

Life of Christ PART I

Lesson 1

Historical Introduction

Rome at the Time of Christ

The Four Gospels

Life of Christ 1

Course Outline

This course is composed of 10 lessons

Lesson 1	Historical Introduction Rome at the Time of Christ The Four Gospels
Lesson 2	Jesus Christ in Eternity Past The Genealogy of Christ
Lesson 3	Chronology of the Life of Christ The Birth of John the Baptist The Song of Mary The Birth of Christ
Lesson 4	The Night Before Christmas Christ and the Shepherds The Circumcision and Presentation of Christ The Visit of the Magi The Flight to Egypt and Return to Israel The Early Life of Christ The Event at the Temple
Lesson 5	Jesus' Young Adulthood Preparing the Way of the Lord (Isaiah 40) Jesus and John the Baptist
Lesson 6	The Wilderness Temptation of Christ Jesus' First Followers
Lesson 7	The Wedding at Cana of Galilee The Divine Guidance of Jesus Christ The First Cleansing of the Temple
Lesson 8	Nicodemus and Christ The Accession of John the Baptist
Lesson 9	The Samaritan Woman Jesus' Galilean Ministry
Lesson 10	Ministry and Rejection at Nazareth

Contents of Lesson 1

Historical Introduction1

Rome at the Time of Christ.....12

The Four Gospels14

Historical Introduction

John 1:15, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

He was with God in the beginning.

Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.

In him was life, and that life was the light of men.

The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it."

Know from the beginning that Jesus was and is and forever will be the Son of God.

Luke 1:1-4, "Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us,

just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word.

Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus,

so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught."

Know from the beginning that this is the factual account of the Son of God, that this is the most widely documented life and times in history.

1 John 1:1-4, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched this we proclaim concerning the Word of life.

The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us.

We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship

with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.

We write this to make our joy complete."

Know from the beginning that this factual account changes lives. It has changed mine, and it will change yours if you will listen and believe.

Gal 4:4,5, "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons."

Know from the beginning that God's timing is always right, and that He sent His Son at just the right moment in human history.

READ Isaiah 52:13 to 53:12

Know from the beginning that the life of the Son of God was predicted for many hundreds of years, and know that He had a destiny of sorrow and a destiny of glory.

Dramatis Personae for the Opening Act

Mary: a young virgin, who is betrothed to Joseph, a carpenter. They are residents of Nazareth, a small town in the hill country of Galilee;

Elizabeth: an older woman of the hill country of Judah, not far from Jerusalem, and Mary's cousin; her husband Zechariah, a priest in the division of Abijah;

Wise men from the East;

Shepherds near Bethlehem;

Gabriel, an angel;

An anonymous angel;

Simeon, a righteous man who waits for the consolation of Israel;

Anna, a prophetess more than a hundred years of age, and a widow for eighty four of those years a very pious woman;

Herod, the king over the Roman province of Judea an evil man full of ambition.

HEROD THE GREAT

Herod in many ways personifies the trouble in Israel at the time of Christ. For a long time,

hundreds of years, the Jews had lived under the control of one nation or another, and they longed to be truly autonomous. It seemed like whatever empire had the upper hand in history would rule them.

If it wasn't the Babylonians, then it was the Persians, when the Persians took over. If it wasn't the Persians, it was the Greeks, when Alexander came rumbling through the ancient near east. If it wasn't Alexander, it was the Romans, after the death of Alexander and the disintegration of his empire.

The Jews still understood that they were a holy people, set apart for God. They always remembered that, if nothing else. They rankled under the rule of Rome, and it especially rubbed them wrong that Herod, the so-called Herod the Great had power over them.

Herod was worse than a Gentile, according to the Jews; he was a half Jewish Idumean, a descendant of Esau, a wild desert dwelling type. The Jews considered them with no small amount of prejudice.

To make matters worse, Herod was hardly a model human being. He has been called a monster one who was crafty and cruel, jealous and vain and always quick to seek revenge when wronged.

He came to the throne over the Roman province of Judea through cunning and manipulation of Marc Antony.

He had nine or ten wives. Even the historians lost count after a while.

On the smallest of suspicion he had even his favorite wife, Mariamne, put to death, along with her sons Alexander and Aristobulus.

Even while on his own deathbed, just days before he died he had his own son, his flesh and blood Antipater put to death.

Caesar Augustus was heard to say, "It is better to be Herod's hog than his own son!"

Again at his deathbed he ordered all the principle men in Israel to be rounded up and placed in the local stadium, where they could be surrounded by his soldiers and then slain when he died. The

reason: so that there would be great mourning at his death.

It must have been difficult for the Jews to read the Scriptures, and to know that their destiny was so great, and yet have the reality so different.

Understand, however, that this was Divine Judgment on the nation of Israel; that they had neglected their relationship with God, and that the situation was appropriate to their spiritual state. In this case the outward circumstances reflected accurately the inward condition: slavery.

