

## LESSON 6

### THE ORIGIN OF NEW TESTAMENT LITERATURE

#### Introduction

Jesus never wrote a book. His apostles wrote four accounts of His life, called the Gospels. The account in Luke's Gospel is continued in The Acts of the Apostles with the spread of the story of Christ to various parts of the Roman Empire. The Apostle Paul wrote nine epistles or letters to churches. He wrote four to individuals, and they also contained messages for churches to set forth the hope which is in Christ and to instruct the Gentiles concerning Christian conduct. Eight General Epistles gave instructions to Christians who faced various circumstances. Revelation concludes the body of literature called the New Testament. The first four books set forth the life of Christ, and the remaining 23 books set forth doctrinal interpretations of His life, practical implications for daily living and service, and eternal hope which Christ offers.

Twenty-seven books were originally written concerning the life of Christ. Thousands of books have since been written to explain the meaning of the 27 books. Although Christ never wrote a book, His life has been the source of many volumes. It is the origin of the 27 inspired books of the New Testament which concerns us in this lesson.

#### The Historical Background to New Testament Literature

The development of New Testament literature can be understood best in relation to important historical events.

A.D. 30	The crucifixion of Jesus (suggested dates vary from A.D. 27 to 33).
A.D. 34	The conversion of Paul (suggested dates vary from A.D. 33 to 36).
A.D. 41-44	The death of James and Herod Agrippa I and the imprisonment of Peter (Acts 12).
A.D. 46-48	Paul's first missionary journey (Acts 13:4ff.).
A.D. 49	The Jerusalem Conference (Acts 15).
A.D. 50-52	Paul's second missionary journey. Much of the time was spent in Corinth (Acts 18).
A.D. 53-57	Paul's third missionary journey. Three years were spent in Ephesus (Acts 19).
A.D. 58	Paul's return to Jerusalem and his arrest (Acts 21).
A.D. 58-60	Paul's imprisonment and trials in Caesarea, until Festus became procurator in A.D. 60,

What was the primary source of the 27 books of the New Testament? \_\_\_\_\_

(the life of Christ)

Give the probable date for each of the following important historical events.

\_\_\_\_\_ *Jesus' crucifixion*  
\_\_\_\_\_ *Paul's conversion*  
\_\_\_\_\_ *Death of James and Herod Agrippa I; Peter's imprisonment*  
\_\_\_\_\_ *Paul's first missionary journey*  
\_\_\_\_\_ *The Jerusalem Conference*  
\_\_\_\_\_ *Paul's second missionary journey*  
\_\_\_\_\_ *Paul's third missionary journey*  
\_\_\_\_\_ *Paul's return to Jerusalem and his arrest*  
\_\_\_\_\_ *Paul's imprisonment and trials in Caesarea and his transfer to Rome for trial*

(continued next page)

- and his transfer to Rome for trial before the emperor.
- A.D. 60-62 Paul's Roman imprisonment (Acts 28:30).
- A.D. 64 The burning of Rome by Nero, the false accusation of the Christians, and possibly the death of Paul.
- A.D. 66-70 The Jewish rebellion against Roman rule and the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. The Roman persecution of the Jews and the death of many Christians may have encouraged the permanent recording of the life and ministry of Jesus.
- A.D. 81-96 The rule of Domitian, during which time the Christians were severely persecuted. Perhaps John wrote Revelation during this time to encourage the Christians.

### The Origin of the Gospels

#### The activities of Jesus

Although Jesus performed many benevolent deeds of healing, His major activity was teaching His disciples. His miracles proved He possessed the power of God; therefore, they gave evidence that the Kingdom was at hand. His teachings emphasized the new concept that victory in the Kingdom comes through the suffering and death of the King. He gave the requirements for kingdom citizens and the kind of service His disciples were to render. His teachings were very significant and greatly treasured by His disciples after His death.

#### The misunderstanding of the disciples

The disciples had difficulty understanding Jesus' new concepts concerning the Kingdom. They were men of their day who expected a victorious political Messiah. Peter's misunderstanding is revealed by his rejection of Jesus' passion statement after the Great Confession at Caesarea Philippi (Matt. 16:16-23), by his jealousy of John and James who had requested special positions in the Kingdom (Matt. 20:24), by his denial of Jesus at the trial (Matt. 26:69ff.), and by his question concerning the restoration of the Kingdom, just before Jesus' ascension (Acts 1:6). Peter probably represented the thinking of all the disciples on most of these occasions.

#### The illumination of the Holy Spirit

According to John 16:13, Jesus promised that the coming of the Holy Spirit would guide the disciples into all truth. Peter explained after the Holy Spirit descended on the day of Pentecost that the New Age of the Kingdom had arrived (cf. Acts 2:14ff.). Jesus was no longer present physically with His disciples, but His words took on new significance for them on the day of Pentecost.

#### The early emphases of the Church

As Jesus was taken up from His disciples, two men appeared to them and asked, "Why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11).

