be the official language of the western Persian Empire and, consequently, a language spoken by the Jews during the Persian Period (late sixth century BCE) and continued in use for many centuries thereafter. Portions of Ezra and Daniel are in Aramaic, and some of Jesus' sayings in the NT are given in Aramaic.

**Canon** 'rule' or 'measure.' In Christian usage a canon refers to a rule adopted by a council. Protestants use the word almost exclusively to refer to their canon of scripture, often specified in a confession of faith.

**Cultus/Cult** A specific organized body of ritual activities that relate human beings to the world of the gods. The term may also be used loosely to refer to the institution which supports the practice of those ritual activities. Thus one may speak of the 'Temple cult' meaning both the ritual acts of the temple and to the temple as the institution where these activities occur.

**Dead Sea Scrolls** A collection of biblical and non-biblical scrolls found in caves around the archaeological site of Qumran. The biblical scrolls include most of the books of the Hebrew Bible, written as consonants without vowels or punctuation. All but the book of Esther have been found among the scrolls. They are the earliest biblical manuscripts found to date.

**Eschatology** Literally, the 'study/doctrine of last things.' Any doctrine about the end, whether of a particular age or of all time.

**Etymology** The derivation of a word from a root or earlier form of the word.

**Form In biblical studies** 'form' most often refers to oral forms for the transmission of tradition. Form Criticism attempts to trace the history of the transmission of a pericope (see below) from the stage of oral tradition to its inclusion within the written biblical text.

**Genre** In literary theory genre means, roughly, a 'kind' of literature. A biography is of a different genre from that of a romance or of a history. The reader expects different things from two different genres of literature.

**Introduction In biblical studies** an 'introduction' is a written essay on a book or passage that introduces the critical issues involved. These usually include questions of authorship, date of writing, place of writing, literary type, historical setting, and principal themes. Full introductions will also discuss the history of the written text and ancient versions.

**Koine** 'common.' Used mainly in reference to the common Greek language that developed throughout the ancient world following the conquests of Alexander the Great. The 'common' Greek language, in contrast to 'classical' Greek, was rich in vocabulary but had lost some of the more difficult grammatical features of the ancient tongue. Koine Greek, because it was the language of international trade and culture throughout the Roman world, was also the language of the LXX and of the NT as well as of the early Christian movement.

**Lectionary** A collection of scriptural passages organized for use in the liturgy. The term may indicate an actual book in which the passages are copied out or may indicate the plan of readings.

**Masoretes** A group of scholar-scribes who added punctuation marks and vowel marks to the consonant-only text of the Hebrew Bible. This activity took place from the 7th to the 9th centuries CE. Masoretic Text The Hebrew text established in the 7th/9th centuries C. E. by Jewish scholars (Masoretes). The oldest complete Masoretic text is in St. Petersburg, Russia and dates to 1008 CE.

**Pericope** In Form Criticism, a unit of oral tradition such as a miracle story, an apophthegm or a saying.

**Q** Likely derived from the German word Quelle, 'source.' A hypothetical collection of the sayings of Jesus and John the Baptist that, according to one possible resolution to the Synoptic Problem, served as a source for the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, but not for Mark.

**Redaction Criticism** Study of the way in which the editor (redactor) of a work has arranged the written and oral materials at hand to achieve literary and rhetorical goals.

**Second Temple** The Temple that stood in Jerusalem between 516 BC and 70 AD. It replaced the Temple destroyed as the Jews were taken into exile in 586BC and was itself destroyed by Roman armies after the Jewish revolt.

**Semitism** As used in biblical scholarship, this term means a feature of LXX Greek or NT Greek that does not reflect standard Greek usage but the usage of a Semitic language. A very common Semitism is the Greek *kai egeneto* ('and it came to pass'), an expression that has practically no meaning in Greek but one which recalls the Hebrew *vayyehi*, often used in classical Hebrew to introduce a narrative.

**Septuagint (LXX)** According to a later tradition, the Greek king of Egypt asked the Jewish community in Alexandria to prepare a Greek translation of their scriptures. Seventy translators were assembled, each placed into his own study, and each worked independently on a translation. When they finished, their work was brought together and each of the translations agreed completely, taken as evidence for the divine oversight of the translation. In reality, it is likely that the Greek Old Testament came together over several centuries as different portions of the Hebrew Bible were in turn translated into Greek. This was the scripture for those Jews who were unable to read Hebrew, but it contains books that the scholars of Jamnia did not accept as holy. The abbreviation LXX 'seventy,' refers to the tradition that 70 scholars translated it. Because Christianity was a Greek-speaking movement, the Septuagint was the scripture Christians adopted from Judaism.

**Source In biblical studies** the word always refers to a written source document that lies behind another written work. In studying the Synoptic Gospels, for instance, we might refer to the Gospel of Mark as a source for both Matthew and Luke. This would imply that Matthew and Luke each had and used a written copy of Mark's gospel.

**Synoptic Gospels** The Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, so called because they seem to share common features, and can often be laid out side-by-side on a page (from Greek *syn-opsis*, which means seen together).

**Synoptic Problem** Addresses the literary relationships among the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke. Currently, the most prominent resolution to the problem is the Two Source theory. This proposes that Mark's Gospel and a collection of sayings known as Q were written sources used by both Matthew and Luke. At the moment, no explanation of how the synoptic gospels relate to one another commands universal assent.

**Version** a translation of a text into another language. The Septuagint, for instance, is a version of the Hebrew Bible. The NIV is an English 'version'.

**Vulgate** Latin 'common' St. Jerome's 4th-5th century C. E. translation of the Bible into Latin. Made by a monk of Bethlehem named Jerome, the Vulgate's Old Testament was translated from both Hebrew and Greek manuscripts.