It is no wonder, then, there was a great fascination in the nation of Israel with the prophecies about the Messiah, The one who would come and reestablish the greatness of their kingdom and their people.

A man who would rise up and smite their enemies and make them a free people once again.

From time to time a fairly great and famous man would rise up, and there would be some excitement about the possibility of his being the Messiah.

Of course, things would quiet down when he turned out to be quite human, and the slavery of Israel droned on and on.

After a time there was even a certain amount of cynicism about the whole deal.

The same phenomenon exists today with the fascination about the end times and the return of Christ.

Herod tried bribing the Jews, so that they would like him, and he could view himself as a successful ruler.

Julius Caesar had given Herod a fantastic and truly royal inaugural celebration back in 37 B.C., when Herod took the throne. He always longed for that past glory, when in fact the traditional Roman warning of "*sic transit gloria mundi*" applied to him more than any other. The bribes came in the form of a building program that was the very rival of Solomon's.

He built monuments and buildings in the Holy Land, and even rebuilt their temple in magnificent fashion, topping it with a golden dome.

The rebuilding of the Temple was much like the building of the Winchester Mystery House in San Jose, California.

More was added every year. A higher roof here, an annex there all very magnificent.

When Herod died, his relatives took over the folly and the never ending program continued until it was finally finished in 66 AD, some 87 years after it was begun.

It is one of the great ironies of history that it was burned down just four years later when Jerusalem was destroyed.

Other buildings and monuments were undertaken.

A temple, a forum, and a theatre at Samaria.

A great Greco-Roman capital, a temple, and port at Caesarea.

The port was an engineering marvel that even today is remarked upon by the archaeologists who work at the site.

Luxurious palaces and fortified retreats were built at Masada, Jerusalem, Jericho, and Herodium, which was near Bethlehem.

In Jerusalem he had baths, a theatre, and a Hippodrome constructed.

He also promoted Greek and Roman games so that the people might be entertained.

All of these things struck a sour note as any bribe to a slave will. The people really did not want these things. They wanted to be autonomous and free. But in order to be truly free, any people must know God, and that was exactly the problem in Israel.

Herod was the king. The people were unhappy. Their response to his despotism is worthwhile to note.

Jewish Responses To Herod's Rule; The Maccabean Revolt

Syria had one incredibly evil ruler by the name of Antiochus Epiphanes. This man was so evil that he made Herod the Great look like a great humanitarian by comparison. Antiochus was the prototype for the Antichrist of the Tribulation.

In 168 B.C. he desecrated the Temple in Jerusalem by setting up an altar to Jupiter Olympus, where he dedicated the use of the Temple to this false God by offering up the flesh of a swine. This was the 'abomination of desolation' of Daniel 11:31, ""His armed forces will rise up to desecrate the temple fortress and will abolish the daily sacrifice. Then they will set up the abomination that causes desolation."

Antiochus made a furious effort, with the help of the corrupt high priesthood (who helped because of a bribe), to Hellenize the Jews.

The high priest himself, a man by the name of Jason, was power mad, and attempted a coup in Jerusalem when Antiochus was mistakenly reported dead during a military campaign in Egypt.

His brief reign was characterized by violence, but the real violence would begin when Antiochus heard of the coup. He returned to Jerusalem with his army, besieged it, and killed 40,000 Jews upon its capture, and sold at least as many into slavery. Then he went back to Egypt.

Eventually, Antiochus awoke the ire of Rome, and he was arrested and ordered to back off from Egypt or die. He did so, but he made another stop at Jerusalem, where he took out his frustration on the Jews. He entered the city on the Sabbath, and murdered thousands of men in the synagogues, while enslaving the women and children. He defiled the Temple in every way imaginable, and caused the daily ritual system to cease entirely. This meant war.

During this time of great persecution there was a priest by the name of Mattathias. He was an old man of noble blood, and he had retired to a little town west of Jerusalem. There he was commanded to sacrifice on the Pagan altar, and he refused. In fact, he became enraged when a Judean came forward to sacrifice, and he struck the man, overthrew the altar, called upon the faithful to follow him, and fled with his sons into the wilderness.

This was the Maccabean family. The example of Mattathias was followed by many in various parts of the country. His story was well known, and the

idolatrous altars were being overthrown, and Jewish worship and culture was being reestablished. The rigorous life of a rebel took its toll on Mattathias, and he died just a year later, in 166 A.D.

The third son of Mattathias, Judas, took over for him in directing the war for independence. He was a man full of energy and clever in the running of the war. He was an expert at guerrilla warfare, attacking at night, and at the most surprising times and places. Encouraged by early success, he became even more bold, and defeated Antiochus' head general, Apollonius, at Bethhoron.