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- \_\_\_\_\_ Paul's Roman imprisonment
- \_\_\_\_\_ The burning of Rome by Nero, the false accusation of the Christians, and possibly the death of Paul
- \_\_\_\_\_ Jewish rebellion against Roman rule, destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple
- \_\_\_\_\_ Persecution of Christians under the rule of Domitian and probable time of the writing of Revelation

(A.D. 30, 34, 41-44, 46-48, 49, 50-52, 53-57, 58, 58-60, 60-62, 64, 66-70, 81-96)

Which of the above events probably encouraged the permanent recording of the life and ministry of Jesus? \_\_\_\_\_

(the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple; persecution of Jews and Christians)

What was the major activity of Jesus?

\_\_\_\_\_

(teaching of the disciples)

Jesus' words which He had spoken while He was on earth took on new significance for the disciples on the \_\_\_\_\_ of P \_\_\_\_\_.

(day, Pentecost)

On the basis of this message and the previous teachings of Jesus, the disciples did not expect a prolonged period before His return. After they received the fullness of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, they realized the urgency of the task assigned by Jesus to preach the gospel in all the world. His death came to be understood as providing atonement for man's sins. His resurrection made possible the continuation of His spiritual presence and power in the building of the Kingdom.

### The Oral Period

The early emphasis of the apostles was on proclaiming the gospel, not on recording it (Acts 2:14ff.; 6:4). They utilized two sources to convince the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah:

1. Their witness of personal experiences, including what they had seen Jesus do;
2. The Old Testament Scriptures, primarily Isaiah 40ff. which predicted the suffering and death of God's Chosen Servant.

The Early Church showed a reluctance to commit her teachings to writing for several reasons: (1) The early Christians expected an early return of Christ; therefore, they spent their time in proclaiming the gospel. (2) They preferred to speak personally rather than write (cf. 2 John 12). (3) The disciples of Jesus were chosen from among the non-literary segment of society. (4) The Rabbis preserved their teachings orally, and Jesus had done no writing either. (5) The apostles who had been eyewitnesses of Jesus were available as long as the gospel did not extend beyond Judaea.

It appears that approximately 30 years passed from the time of Jesus' death and resurrection until the first Gospels were recorded, at least in the form which we now have. This period is referred to by scholars as the Oral Period. Scholars suggest that the accounts of Jesus' teachings and activities took on characteristics which made it easier for them to be transmitted orally. The form-critical school attempts to identify small units which were once transmitted orally and were later recorded in the Gospels. They point to such statements as, "And it came to pass . . ." in Mark's Gospel to support their view that the writer of Mark used these phrases to string together the smaller oral units. Form critics also attempt to define the situation in the life of the community which caused a certain form of a unit to develop. For example, Matthew 28:19 is identified as a baptismal formula; that is, the particular words were quoted at baptismal services. Guthrie points out that the form-critical school errs by emphasizing that the community created the gospel instead of the gospel's creating the community.<sup>1</sup>

It seems reasonable to conclude that oral teaching was the main means of communicating the Christian traditions during the thirty-year period. Writing materials were expensive and copying by hand was slow. The predominance of oral transmission, however, does not preclude literary productions.

### The origin of writings

Two events emphasized the need for written accounts of the life and teachings of Jesus: (1) The death of the apostles threatened to destroy the source of authentic teachings. (2) The spreading of the gospel to the Gentiles, who did not have an Old Testament background, required a permanent, authoritative writing.

<sup>1</sup> Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1970), pp. 200ff.

Give two reasons the disciples expected an early return of Jesus.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_

(because of His previous teachings, the promise of the angels at His ascension)

Give two sources used by the apostles in their earliest proclamation of the gospel.

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

(witness of their personal experiences  
Old Testament Scriptures)

Give four reasons the Early Church was slow to write her teachings.

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

(Compare your answer with the reasons given in the paragraph you have just read.)

The Oral Period was the time between the

\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ of Jesus  
and the recording of the first \_\_\_\_\_.

(death, resurrection, Gospels)

Although oral transmission dominated for thirty years, it (does, does not) mean there was no written record during that period.

(does not)

### The earliest form of the gospel

The apostolic message was based on the teachings and activities of Jesus. An early example of the message which the apostles preached is found in Peter's sermon at Pentecost: (1) Jesus is the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy; (2) with His coming, the Messianic prophecies have been fulfilled and the New Age has dawned; (3) He is the promised descendant of David, and God's approval of Him is manifest through His mighty works and wonders; (4) He was crucified, raised from the dead, and exalted to the right hand of God; (5) He will return to judge mankind and to consummate His Kingdom; and (6) salvation is by faith in His name.

### The Earliest Recorded Gospel

#### Proposed sources of the Gospels

Because many verses in the first three Gospels (the Synoptics) are identical, scholars for many years have debated the question of their relationship. The present prevailing view is that Mark's Gospel was written first, and Matthew and Luke used Mark as a source for their Gospels. Since Matthew and Luke are longer than Mark, it is obvious that they contain material which is not in Mark. Matthew and Luke contain some identical material which is not in Mark. As a result of the work of B. H. Streeter, most contemporary scholars hold to a four-documental theory. The four documents are:

1. *Mark* was written first and was used by Matthew and Luke.
2. *Q* was a source which provided the teachings or activities of Jesus that are common to Matthew and Luke but not in Mark.
3. *L* was a source used by Luke for his special material.
4. *M* was a source used by Matthew for his special material.

