



## INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOKS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

### FOREWORD

This course, "A simplified coverage of the Books of the New Testament", is to be covered in ten lessons. The lessons are as follows:

1. Introduction to course and to the Gospels.
2. Matthew, Mark.
3. Luke and Acts.
4. John.
5. Introduction to Pauline Epistles and Romans.
6. 1 and 2 Corinthians and Galatians.
7. Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians.
8. 1 and 2 Thessalonians and the Pastoral Epistles.
9. Hebrews, James, 1 and 2 Peter.
10. 1, 2 and 3 John, Jude, Revelation.

A.M. Hunter's "Introducing the New Testament" and the New Bible Dictionary are used in this course. They are useful, but not essential to buy. A modern translation Bible such as TEV, Good News or NIV is necessary.

In this unit questions will be used in place of an examination.

Each lesson contains 5 questions.

These are to be answered in approximately half a page each.

On completion of Lessons One to Five please forward your responses to the registrar for marking. These will be returned to you.

On completion of Lessons Six to Ten forward your responses to the registrar for marking, and these will be returned to you with your certificate.

The questions are designed to push the student to study beyond the notes to the Bible itself and also to think of the application.

There is a 6th question included in each Lesson.

This is for discussion for anyone studying "New Testament" in a group. The answers to these questions are not to be sent in for marking.

A glossary of terms is included with this unit.

**INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOKS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT****GLOSSARY OF TERMS - UNIT 3**

1. APOCALYSE - a revelation
2. APOLOGETIC - a reasoned defence of Christianity
3. ASCETIC - severely abstinent; austere
4. CANONICAL - included in canon of Scripture; authoritative; accepted
5. CATHOLIC - of use or interest to all people; all-embracing
6. CHRONOLOGY - arrangement of events according to dates or times of occurrence
7. DISCOURSE - talk, conversation, sermon
8. DOCETISM - heresy that Christ's body only appeared human
9. DUALISM - theory recognising two independent principles (mind and matter; good and evil in the universe; two personalities in Christ)
10. ESCHATOLOGY - doctrine of "last things" (death, judgement, heaven and hell)
11. GENEALOGY - account of descent from ancestor by enumeration of intermediate persons pedigree
12. HERESY - opinion contrary to the orthodox doctrine of the Christian Church
13. INCARNATION - Christ's embodiment in human flesh
14. KERYGMA - preaching or proclamation of the religions truth of the Christian Gospel
15. LIBERTINE - free thinker on religion and/or morality; one who follows his own inclinations
16. LOGOS - Word of God (Greek of Logos means word, reason, account)
17. MESSIANIC - inspired by belief or hope in a Messiah
18. THESIS - proposition to be maintained or proved
19. TREATISE - literary composition dealing methodically with a definite subject
20. VERNACULAR - language of one's native country



## UNIT 3 NEW TESTAMENT

### LESSON 1

#### Introduction

Central to the New Testament (New Covenant) is the Lord Jesus Christ.

Unanimously persuaded that Jesus Christ is the Fulfilment and Fulfiler of all God's ancient plans and promises (2 Cor.1:19f; Luke 24:27), the writers of the New Testament declared that a new age had dawned with His coming (Gal.4:4; Eph.1:10, Mark 1:15).

Before our Lord's incarnation, God 'spoke' to His ancient people, Israel, through chosen prophetic channels (Heb.1:1; 2 Peter 1:20f). The New Testament announces Jesus Christ as the eternal Word become flesh (John 1:lff, 14). Through the Word, the only begotten Son, God has 'spoken' His final word of revelation (Heb.1:1). There is no progression beyond Jesus Christ for He is the image of the Invisible God (2 Cor.4:4; Col.1:15; Heb.1:3; John 14:9).

Christ came not only to reveal the Father (a 'picture of God drawn by God Himself, in a human life'; Matt.11:27), but to do the Father's will. He came to seek and save the lost' (Matt.1:21; Luke 19:10). God is 'light' and He must judge all sin - 'the wages of sin is death' (Rom.6:23; 1 John 1:5). God is also 'love'. The incarnation and the cross in particular confront human beings with the sublime expression of divine love (John 3:16; 10:11; Rom.5:6-10). Yet more than a revelation of God's love, the cross was the necessary instrument for our salvation from sin and death - Jesus must die (Mark 8:31; 10:45; John 1:29; Gal.3:13; Heb. 9:22,26). Jesus did die! The cross, however, was not defeat but victory, for He 'came to destroy the works of the devil'. Jesus Christ rose from the dead and ever lives (Mark 8:31; 16:6; Acts 1:3; 1 Cor.15:4,20). His promise is that He shall return again in power, in judgement and salvation (John 5:28f; 14:3; 21:17; Matt.24:3lff; Acts 1:9; Heb.9:28).

This same Jesus, declares the New Testament, is Lord. He alone is the legitimate object of men's worship (Phil.2:9-11; Col.1:19). The most important confession of the Church through all of its history is that 'Jesus is Lord'. Saving belief begins with this confession (Acts 16:31; Rom. 10:9,10). Sinful human beings, without the aid of the Holy Spirit of God can never truly make this affirmation. God alone can bring us to this point (Matt.16:16,17; 1 Cor.12:3).

The only Jesus Christ we know is the Jesus Christ of the New Testament and the New Testament is the divinely inspired record of God's son and his dealings with men. As God's word, it is truth (John 1:25f; 17:17 cf; 2 Tim.3:16f).