It was only a little while later that Antiochus left Jerusalem and left the government to a man name Lysias. Lysias was a military dunce, and Judas defeated his larger army at Emmaus, and later at Bethsura. Judas was then able to occupy Jerusalem, where he purified the Temple.

Judas continued his triumphs on the military field, and after the battle of Adasa, the Jews had almost won their independence. Almost. Bacchides led another invading army, and this time the Jews were caught unaware. Able to only muster a small group of men, and losing many of those on the night before the battle, Judas was defeated, and died.

All that was gained seemed lost. The patriots were in a state of total disorder, and it was only renewed persecution that brought them together again.

The Jews again looked to the Maccabees, this time Jonathan, the youngest son of Mattathias would be their champion. Jonathan would fight a skillful defensive campaign in the Jordan Valley, and when a new king took the throne in Syria, he gained support, and Israel a fair amount of freedom.

Jonathan was made high priest, and there was peace in the land for some 20 years. Sadly, in 144 B.C. Jonathan fell victim to the treachery of a man by the name of Tryphon, and was imprisoned in Ptolemais, in Galilee. This act left just one Maccabee, Simon.

Simon had all along been a steady military leader, but had left the national leadership to his brothers.

Now it was his turn, and he placed himself at the head of the patriot party. After a short while, Tryphon put Jonathan to death, and seized the throne of Syria.

Simon had the wits to make an appeal for the freedom of the Jews to Demetrius, a well known general with connections to Rome.

This appeal was accepted, and once again it seemed as though the Jews would be free.

Although Mattathias had begun the rebellion over the issue of the Jewish religion, after 32 years, the war, and political freedom became the thing. Relationship with God had taken a back seat to military strategy and tactics, and politics. And remember, that no nation can remain free without a relationship with God.

At the time of Simon, in 143 B.C., Israel had apparently won their freedom through military skill and political maneuvering. They had won almost every battle that they had fought for 25 years. They had successfully manipulated the political machines of their foreign occupants.

They had done everything just right, but they had failed in the most important regard: the spiritual life.

Just eight years after the apparent victory of Israel, Simon and two of his sons was murdered by Ptolemaeus, and in 135 B.C. the nation of Israel once again found itself on the brink of slavery.

John Hyrcanus was one of the two living sons of Simon. When he heard of the death of his father, he marched with the army against Jericho. Unfortunately, Ptolemaeus held a trump card: he had Simon's widow, John's mother, captive, and the sabbatical year of the year of Jubilee was just around the corner, so the siege of Jericho failed.

Seeing no further use for the woman, Ptolemaeus had her killed, and then he fled to Philadelphia. Antiochus the sixth (not Epiphanes) then invaded Judea, and besieged Jerusalem, and Hyrcanus and the army was trapped there and placed into a desperate situation.

The Jews caught a break when a truce was granted for the Passover feast, and Hyrcanus took the opportunity to bargain with Ptolemaeus. Hyrcanus

compromised like crazy in order to gain the freedom of Israel, even going to the extreme of opening David's tomb to pay the tribute demanded by the Syrian General.

He then went to Parthia to bargain further for the freedom of Israel, and through compromise and manipulation was able to establish a treaty that lasted for more than fifty years.

By 30 B.C., the line of the Maccabees had died out with the death of Hyrcanus II, the grandson of Hyrcanus. His granddaughter was Mariamne, who went on to marry Herod the Great.

Now, where were the Pharisees during all this time? Well, they had begun to grasp for political power, so that they might more effectively carry out their mission. At first they were on the side of the Maccabees, but the more the rebels concentrated on the war, the further they got away from strict observance of the Law, and so they earned the wrath of the Pharisees.

Because of the gross compromises of Hyrcanus, and looting of David's tomb, more and more Jews went to the side of the Pharisees. After the death of Hyrcanus I, his daughter became queen, and seeing the handwriting on the wall, she abandoned her political power to Pharisees.

At the time of the birth of Christ, the Romans through Herod held the outward political power, while the Pharisees held it internally. The people found themselves under a double tyranny, and it was a difficult time indeed.

Concluding principles:

- Freedom without a relationship with God is in reality slavery.
- War without a relationship with God is a waste.
- Both slavery and freedom begin in the soul.
- **John 8:32**, "Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."
- **Gal 5:1**, "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery."

THE PHARISEES

The word "Pharisee" is the Greek translation from the Aramaic, and it means to be separated. To the Pharisee, this meant a separation from the influences of the Gentiles on their religion and culture.

We have a very similar thing occurring in our nation today. The Pagan influences in our society are waging war against the marvelous culture and vital relationship with God that our forefathers enjoyed. It is a natural and good response to do what you can to protect what is good; to defend it from those who so zealously attempt to destroy it.

Every time that the nation of Israel fell under the rule of another nation whether Babylon or Persia or Greece or Rome, they felt like they were losing a little bit more of themselves. The foreign nationals would come in with their foreign Gods and foreign customs and foreign games, and away would go just a little bit more of what was truly Jewish.