#### The origin of Matthew

Tradition has attributed the Gospel of Matthew to the Apostle Matthew. Source critics have concluded that the Apostle Matthew could not have been the author of the book by his name since he was dependent on other sources. An apostle would have been able to provide an eyewitness account of the teachings and activities of Jesus. Critics grant that it is permissible to attribute the special material found in the first Gospel to Matthew.

#### The origin of Mark

When Paul and Barnabas went on the first missionary journey (A.D. 46), they took John Mark as their assistant. Paul and Barnabas preached (evangelized) to Jews as well as to Gentiles. The first converted Gentiles were proselytes to Judaism, and they knew something about the Old Testament Law (cf. Acts 13:43). After Paul and Barnabas had preached to Jews and proselyte Gentiles, the next Sabbath "came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God. But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming" (Acts 13:44-45). After Paul and Barnabas were rejected by the Jews, they turned to the Gentiles, that is, those Gentiles who had no background in the Old Testament. After they were convinced that Jesus was the Saviour, they had to be taught or instructed concerning the life of kingdom citizens. They needed to know of the teachings and activities of Jesus. It appears to have been the assignment of John Mark to serve as a catechizer in instructing the new converts.

Since writing materials were expensive and copying by hand was arduous, the majority of new Christians never had a copy of the teachings of Jesus. They knew His life and teachings only by

*Give the four-point outline which was usually followed in the earliest presentation of the gospel.*

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*(Compare your outline with the one given in The earliest form of the gospel.)*

*Give the four sources which B. H. Streeter says were used in the writing of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_.*  
*Q was a source which provided the teachings or activities of \_\_\_\_\_ which are common to \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ but not in \_\_\_\_\_.*

*L was a source used by \_\_\_\_\_ only.*

*M was a source used by \_\_\_\_\_ only.*

*(Mark, Q, L, M, Jesus, Matthew, Luke, Mark, Luke, Matthew)*

*Some say the Apostle Matthew could not have written the Gospel of Matthew because an apostle would not have been dependent on other \_\_\_\_\_.*

*(sources)*

memory. This was true for the Jews as well as the Gentiles. The Gospel of Mark has characteristics which indicate that it may have been the account of the life and teachings of Jesus which was used to teach new converts. The Gospel has natural divisions which indicate that it may have been taught in sections. The language is vivid and the story moves rapidly. Mark does not include the more involved teachings of Jesus which are contained in Matthew and Luke.

Mark had opportunity to associate with Peter, an eyewitness of the life of Jesus. In his *Ecclestial History*, Eusebius quotes Papias (Bishop of Hierapolis, about 140) as saying:

This also the Presbyter used to say, "Mark, having become the interpreter of Peter, wrote accurately, though not in order, all that he remembered of the Lord's sayings or doing."

Papias continued by saying that Mark was neither a hearer of the Lord nor His follower. Therefore, his account would be dependent on an eyewitness. Many scholars have pointed out that Mark contains the Petrine doctrine of Christ.

Some scholars have found an absence of those traces of Jewish Christian perspective which have been noted in Matthew's Gospel. Since Peter was the apostle to the Jews, one would expect Mark's Gospel to reflect a Jewish bias. Guthrie and others have pointed out that Mark is a Gospel for the Gentiles. A review of Mark's history should solve the problem.

Mark received the authentic account concerning Jesus from Peter. Since neither Paul nor Barnabas had been eyewitnesses of Christ, they needed someone as a "minister of the word" to accompany them on their missionary journeys. Luke began his Gospel by stating that the traditions which he included came from those who had been from the beginning eyewitnesses and "ministers of the word" (Luke 1:2). "Ministers of the word" seem to have had the responsibility of teaching the new converts of the expanding Church the account of Jesus' life and teachings. Mark is described by the same word "minister" in Acts 13:5. His association with Paul and Barnabas in a mission to the Gentiles would have been to teach new converts.

It is possible that John Mark had notes on the teachings of Jesus which he had made from Peter's preaching. Paul would have depended heavily upon Mark for the basic account of the life and teachings of Jesus. These basic teachings were probably made available to the churches Paul established among the Gentiles. Mark's written account of the life and teachings of Christ may have been given to the Roman Church between A.D. 55 and 60. Irenaeus (about 180) said: "And after the death (perhaps departure) of these (Peter and Paul), Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, also handed down to us in writing the things preached by Peter." Clement of Alexandria (about 200) indicated Mark left a written Gospel with the church in Rome.