**Resource Section: Please read the following introduction to Paul before Unit D Session 1**

**Applied Theology – The Letters of Paul**

**Aims of the Module**

- To introduce Paul and his Letters
- To begin to read the Letters as 'Applied Theology'.
- To explore some of the specific issues addressed by Paul in his Letters
- To think about how Paul's Letters can help us apply the gospel to our own issues and circumstances.

***Introduction to the Unit***

The essential reading each week will be the Bible passages given. If you have further time you may want to look at some of the recommended reading and further study. But remember, the believers who first received Paul's letters did not have access to commentaries on them! Some of them will have known some of the Jewish Scriptures - what we call the Old Testament - and they will have heard accounts of Jesus' life, teaching, death and resurrection. They may have heard preaching and teaching from Paul or other Church leaders. But that's all.

Do make sure you read Paul's letters **first**, and think about the questions raised, before you turn to any other background reading.

The pattern for each session is

- (an optional ice breaker)
- an introduction to the subject and the first Bible passage
- A first set of questions mainly exploring the passage and with a focus on what it says about the nature of God or the Church

(Tea break)

- A second Bible passage which applies some of the theology in the first passage
- A second set of questions of questions that aim to stimulate a more wide-ranging discussion of how the passages apply to Christian living then and now

There are of course lots of possible approaches to the study of Paul and his Letters. We could e.g. take a biographical approach, or provide an overview of all his Letters. Every approach has strengths and weaknesses. At the end of this module, you won't yet be an expert on Paul, but we hope you will have begun to understand him better.

## Before Session 1, please read

- **Colossians 1.13-20 and 3.1-17.**
- **The following 'Resource Section'**

## Resource Section: Please read the following introduction to Paul before Session 1

1. Paul wrote letters to Churches and to individual Christians, and in the New Testament we have copies of many (perhaps most) of the letters he wrote.
2. In the Letters, Paul answers particular situations, and his theology emerges as he does so. As we read, we see him applying the gospel of Christ to the practical issues faced by the Churches. Sometimes a letter is partly a response to opponents – in which case they, not Paul, set the agenda. But we don't always know who opponents are, or details of the dispute.
3. We don't have copies of everything Paul wrote. 'First' Corinthians refers to an earlier letter – 'I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral persons' (1 Cor 5.9). In the Letter to the Colossians he asks his readers to 'See that you read also the letter from Laodicea' (Col 4.16).
4. Paul did not himself physically write all the Letters that bear his name. A clear example is the Letter to the Romans. 'I Tertius, the writer of this letter, greet you in the Lord.' (Rom.16.22). In the ancient world, it was not unusual to use a scribe to write on your behalf. Some Letters name more than one person as the author e.g. The Letter to the Philippians begins 'Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus' (Phil 1.1). Because the language and subject matter of the Letters varies considerably, some scholars believe that some Letters (e.g. the Letters to Timothy) are not by Paul, even though they were written in his name.
5. Paul was brought up as a Greek speaking Jew. He is from the Diaspora, and he was a Pharisee. He describes himself as 'circumcised on the eighth day, a member 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 3.5-6). Elsewhere he writes: 'I advanced in Judaism beyond many among my people of the same age, for I was far more zealous for the traditions of my ancestors' (Gal 1.14).
6. Paul had an experience of the risen Christ. The most well known account of this is not by Paul, but comes from Acts. 'As he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?' He asked, 'Who are you, Lord?' The reply came, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do' (Acts 9.3-6). Paul's own references to this are much less explicit: "Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me" (1 Cor. 15.9).

7. Paul claimed to be an apostle. 'Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God' (Rom 1.1); 'Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God' (1 Cor 1.1); 'Paul an apostle -- sent neither by human commission nor from human authorities, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead' (Gal 1.1).
  
8. Neither the Letters or the Gospels are dated. This makes it difficult to put them into chronological order, and any suggested ordering is based on numerous deductions and assumptions.

The following timeline is one possible reconstruction.

30	Crucifixion of Jesus
32	Conversion of Paul
35	Paul's first visit to Jerusalem
40s	Paul's mission and teaching in Antioch
48	Jerusalem Council (Gal 2 / Acts 15)
50-52	Paul's mission to Corinth and the Aegean 1 & 2 Thessalonians Galatians
52	Jerusalem visit
53-55	Paul's mission to Ephesus and the Aegean 1 & 2 Corinthians <i>Philippians, Colossians and Philemon? Or later.</i>
56	Further mission in the Aegean Romans
57	Paul arrested in Jerusalem
57-59	Paul in prison in Caesarea
59-60	Journey to Rome
60-62	Paul in prison in Rome <i>Philippians, Colossians and Philemon? Or earlier.</i> <i>Ephesians – or later</i>
62-63	<i>Possible temporary release and further mission?</i>
62-64	Probable date of Paul's execution <i>Ephesians? Letters to Timothy and Titus?</i>

There is no consensus view on when the Gospels were written. There are disagreements about which was written first, though it is generally accepted that John was the last to be completed.

If Mark is the earliest, then possible dates would place

Mark	in the 60s or early 70s AD
Matthew	in the 70s or early 80s
Luke and Acts	in the 80s
John	in the 90s.

Whatever date is chosen for the Gospels, what is clear is that most of the Letters, by Paul and others, were written BEFORE the Gospels.

The uncertainty about the date of Paul's Letters is reflected in similar uncertainty about the date of his journeys. The following maps are one reconstruction and are taken from <http://www.ccel.org/bible/phillips/CN092MAPS1.htm>.

### Paul's First Missionary Journey



### Paul's Second Missionary Journey