The emphasis of the Pharisees was in the area of the Mosaic Law. It was their aim to protect and uphold the Law of Moses, so that the pollution of foreigners and their foreign Gods would not destroy what made the nation of Israel so distinct, and so great in their time. This is why they came to hate Herod so very much.

For some four hundred years before the birth of Christ they strove to fulfill their mission as they saw it. Such an aim was not so bad, but in carrying out that aim they became so extreme as to be parody of the Law.

Their undue attention to detail, and especially their imagination in creating details which did not exist resulted in their missing the point of the Law entirely.

The Law was designed to bring the people of Israel to a relationship with the living God through the provision of knowledge essential to the maintenance of that relationship. It was not designed to be carried out just for the sake of accomplishment and preservation.

The very best way for the Pharisees to have accomplished their aim would have been to

perpetuate the Law through having a relationship with God by it.

Their teachings about religious matters are quite a revelation of their character.

They tried ardently to avoid all physical contact with the Pagan Gentiles. Even touching one would make them ceremonially unclean. This is why the Pharisees took such great offense at Christ's close association with the tax collectors and sinners.

They always stuck to the letter of the Law, without a hint of flexibility. They defined exactly many things that were not set forth in the Law. They were obsessed with the Sabbath, and were constantly specifying and clarifying what could and could not be done; how far one could travel; exactly how much could be lifted; what the precise exceptions were. Of course, the point that the Sabbath was designed for concentration on God was lost on them.

The Pharisees were consumed with the idea of appearance. They would pray long and loud in public. They would contrive special hats to cover their eyes, so that they might not see a woman (these were called the bloody Pharisees, because they were always running into things).

Their motivation is equally revealing. They did what they did at the time of Christ for two reasons: to gain power, and to avoid judgment. The latter is especially interesting in the light of 1 John 4:18, "There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love."

They were fervent in their legalism lest they offend God, and thus come under His judgment in the eternal state. But you cannot have a true relationship with one you fear. You must have confidence before God, and that was one thing the Pharisee did not have.

Another motivation, the lust for power, had been hanging around the Pharisees for quite some time. Their mission, though warped in its execution, was quite a noble one. They looked at their mission, and decided that they needed power, political power in order to carry it out. Much like their association with the Law, their attempts to

gain power led to their addiction to it, and its rule over them.

Perhaps the best characterization of their addiction to power was their success in the Maccabean Revolt, which occurred a couple of centuries before the birth of Christ.

In the intermediate period between the death of Alexander in 323 B.C. and the establishment of Roman control from 63 B.C. onward, Israel remained under the nominal control of Greece and even Syria.

THE SADDUCEES

This religious group known as Sadducees came into being about 300 years before Christ. They are characterized by their aristocracy, their cultural surrender to the Greeks and others, and their opposition to everything the Pharisees stood for.

Their name comes from the Aramaic Sadduqim, which meant 'righteousness'. However, those who were in opposition to them called them saddiqim, which meant 'destruction'.

They came from the ranks of the priests and high priests of Israel, during the time of the Greek occupation. Their desire was to give in to the Hellenizing influences of the Greeks, and thus retain their favor.

The Sadducees had a lot to lose to the occupation forces of the Greeks, because they were mostly prosperous, aristocratic people. In order to maintain their lifestyles and possessions, they placated the Greeks, giving in to their cultural and even religious influences.

During the Maccabean revolt, they stayed in the background. They were in fact very unpopular. When Jonathan Maccabee was appointed high priest by popular demand, it looked like the Sadducees would be gone forever. At the time, almost all of the people in the land were willing to sacrifice anything for their freedom. The strong oppression of the Syrians drove them to this sacrificial attitude.

After about 40 years of on and off civil war, the Jews became tired of the bloodshed, and popular opinion tended toward peace. In this case, peace meant compromise, and compromise was the

game of the Sadducees. John Hyrcanus, of the Maccabees, was really very close to the Sadducee way of thinking.

However, the compromising policy of Hyrcanus became unpopular in a few years, and so the Pharisees came into power. Due to the double tyranny of the Pharisees and king Herod, the Sadducees had made a great comeback not long before the birth of Christ. Let's face it: the Pharisees were no fun at all.

The religious beliefs of the Sadducees can be summed up in a single thought: they were always opposed to what the Pharisees believed. They believed that only the written Law is binding, whereas the Pharisees believed that the body of tradition and written interpretation were just as important as the Law itself.

The Sadducees punished breaches of the Law severely, but the Pharisees often interpreted their way around the written Law, and thus got out of the proscribed punishment.

They had a strong belief in human free will, while the Pharisees believed in predestination to the point of being fatalistic.