Whilst background questions such as date and authorship are not unimportant - for the present study greater prominence will be given to the contents of the writings - i.e. purpose, theme, outstanding characteristics, plan, etc.



## **The Gospels**

The Gospels, while appearing first in our completed New Testament, were not written first. Chronologically, Paul's epistles are the earliest writings. Yet logically, the order as we have it is good. Matthew's is the first Gospel, and with its emphasis on Jesus as the fulfiller of the Old Covenant, it makes a good link between the Old Testament and the New (or the Old Covenant and the New Covenant).

The Gospels are unique as a 'type' of literature. As far as we are aware, no writing of this kind had previously been attempted. In every case, analysis shows that Mark, probably the earliest Gospel, does not use any sources which give a description of Jesus life, which could be called a Gospel.

'Gospel' is derived from the Anglo-Saxon "godspel" - "good tidings" which translates the Greek "euangelion". It was not until the middle of the second century AD, that the plural form of 'Gospels' came to be used. The four records which traditionally stand in the forefront of the New Testament are, properly speaking, four records of the one Gospel - 'the Gospel of God ... concerning His Son' (Rom.1:1-3). At an early date after the publication of the fourth Gospel, the four canonical Gospels began to circulate as a collection and have continued to do so ever since.

The Church showed a certain reluctance to commit its teaching to writing. Word of mouth carried more authority for the eastern mind than written documents (cf. 2 John 1 and 3 John 13). Jesus Himself left no written records, and the tradition of His teaching was preserved orally for a considerable time. It is generally supposed that written documents were regarded as a necessity only after the death of the authorised eyewitnesses. These early years were the period of 'oral tradition' - the period when Christians still preferred the voice of eyewitnesses to any written record of Jesus. As eyewitnesses (cf. Luke 1:2) were removed by death, the necessity of a permanent written record of their witness would be more acutely felt than before. All four of the canonical Gospels are probably to be dated within the five decades, AD 50-100.

## **Synoptic Gospels**

The first three Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke, are known as the Synoptic Gospels because they have such an agreement in structure, content and wording, that they can easily be arranged in parallel columns so as to provide a synoptic view of their content (from Greek - synopsis; syn, "along with", opsis, review"). By such an arrangement, the question of the kind of literary relationship that exists among the three Gospels is necessarily forced upon the observer. It is from this study, that the conclusion was reached that Mark's Gospel was probably written first. John's Gospel is somewhat different in approach to the 'synoptics' and is best studied independently.

Whilst the first three Gospels have much in common, there are also striking differences in wording, arrangement, style, etc. No Evangelist (or "writer of a Gospel") intended to write a complete life of Jesus Christ. Each selected his material to suit the purpose for which he was writing. (Study several parallel accounts - notice similarities and then differences in detail, wording and location, omissions etc. The "Good News" Bible gives references for the same incidents, underneath headings. This makes parallel accounts easier to find).

Except for the barest outline in the Epistles, we have been left no record on the life of Jesus Christ beyond the four Gospels. Our sole authority is the four-fold Gospel. The Christ of the Church (as far



as his earthly life is concerned) is the Christ of the Gospels. The Christ of experience is the Christ of the Gospels.

The Evangelists who wrote these records were not men who wrote from a 'detached scientific objectivity', but men wholeheartedly committed to the truth they proclaimed. They themselves had experienced a remarkable transformation as a result of the stupendous events they related. These men confirm that Jesus of Nazareth is indeed the Messiah King and the Eternal Word made flesh. "The Gospel record is rooted in history. Record and revelation, history and interpretation, cannot in the Gospels be separated; but the control of history is everywhere present. The Cross, which lies at the heart of the story, is beyond question a stark and dreadful reality. Who could have been found to invent such a paradox as that of a crucified Messiah? The earliest witnesses to Jesus of Nazareth were no followers of 'cunningly devised fables'. They were men who were set to bear witness to the truth." (Rawlinson)

The above is a sketch only of some of the human factors involved in the product we know as the Gospels. Yet finally the control of the record and its truth has come from the inspiration of the Holy Spirit for the believer affirms the ultimate Author to be God Himself.

Because of the scope of the present course (a simplified coverage of the Books of the New Testament), the student will have little time to do more than read each New Testament book rapidly (a modern translation of the New Testament such as "Good News" TEV Bible will be an advantage).

**Question 1:**

What does the New Testament show us about God's love as expressed through Christ and the cross (John 3:16; 10:11; Rom. 5:6-10)?

**Question 2:**

What does the New Testament say is the most important confession for Christians? Explain it. (Phil.2:9-11; Col.1:19; Acts 16:31; Rom.10:9,10).

**Question 3:**

What does "Gospel" mean? Explain how this term came into use. Do you personally think it is a good name? Why?

**Question 4:**

When were the Gospels written? In what order? Why did it take this long for the Gospels to be actually written down?

**Question 5:**

What is meant by "Synoptic Gospels"? Read the two accounts of the same incident in Luke 8:22-25 and Mark 4:35-41 and write down any differences. Where is this incident recorded in Matthew?

**QUESTION FOR GROUP STUDY:**

Crucifixion was a terrible death but why was Jesus' death also a victory (Mark 8:31; 16:6; Acts 1:3; 1 Cor.15:4, 20)?

What is his promise (John 5:28f; 14:3; 21:17; Matt.24:31ff; Acts 1:9; Heb.9:28)?