### Origin of Luke

In the preface to Luke's Gospel, the author gives an account of his procedure in composing the Gospel. He stated that he desired to give an orderly and accurate account. He consulted those "which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word" (Luke 1:2). It is not only possible but probable that Luke, who was an associate of Paul, had access to Mark's account of the life and teachings of Jesus. Perhaps Mark is one of the "ministers of the word" to whom Luke referred. Luke added additional teachings received from eyewitnesses. His Gospel appears to have been written to give a full account of the life of Christ to Gentiles whose knowledge of the Old Testament was limited.

*The Gospel of Mark may have been written to*

\_\_\_\_\_ new converts the \_\_\_\_\_  
and \_\_\_\_\_ of Jesus.

*(teach, life, teachings)*

*Mark was neither a hearer or follower of Jesus. Mark's source was apparently \_\_\_\_\_.*

*(Peter)*

*Those who had the responsibility of teaching the new converts were called \_\_\_\_\_*

*(ministers of the word)*

*Luke stated in the preface of his Gospel that he desired to give an \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ account of the Gospel. He consulted \_\_\_\_\_ and ministers of the \_\_\_\_\_. He probably wrote to \_\_\_\_\_ whose knowledge of the Old Testament was limited.*

*(orderly, accurate, eyewitnesses, word, Gentiles)*

## The earliest records

It is not unreasonable to believe that, after the death of Jesus, the apostles who remained in Jerusalem shared what they remembered of the sayings of Jesus. These may have been recorded soon after Pentecost. The preaching of the apostles would not have been limited to the exact words of Jesus, but the original source would have been available to Peter as well as Matthew. The Book of Acts indicates that the apostles remained in Jerusalem for several years. This means their work would have been with Jews; whereas Luke's and Mark's associations with Paul would have carried them among the Gentiles. Matthew's approach attempted to convince the Jews, by appealing frequently to Old Testament Scriptures, that Jesus is the Messiah. His Gospel does not deny that Jesus is Lord of all the universe, but he makes a special appeal to Jewish readers. Among the disciples, Peter was apparently the spokesman to the Jews, but not necessarily the writer. The tax collector may have been better prepared as a scribe to keep records than any other apostle.

Following Pentecost, the apostles remained together in Jerusalem, and "they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine . . ." (Acts 2:42). Apparently the apostles were teaching the disciples and new converts the account of Jesus' life and teachings. Peter's proclamation at Pentecost may have represented the emphases of apostolic preaching, but the sermons were based on definite sayings of Jesus which may have been recorded. The purpose of the sermons was to explain the meaning of the life and teachings of Jesus.

## John's Gospel

John's Gospel differs greatly from the Synoptics. Although all four Gospels contain theological interpretation of history, John gives greater emphasis to the meaning of Jesus' teachings. Clement of Alexandria stated, "but John, last of all, . . . being encouraged by his familiar friends, and urged by the Spirit, he wrote a spiritual Gospel."<sup>2</sup> Clement implied that John was acquainted with the Synoptics and purposed not to repeat them. He wrote to supplement the Synoptics by emphasizing the divine nature of Jesus. The author's stated purpose was that "ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name" (John 20:31). To his Jewish recipients, "the Christ" emphasized Jesus as the anointed of God. To the Gentiles, "the Son of God" emphasized His divine nature.

John has been dated later than the Synoptics. Most scholars would not place his Gospel earlier than A.D. 85. Since Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed by the Romans in A.D. 70, the Church and the activities of the apostles no longer centered in Jerusalem. John appears to have gone to Ephesus, either before or at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem. Many Jews, as well as Gentiles, were the targets for his evangelistic writings. He shared the joy of the gospel of Christ with those who had found the mystery religions, Gnosticism, and legalistic Judaism inadequate to meet their spiritual needs.

Some scholars have denied that the fisherman, called by Jesus to be an apostle, could have produced the literature of the Fourth Gospel. It should be remembered that John was a very young man when Jesus called him to be a disciple. John was not

John's Gospel differs greatly from the  
S \_\_\_\_\_.

(Synoptics)

John's Gospel gives greater emphasis to the  
meaning of \_\_\_\_\_ teachings. John's  
purpose in writing was to supplement the  
S \_\_\_\_\_ by emphasizing the \_\_\_\_\_  
nature of \_\_\_\_\_.

(Jesus', Synoptics, divine, Jesus)

<sup>2</sup> Cited by Eusebius in *The Ecclesiastical History* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1955), p. 234.

ignorant although he was unschooled in Rabbinic traditions. His formal education may have been limited at the time of his call, but he undoubtedly was a man of great natural ability, and he had fifty years or more to improve his literary skills. After becoming a preacher of the gospel, it is reasonable to believe that he devoted much more time to study. It should also be noted that he believed in the power of the Holy Spirit to guide the disciple into truth.

### The Acts of the Apostles

Little opposition has been raised against Lucan authorship. Luke makes reference to "the former treatise" which he also addressed to Theophilus (cf. Acts 1:1; Luke 1:3). The first part of Acts is written in the third person (he, they, etc.). The author changes to the first person plural (we) in Acts 16:11, indicating he joined Paul's party at Troas.