They denied the resurrection, and any kind of continued existence of the soul after physical death. This led to their inordinate value of private property and possessions. The Pharisees, however, believed that the soul continued after death, and that there would be a severe judgment in eternity.

The Sadducees did not believe in angelic beings, or demons, and any reference to such in Scripture was converted to a manifestation of God Himself. The Pharisees did believe in angels.

The Sadducees always reserved the right of private opinion about Scripture and the Law, while the Pharisees rejected that right, tyrannically imposing their opinions on all.

The Sadducees were a mixture of both the conservative and the liberal from today's American society. The pressures of history and their religious beliefs worked together to make them what they were. Although they had some good elements to their philosophy, they were just as spiritually and morally bankrupt as the Pharisees. They are a good example of wrong

reaction for the right reason. It was a good thing to be opposed to the religious tyranny of the Pharisees, but the motives of the Sadducees were wrong, and thus their beliefs went in the wrong direction. Although religion was important to them, relationship with God was not, and so they destroyed themselves. They left the pages of history forever after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.

THE ESSENES

The Essenes were a widespread movement in the ancient world. They appeared on the scene not long before the Maccabean revolt, about 175 B.C.

Their decision was to withdraw from the evils of the world around them, and they were the prototype of the monastic movement of the dark and middle ages. Because of the destruction of the Jewish nation, and their deportation to points all over the ancient world, this movement was widespread.

These are the people who produced the Dead Sea Scrolls, and who lived in the caves of Qumran where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found. In a sense, these were the ostriches of the time, sticking their heads in the sand, and hoping that others would leave them alone.

They were widely admired, especially by the intelligentsia of the day. Both Josephus and Philo are full of praise for them (but notice that neither wanted to be one).

Their group was strictly organized, and enforced strict obedience to their leadership. They had a system of double initiation. First, they had to undergo a probation period of one year, and after this time they would undergo an initiation ceremony of ritual purification.

After two more years of probation they gained their full membership in the community. At this time an oath was taken in which the new member would swear himself to complete truthfulness to other members of the community, and complete secrecy on the doctrines of the community to those outside (this is one reason why Christ forbade swearing).

Only adults were admitted into the Essene order, but they did have a children's' recruiting and introduction program.

The Essene community was dedicated to total communism. They had a common purse. They had common clothes. They had common food at a common table.

Trading of any kind was prohibited. They had a strictly regulated daily labor plan.

They were total pacifists. They were not even allowed to make weapons or anything that might hurt someone.

They observed the Sabbath with strict adherence. They read and explained Scripture in their daily worship schedule.

They were extremely ascetic in many ways. They abstained from sex and marriage; their ranks were only increased through outside recruiting. It is a testimony to their popularity that they have continued in one form or another until even today.

They were prohibited from profanity, makeup (or anything that might enhance their physical appearance), bathed only in cold water, wore only white, and were greatly modest about all bodily functions.

They substituted their own ritual system for God's, and they thought their own to be superior. They did not sacrifice any animals.

The Essene movement was a reaction to the incursions of the evil outside world. They were not much different from the other utopian movements of history. They depended very much on strong and virtuous leadership, and when their leadership failed them, they disappeared from the pages of history.

Unlike their Pharisee and Sadducee counterparts, they seemed to have a more vital, daily relationship with God. However, distortions were inevitable due to their rejection of God's ritual system, and some of them even went so far as to engage in sun worship. They were most like the Pharisees, and could even be considered a radical Pharisee sect.

They were the pattern which the early church (mistakenly) patterned themselves. Since they

lived such sequestered lives, Christ would have little to say about them, because He never ran across them.

John the Baptist was considered to be like the Essenes because of his ascetic life in the desert, but he really wasn't.

THE ZEALOTS

The Zealots were almost purely a political party. They called for the violent overthrow of the Roman rule. They carried on the tradition of the Maccabees they were militant, and full of zeal and purpose. They were the cause of the Jewish wars and the destruction of Jerusalem.

They fought with complete fanaticism to the very end. They were extremely patriotic, but not many were Godly. They took their patriotism to great excess, and vowed to strike down all the enemies of Israel. Although they were politically correct (not in the modern sense), they were morally wrong, and in this they were most similar to the southern U.S. in the early 1800's.

Transition

The nation of Israel at the time of the birth of Christ was an unhappy nation. For hundreds of years, they had battled for their freedom and lost. They had been under the crushing rule of foreign nations.

For hundreds of years, a great destiny had been before them, taunting them. Because of this, they chafed under the yoke of Roman rule through Herod.

Without a national relationship with God, the nation could not be free. Without a national relationship with God, the nation could not enjoy the blessings of the unconditional covenants.

Without a national relationship with God, they would reject the greatest of all world leaders of all time: Jesus Christ. One and all, they would reject Him.