According to Frank Stagg, the author's primary purpose was to show how the gospel of Christ became "unhindered."<sup>3</sup> The nationalism of certain Jewish converts tended to limit the Church to Jews. Even the apostles remained in Jerusalem. The Grecian Jews, represented by Stephen, argued that Christianity was not to be circumscribed by temple and Jewish customs. Paul led in the stoning of Stephen because of that position. After his conversion, however, Paul became the apostle to the Gentiles. By the end of his third missionary journey in A.D. 58, it was obvious that the great response to the gospel would be by the Gentiles rather than Jews. The Book of Acts gives the background to the developing doctrine of the Early Church and to the shift from Jewish to Gentile centres.

### The Pauline Epistles

There are thirteen epistles which have been attributed traditionally to Paul. Although Paul had not been with Jesus during His earthly ministry, he was a man of the Spirit and a scholar of Jewish law (he studied under Gamaliel of Jerusalem, cf. Acts 22:3). During his early life, he was a strict Pharisee who believed in Jewish separation from Gentiles. A special revelation at the time of his conversion resulted in a complete change of his views. After hearing the address of Stephen and observing his faith demonstrated in death, Paul probably was disturbed concerning the Rabbinic views towards the Suffering Servant in Isaiah and the Scriptures which spoke about the conversion of the Gentiles (see Acts 7).

After his conversion, Paul spent three years in Arabia. During this time, his theology underwent a tremendous transformation. He became the interpreter of the gospel of Christ to the Gentiles. Through a diligent study of the Old Testament and under the leadership of the Holy Spirit, he discovered that salvation had always been by faith rather than by the observance of legalistic rules. He gave his life to the establishment and guidance of the new Israel which included converted Gentiles.

### The Early Epistles

*1 and 2 Thessalonians.*—Paul's earliest epistles, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, were written about A.D. 50. He wrote to encourage the newly founded church to persevere in the faith and to clear up a misunderstanding concerning the return of Christ. After Paul arrived at Corinth (Acts 18:5ff.), he was met by Timothy and Silas. They reported the faithfulness and affection of the Thessalonians. Paul responded to the report with a letter

<sup>3</sup> Frank Stagg, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1955), p. 1.

<p><i>The Acts of the Apostles was written by _____.</i></p> <p><i>(Luke)</i></p>
<p><i>Luke's primary purpose in writing was to show how the gospel of Christ became " _____ ".</i></p> <p><i>The Acts gives the background to the developing doctrine of the _____ and to the shift from _____ to _____ centres.</i></p> <p><i>(unhindered, Early Church, Jewish, Gentile)</i></p>
<p><i>During Paul's early life, he was a strict P _____ and believed in Jewish separation from _____.</i></p> <p><i>(Pharisee, Gentiles)</i></p>
<p><i>After Paul's conversion, he became the interpreter of the gospel of Christ to the G _____.</i></p> <p><i>(Gentiles)</i></p>
<p><i>What two epistles did Paul write first?</i></p> <p>_____</p> <p><i>When were they written? _____</i></p> <p><i>(1 and 2 Thessalonians, A.D. 50)</i></p>

expressing his joy. Before he left Corinth, word came that the Thessalonians had misunderstood the doctrine of the return of Christ. He wrote a second letter to correct this misunderstanding.

**1 and 2 Corinthians.**—During his third missionary journey, Paul spent three years at Ephesus (A.D. 53–56). While there, he appears to have written four letters to the Corinthians. He mentioned an earlier letter in 1 Corinthians 5:9. Second Corinthians seems to be a combination of two letters (cf. 2 Cor. 6:14–7:1). The letters were written to clear up problems and misunderstandings. First Corinthians is particularly important because it reflects the life of the Early Church. To prevent divisions, Paul suggested that the church make Christ, instead of a pastor or preacher, the centre of her life (chaps. 1–4). He alluded to the democratic structure of the church as he dealt with the problem of immorality (chaps. 5–6). He gave instructions concerning marriage to non-believers (chap. 7), eating of meat offered to idols (chaps. 8–11), participation of women in worship (11:2–16), observance of the Lord’s Supper (11:17–34), and use of spiritual gifts (chaps. 12–14). The instructional part of the epistle ends with the great chapter on the resurrection of the body (chap. 15).

Parts of 1 Corinthians were not well received; therefore, Paul wrote another epistle to the church to defend his actions. He explained why his plans to visit them were changed (chaps. 1–2), and he gave a defence of his apostleship (chaps. 3–6). He encouraged the church to complete the offering for the Jerusalem Christians (chaps. 8–9). Some scholars consider 2 Corinthians 10–13 to be part of another letter in which Paul defended himself against those inside or outside the church who were depreciating his apostleship.

**Galatians.**—Three dates have been suggested for Galatians: shortly after the Jerusalem Conference while Paul was at Antioch, A.D. 50; while Paul was at Corinth, A.D. 51; and while Paul was at Ephesus, A.D. 55. The Epistle to the Romans was written from Corinth, about A.D. 57. Since Galatians is very similar to Romans, many scholars prefer to place its composition at Ephesus. Most of Galatians concerns the question of whether or not keeping the Jewish law is required for salvation. The latter part deals with Christian conduct.

**Romans.**—Paul’s Roman epistle is one of the most important writings in the New Testament. The epistle appears to have been written from Corinth in early A.D. 57 to prepare for Paul’s visit to a congregation which he had never met. It is a formal theological treatise presenting Paul’s understanding of the gospel of Christ. It sets forth the doctrines of sin, salvation by grace, life in the Spirit, God’s plan for Israel, and Christian conduct.

**The Prison Epistles**

Four letters were written while Paul was in prison: Philippians, Colossians, Philemon, and Ephesians. The Book of Acts mentions two imprisonments: (1) in Caesarea after Paul was taken prisoner in Jerusalem (cf. Acts 22–26); and (2) in Rome after Paul had appealed to be tried before Caesar (cf. Acts 28). Some scholars suggest that Paul had been imprisoned previously at Ephesus, about A.D. 56, because of his references to fighting with beasts at Ephesus (1 Cor. 15:32) and “far more imprisonments” (2 Cor. 11:23). Traditional scholarship has held to the Roman origin of the epistles (A.D. 60–62). Recent scholarship has challenged that position because of Paul’s failure to mention difficulties in Jerusalem, his imprisonment in Caesarea, and the dangers of the voyage and shipwreck. Why would his personal letters written after these events fail to mention them? The Roman origin is supported by references in Philippians to the praetorian guard (1:13) and to “those at Caesar’s household” (4:22).

One of the problems which Paul dealt with in his first Epistle to the Corinthians was divisions in the \_\_\_\_\_.

He also dealt with the problem of \_\_\_\_\_ and gave instructions concerning marriage of \_\_\_\_\_, the eating of \_\_\_\_\_ offered to \_\_\_\_\_, the participation of \_\_\_\_\_ in worship, the observance of the \_\_\_\_\_, and the use of spiritual \_\_\_\_\_.

(church, immorality, non-believers, meat, idols, women, Lord's Supper, gifts)

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Give the probable date when Galatians was written. \_\_\_\_\_

(A.D. 55-56)

What is the main emphasis of Galatians?

\_\_\_\_\_

(whether keeping the Jewish law is required for salvation)

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The Roman epistle was written in \_\_\_\_\_, about A.D. \_\_\_\_\_. It is a formal theological treatise presenting Paul's understanding of the \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_.

(Corinth, 57, gospel, Christ)

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List the Prison Epistles. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

(See the text for the correct answer.)

**Philippians.**—Paul wrote to thank the Philippian church for a gift, to give news of their messenger, and to warn against subversive influences. Epaphroditus had returned from Philippi, and he had brought a gift to Paul from the church. Perhaps Epaphroditus had planned to remain with Paul as a helper, but he became ill. Paul sent a letter with him upon his return to Philippi to explain that he was returning because of illness and not because of inefficiency.

**Colossians.**—The letter to the Christians in Colossae combated erroneous teachings in a church which Paul had not visited. The Gnostic heretics apparently suggested that association with material elements was evil; therefore, they concluded that Christ who came in human flesh was inferior to the elemental spirits of the universe. They suggested that true worship existed in rigid observance of festivals, new moons, and Sabbaths. They imposed strict dietary regulations and prescribed devotional rituals. Paul responded by proclaiming the supremacy of Christ. He also condemned the immoral practices apparently condoned by the Gnostic heretics.

**Philemon.**—Onesimus, a runaway slave, apparently was converted to Christianity. His owner, Philemon, was a resident of Colossae. Paul wrote the letter to send with Onesimus upon his return to Philemon. He appealed to the master to treat the slave as a Christian brother.

**Ephesians.**—Recent scholarship has questioned whether Ephesians is a genuine Pauline letter and whether the epistle was actually to the Ephesians. Arguments for Pauline authorship are based on the claims within the epistle (1:1; 3:1) and the second century identification of the letter with Paul's writings. Pauline authorship is questioned by some scholars because of the absence of details concerning a concrete church situation and the failure of the author to indicate that he was personally acquainted with individuals within the church. The letter contains no personal greeting as is usually characteristic of Paul's writings. Differences in language and style have also caused question. The words "in Ephesus" (1:1) are not in the earlier manuscripts.

The letter addresses the problem of church unity. Christ destroyed the wall separating the Jews and Gentiles. All members of the body of Christ should walk together in love and harmony. Gentiles must renounce pagan ways and be imitators of God. The author also gave advice concerning relationships within social structures, such as the home.

### The Pastoral Epistles

Paul wrote three epistles to young ministers concerning their pastoral work. Many modern scholars have questioned the Pauline authorship of 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus because:

1. Historically the situation presupposed in these letters cannot be fitted into any known period of Paul's life. Paul may have been released from Roman prison after the close of Acts, A.D. 62.
2. Stylistically and theologically, the epistles differ from Paul's earlier works.
3. Ecclesiastically, the church polity and organization reflected in the epistles appear more advanced than the church structure of A.D. 62.