Introduction to the Spiritual Perspective

The past history of any people has an impact on their present culture the way they think, solve problems, react to pressure or prosperity. Israel at the time of Christ was no different. The people

stood at the crossroads of their own national history. They had a past, and they could make choices which decided their future.

History is made up of many elements: geography, culture, philosophy & religion, economics, technology, politics, and many others.

The greatest of all the elements is the principle that Jesus Christ controls history. The attitude of a nation toward Christ has a great impact on its place in history. The attitude of the nation toward establishment truth has a great impact on that nation's status before God. The attitude of the individual believer toward Bible Truth has a great impact on all other people in the nation.

The Cosmic System

The term "cosmic system" refers to Satan's plan and process for controlling the world, and his attempt, using his organization of fallen angels, to counteract the plan of God in all respects. In his plans and programs, Satan will ultimately and certainly fail. Jesus Christ is the victor in the spiritual warfare, the "angelic conflict". The Lord Jesus sits at the right hand of God the Father in heaven, where all His enemies shall be made his footstool.

The cosmic system has a great impact on the history of a nation. History has certain downward trends which signify the cosmic influence on a nation. For example, Israel at the time of the birth of Christ had been on the downward side of history for quite some time. It is important to take a look at the principles of the cosmic system related to history in order to fully understand the period in question.

General Principles of the Cosmic System.

Human history is the resolution of the prehistoric angelic conflict. In order to vindicate himself and His judgment of the fallen angels, God conceived a plan by which sinful human beings could glorify Him.

In order to justify his rejection of the prehistoric grace offer from God, Satan conceived a system designed to counteract the plan of God.

Therefore, the purpose of the Satan's cosmic system is as follows:

- To keep unbelievers from believing in Jesus Christ.
- To destroy the believer's relationship with God.
- To bring in his own millennium through internationalism and a centralized world government.

- To prevent God's millennium from arriving.

There are three plans in Satan's cosmic system.

- The World Plan
- The Individual Plan
- The Propaganda Plan

The World Plan of Satan

The world plan is Satan's plan to bring in His own millennium, and to prevent God from bringing in the Divine Millennium. The world plan is a highly organized international conspiracy of demons.

Eph 6:12, "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."

Although the world plan is highly organized through the genius of Satan Himself, the human side is not so. Demons do control human beings through demon possession and demon influence, but the humans themselves are rarely well informed. Often a world conspiracy theory will arise, but these are due to the demonic side and not the human side. There is no Biblical documentation for a human world conspiracy. Humans are simply pawns in Satan's world plan.

The Individual Plan of Satan

The individual plan is an integral part of the world plan, since human participation in the demonic organization is absolutely essential. The means to the end of the cosmic system is power.

The world branch is constantly grasping for power over the human race and its organizations. Power in the form of human government is of the utmost importance in the world branch of the cosmic system. The more power that the enemy has, the greater he thinks he can be. The more power the

enemy has, the more effectively he can carry out his plan.

In every human life and human organization, Satan is grasping for more power, so he can wield it to carry out his plan. Every time that someone or some organization depends on a human viewpoint solution, Satan gains power over their lives. Every time that someone or some organization comes to believe a cosmic counterfeit or lie, Satan gains power over their lives.

The Satanic "Millennium"

As a part of the angelic appeal trial of human history, Satan has developed his idea of a millennium, which is designed to prove his point. In order to bring in his millennium, Satan must have total control of international human authority. This is why there is so much influence towards internationalism in the world.

God ordained nationalism after Satan's first attempt at internationalism at the tower of Babel, Gen. 11:19.

Satan will bring in his "millennium", known as the Period of Great Tribulation, which will only come after the rapture of the church. The Satanic millennium can only be put into place when there are no believers on planet earth.

This 'millennium' will be the most chaotic, disastrous, and miserable 7 years in world history. It is the tribulation of the book of revelation.

The intent of the Satanic millennium.

- To prove that the prehistoric sentence of God which condemned the fallen angels to eternity in the lake of fire was unfair.
- To prove that Satan is God's equal, Isa 14:14, "I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High."

The characteristics of the Satanic millennium.

- Counterfeit righteousness and injustice under the veil of justice.
- Constant change and lack of dependability
- Treacherous motives and cruel slavery behind the mask of mercy.

- Wrong approaches to problem solving and false solutions which always make the problem worse.
- Chaos and confusion.
- Bad decisions from a position of weakness and a society saturated with evil.
- Dishonesty, obfuscation, evasiveness, and a lack of veracity. (All this sounds like U.S. politics today).

The Fight Against the Divine Millennium.

Satan is constantly fighting against the Divine plan for human history. Satan thinks that if he can destroy or delay the Divine millennium, he will somehow gain an advantage in the angelic conflict. He is wrong. He does not have the power to do either.