**1 Timothy.**—Paul instructed Timothy to deal with teachers who perverted both the Law and the Gospel. Paul pleaded for prayers for all men since God wishes every man to be saved. He instructed women to dress soberly and advised against permitting them to teach. This epistle is especially noted for its list of qualifications for bishops and deacons (see chap. 3). Special in-

Paul wrote to the Philippians to thank them for a \_\_\_\_\_, to give news of their messenger E \_\_\_\_\_, and to warn against \_\_\_\_\_ influences.

(gift, Epaphroditus, subversive)

Colossians was written to a church which Paul (had, had not) visited. He wrote proclaiming the \_\_\_\_\_ of Christ and condemning the \_\_\_\_\_ practices condoned by the \_\_\_\_\_ heretics.

(had not, supremacy, immoral, Gnostic)

Philemon was the owner of the slave \_\_\_\_\_ who was converted to Christianity.

(Onesimus)

The Epistle to the Ephesians deals with the problem of \_\_\_\_\_ and gives advice concerning relationships within \_\_\_\_\_ structures, such as the \_\_\_\_\_.

(church unity, social, home)

Write the names of the Pastoral Epistles.

Why are they called Pastoral Epistles. \_\_\_\_\_

(1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, because they were written to young pastors giving instructions concerning their work)

structions are given for the treatment of older men and women. The epistle closes with injunctions to slaves and warnings about covetousness.

**2 Timothy.**—In Timothy, Paul reviewed Timothy's spiritual history and admonished him to be a good soldier of Christ. Timothy was to use the Scripture properly and guard his life in order to be able to controvert the evil teachings which were spreading rapidly.

**Titus.**—This epistle reviews the qualifications of the bishop who was to be able to cope with insubordinate teachers who were upsetting people. Instructions are given for dealing with various groups: older men and women, younger men, and slaves. Christians are instructed to demonstrate their new life in Christ to society through good works rather than through profitless controversy.

### The General Epistles

Most of the General Epistles were not addressed to particular groups; therefore, they are referred to as Catholic (universal) Epistles by some scholars.

#### Hebrews

Early Christian leaders were not agreed on the authorship of Hebrews. Origen (third century) asked, "Who wrote the epistle to the Hebrews?" He answered, "God alone knows." Recent scholars have described the author as a Christian Jew, who was acquainted with Platonic philosophies which were current in Alexandria, and as a scholar of the Old Testament. According to Acts 18:24, Apollos fits this description.

The epistle appears to have been written to Jewish Christians who were faced with persecution and who were in danger of rejecting the Christian faith. The location of the persecuted Christians and the date are unknown. Clement of Rome quoted Hebrews about A.D. 95. It may have been written before the fall of Jerusalem and the Temple in A.D. 70. The epistle presents Jesus Christ as God's ultimate revelation to man. Jesus as the Son of God is superior to Moses; therefore, He supersedes the Old Testament Law on which Judaism was based.

#### James

Many have attributed the Epistle of James to the Lord's brother who disbelieved Him during the days of His flesh but was won to faith by an appearance of the risen Lord (1 Cor. 15:7). He became the leader of the mother church of Jerusalem and died a martyr's death in A.D. 62. James wrote to the Jews of the Dispersion concerning the ethical requirements of the Christian life. He condemned preference for the rich above the poor and rejected the concept of faith without works.

#### 1 Peter

The epistle purports to have been written by the Apostle Peter with Silvanus, Paul's comrade, as his amanuensis (secretary—cf. 1:1; 5:5). Peter probably wrote from Rome ("Babylon," 5:13) to give hope to the persecuted Christians in Asia Minor. They were challenged to remain steadfast in face of persecution, hate, suffering, and humiliating defamation.

#### 2 Peter

Scholars since Origen and Eusebius have questioned the Petrine authorship of 2 Peter because of its lack of resemblance to 1 Peter. It appears to have been dated much later than A.D. 65, the traditional date of Peter's death in Rome. It borrowed freely

Why are the General Epistles called Catholic Epistles by some scholars? \_\_\_\_\_

(They were not addressed to particular groups; catholic means "universal")

The Epistle to the Hebrews appears to have been written to \_\_\_\_\_ who were faced with \_\_\_\_\_ and were in danger of rejecting the Christian faith.

(Jewish Christians, persecution)

The Epistle of James was probably written by James, the brother of \_\_\_\_\_. James condemned preference for the \_\_\_\_\_ and rejected the concept of \_\_\_\_\_ without \_\_\_\_\_.

(Jesus, rich, faith, works)

Peter probably wrote 1 Peter from \_\_\_\_\_ to give hope to the \_\_\_\_\_ Christians in \_\_\_\_\_.

(Rome, persecuted, Asia Minor)

Do scholars agree that Peter wrote 2 Peter? (Compare your answer with the text.)

from Jude and refers to Paul's letters as "scripture," a concept which would not likely have developed before the second century. The author warned against doctrines of false teachers who scoffed at the hope of Christ's second coming. He exhorted his readers to "be zealous, beware, and be prepared."<sup>4</sup>

### Jude

Jude was purported to have been written by the brother of Jesus and James. Many scholars question the authenticity of the claim. B. H. Streeter suggested he was a grandson of Jude who led the Jerusalem church during the reign of Trajan (A.D. 98-117). Although the epistle is written in pure Greek, the author's knowledge of the Old Testament and the Book of Enoch suggests he was a Jew. He seemed to have been opposing libertine Gnostic leaders who contended that the real spiritual person was not affected by what the flesh does. They rejected the incarnation of Christ and indulged in licentious living.

### 1, 2, and 3 John

Conflict with false teachers is also indicated in the Johannine Epistles. The resemblances in language, style, and thought indicate that the three epistles were written by the same author as the Fourth Gospel. The contrasts of light and darkness, good and evil, love and hate, and life and death pervade the First Epistle as well as the Fourth Gospel. The author referred to himself in the Third Epistle as the elder.

The theme of 1 John is Christian assurance (cf. 5:13). The epistle also attacked the Docetic heresy which denied the human form of Christ, suggesting that His body was only a semblance. Hunter describes 2 John as a miniature of 1 John.<sup>5</sup> Third John is a private note to Gaius and concerns personal relations. The "church boss" Diotrephes had rejected missionaries commended by the elder. John thanked Gaius for his kind treatment of them.

### Revelation

Revelation contains a very different style from the other writings of the New Testament. It is often designated as the Apocalypse, a transliteration of the first word of the text which means an "unveiling." The style is impressionistic; therefore, the message of the book is expressed through the actions of angels and beasts. The details of the message of Revelation are not always clear. The central theme of the book, however, is the victory of the crucified Lamb who gained dominion through death. The original purpose of the book was to give encouragement to those Christians of Asia Minor who were suffering martyrdom because they refused to worship the Roman emperor Domitian (A.D. 81-96).

*Do all scholars agree that Jude was written by a brother of Jesus and James? \_\_\_\_\_*

*(no)*

*List some contrasts which indicate that the Gospel of John and 1 John were written by the same person.*

\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_

*(light-darkness, good-evil, love-hate, life-death)*

*Why was Revelation written? \_\_\_\_\_*

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*(Compare your answer with the purpose given in the text.)*

<sup>4</sup> A. M. Hunter, *Introducing the New Testament* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1957), p. 184.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 179.

## Home Study Exercises

Basic assignment (to be answered by Levels 1, 2, and 3)

1. List and give the dates of eight important events in the life of Paul.

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2. What event may have caused the writing of the Gospels? \_\_\_\_\_

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3. When did the words of Jesus become more significant for the disciples? \_\_\_\_\_

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4. Why did the disciples expect an early return of Jesus? \_\_\_\_\_

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5. List four reasons why the Early Church was slow to write the Gospels. \_\_\_\_\_

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6. Define the Oral Period. \_\_\_\_\_

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7. (True or false?) The predominance of oral transmission for 30 years means there probably was no written record. \_\_\_\_\_

8. Give the four-point outline of the earliest form of the gospel.

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9. According to B. H. Streeter, what were the four sources of the Synoptics? \_\_\_\_\_

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10. What circumstance probably caused the Gospel of Mark to be written? \_\_\_\_\_

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11. What was the responsibility of "ministers of the word"? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
12. How did Luke's Gospel probably originate? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
13. Why did John write his Gospel? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
14. The Acts of the Apostles was written by \_\_\_\_\_ . Why did he write it?  
 \_\_\_\_\_
15. What were Paul's two earliest epistles? \_\_\_\_\_  
 When were they written? \_\_\_\_\_
16. List four problems Paul dealt with in 1 Corinthians.  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
17. Give the date and emphasis of each of the following:  
 Galatians— \_\_\_\_\_  
 Romans— \_\_\_\_\_
18. Name the Prison Epistles. \_\_\_\_\_
19. Why are 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus called Pastoral Epistles?  
 \_\_\_\_\_
20. Name the General Epistles. \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
21. Why was Revelation written? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**Supplementary assignment (for Levels 2 and 3)**

1. According to form critics, how did the Synoptic Gospels originate?
2. Why do some scholars believe 1 and 2 Corinthians were originally four letters?
3. Give the probable location of origin and the purpose of each of the thirteen Pauline Epistles.
4. Give the probable date, author, and purpose of each of the General Epistles.

**Advanced assignment (for Level 3)**

Read and outline one of the following articles.

- J. N. Sanders, "The Literature and Canon of the New Testament," in *Peake's Commentary on the Bible*.
  - G. R. Beasley-Murray, "Introduction to the New Testament," in *A Companion to the Bible*, edited by H. H. Rowley.
- Any article on New Testament literature in the *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* or a similar dictionary.

## Seminar Discussion

1. Know and be prepared to give the historical outline on pages 73 and 74 of this study guide.
2. Level 3 students will be prepared to give brief reports on the articles read in their advanced activities.
3. What historical circumstances contributed to the origin of the Gospels and the Pauline Epistles?