The Divine Millennium will come at the second advent of Christ, and it therefore immediately follows the tribulation. There have been two attacks in history against the Divine Millennium: the attack against Christ, and the attack against the Jews. These attacks are tantamount to murdering the witnesses of a trial, so that they cannot testify.

The Attacks against Christ.

Jesus Christ will be the world ruler during the Divine Millennium, and His rulership will be fantastic.

There was an attempt to destroy the mediatorship of Christ.

- In Genesis 6 there is a record of an attempt to destroy the human genetic purity of the line of Christ.
- In order to be the perfect mediator between God and man, Christ had to be both fully God and fully man in the hypostatic union.
- Satan attempted to destroy the human side of this equation.
- Demons seduced human women and impregnated them. Their children were angelic-human half breeds, and no longer genetically pure.

- Only Noah and his family resisted this demonic conspiracy. This is why the rest of the earth had to be destroyed.
- God considered this attack so great, that he imprisoned the angels who participated under the surface of the earth, where they still reside, waiting for their release in the tribulation.

There were attempts to kill Christ before He could fulfill the purpose of His life.

Satan knew that if he could kill Christ before His time, the plan of God would be stymied.

Therefore, there were several attempts on His life.

- The attempt of Herod, Mat 2:13,16, "When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him." "When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi."
- The attempts of the Pharisees, **Mat 12:14**, "But the Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus."
- The attempts of the chief priest and elders, **Mat 26:3,4**, "Then the chief priests and the elders of the people assembled in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas, and they plotted to arrest Jesus in some sly way and kill him."

Of course, all of these attempts failed completely.

The Attacks against the Jews

The Jews are God's chosen people, and they are going to be Christ's subjects in the Divine Millennium. Therefore, Satan is constantly plotting against the Jews in his attempt to exterminate them as a race of people. There is a tremendous amount of Satanic propaganda against the Jews. The Jewish world conspiracies, etc.

In every generation, there is an attempt through the Satanic world conspiracy to eliminate the Jews

as a race. In the 20th century, there have been at least three attempts at genocide against the Jews.

- In Soviet Russia, from 1917 to the present.
- In Nazi Germany, from 1933-1945.
- By various Arab nations, today.

During the tribulation, the genocidal attacks against the Jews will reach their crescendo.

We are to judge the present nation of Israel by the standards of Divine establishment.

We are to judge individual Jews only when they come under our authority or they break the law.

In all other instances, we are to give Jews maximum respect and reservation of judgment.

As a national entity, we are to provide a haven for the Jews, so that they might be free from racial prejudice.

Conclusion.

Although these demonically inspired attacks are terrible in their intensity and genius, they have no chance of succeeding. God will protect the Jews until the return of Jesus Christ. He will succeed, easily.

The Propaganda Plan of Satan

The purpose of the propaganda plan is to promote the cosmic counterfeits and lies, and to attack the word of God. The propaganda plan integrates and cooperates with both the individual and the world branches of the cosmic system. The propaganda branch is an expression of Satanic genius and the demonic organization. Human beings are an important element in the propaganda branch.

The Promotion of the Cosmic Counterfeits and Lies.

The cosmic system has an elaborate scheme of counterfeits and lies. These counterfeits and lies are designed to supplant the truth. The counterfeits and lies match up with every category of truth possible, including:

- The Gospel.
- The plan of God.
- The power of God.

- The person and work of God the Father
- The person and work of Christ.
- The person and work of the Holy Spirit.

These counterfeits and lies are promoted by every means possible. There is a great emphasis today on the media, and especially television. Those who are heavily involved in the cosmic system inevitably become cosmic propagandists.

The Attack Against the Word of God

In order to make the promotion of the cosmic counterfeits and lies fully effective, the cosmic system attacks the Word. The attacks against the Word come in two basic categories.

Attacks to destroy the Word outright. There have been many attempts throughout history to destroy the manuscripts of the Bible.

Attacks to undermine the credibility of the Word. These are usually attacks on the supernatural nature of the Divine inspiration of the Word. Liberal theologians are mainly responsible for this branch of the attack on the Word.

Rome at the Time of Christ

The Roman Environment During the Life of Christ.

The Pax Romanus.

After many wars, the Roman Empire was established. After the death of Julius Caesar, there was a civil war, and then Augustus Caesar (Octavian) was given absolute power over the senate and people of Rome. Augustus was a good man who desired peace and prosperity for Rome. After many long years of warfare, external and internal, the people were tired of it, and longed for peace. Augustus was sensitive and thoughtful, a good ruler. Through his long rule many great things were provided.

Because of the state of peace, there was a great emphasis on trade and commerce. Many Romans made their fortunes because of the advantages of freedom through military victory and peace through military strength. There were great building programs in every city, financed by donations from the private sector. Theatres and

temples and viaducts all sprouted as if there were a spring season for buildings.

There was a fantastic system of roads and trade routes on the sea, all protected by the police and the Roman equivalent of the coast guard. Piracy and highway robbery remained at a minimum through capital punishment.

Augustus also preached the virtues of morality and discipline and justice and courage. He realized that the Roman empire was centered on the family, and that its stability depended on it. There was a rigidly pro-family bank of legislation, which encouraged marriage and children inside the marriage relationship. Some of this was circumvented, while much of it was taken to heart.

Augustus was Caesar at the time of the birth of Christ. Although Augustus died in 14 A.D., Tiberius continued the Augustan tradition of the Pax Romanum. Tiberius was the emperor for the remainder of the life of Christ.

The Jews (and especially the Pharisees and Zealots) had absolutely nothing to complain about. The peace of Rome was very pro-establishment.

Koine' Greek, the Language of the Roman Empire.

Koine' Greek was the language of Alexander's conquest. Attic Greek was a difficult language to master. When Alexander expanded the Greek empire as far as Afghanistan and India, the people had to assimilate in order to be a part of that empire. Without Greek the foreigners could not trade or prosper. However, since Attic Greek was so difficult, the people of the empire commonized it, so that it could be easily used.

This commonization was a great simplification which retained the subtle and detailed nature of its predecessor.

Koine' Greek was the greatest language in history for written communication. Through it many complex and subtle concepts could be communicated with clarity. Koine' Greek was retained in the Roman Empire as the language of the common man. Nearly everyone knew it and used it throughout their lives.

Roman Culture

The Romans borrowed much of their culture from their Greeks. Greek literature, drama, and games were all retained by the Romans. The Romans admired almost all aspects of Greek culture, even the most debauched things.

The Romans had spent much of their developing years in war and in a very disciplined and workaholic environment, and so they lacked cultural self esteem. The Greeks had much to offer in the way of culture although much of theirs was corrupt. The Greeks had died from their cultural debauchery it was the ruin of their empire.

No nation has ever survived the corruption of their morals. The homosexuality of the Greeks was rampant; it destroyed them. The Romans adopted even this even to the point of pederasty. It would also destroyed them.

Analogous to this is the popularity of all things American to the Japanese. Whether its baseball or disco or Madonna, the Japanese people love it, as long as it is American. The contrast is that while Japan was conquered by the U.S. and it adopted much of U.S. culture, the Greeks were conquered by the Romans, and yet the Romans adopted the Greek culture.

However, at the time of Christ, the Romans remained for the most part moral and family oriented. It was the most stable time in the history of the world.

The Roman postal service was for government use only a great idea. Imagine the reduction in garbage from the elimination of junk mail. Personal mail went with travelers and traders.

The Romans had no public schools. The education of their children was a two-tiered system. The first tier was that of the disciplinary training. This was usually administered by a well educated and trusted household slave. He would teach manners and self-discipline to the children of the household.

The second tier was that of the educational training. Science, math, astronomy, medicine, botany, zoology, linguistics, literature, music, and sports were all common subjects in the education of the child. There was also a great emphasis on

logic and rhetoric. 6. Next, there was the institution of slavery.

It is important to note that the Romans could never imagine a state of total abolition, so ingrained was the institution of slavery in their nation and their culture and even their thinking. The moral question of slavery was never raised.

Slaves became slaves because of the conquests of the Roman Empire. Whenever a new territory was conquered, much of the population was deported back to population centers elsewhere in the empire.

- This served a twofold purpose: it provided cheap labor, and the insurance against guerrilla warfare in the conquered territory.
- The people who were deported received a low form of welfare: they would have the basic logistics provided in exchange for their labor. Slavery did much to provide for those who would otherwise be charity cases.

The slaves of the Roman Empire took on what was considered the menial tasks of the day much of the manual labor was done by them. As the Empire grew and prospered, the more educated and presentable slaves become household helpers and educators.

Slaves were always dependent on their masters, and as long as the Empire stayed on the virtuous side.

- Manumission was often granted to faithful slaves.
- Emancipated slaves had great opportunities for upward mobility.
- There was not an extreme prejudice against slaves often they were respected for who they were.

Although slaves were considered property, they were allowed to have their own lives, marrying and producing families. The New Testament is written from this frame of reference.

- Masters are considered legitimate authority, as long as they stayed within the laws of Divine established. Therefore, slaves are called upon to obey their masters.

- Masters are called upon to emancipate their slaves.

The Four Gospels

General Introduction.

In the middle of the 6th decade of the first century, Christianity had reached a crisis. Nero had begun his persecutions, and the Romans had begun to suppress the open rebellion of the zealot Jews in Palestine.

The church had been well established throughout the Roman Empire, and many doctrinal epistles had been written in support of the church.

Paul was in prison; many of the great believers of the eyewitness generation had died from natural causes and violent persecution.

It appeared as though the prophecy of Christ about the destruction of the Temple was about to come to pass due to the hopeless war in the Holy Land.

It was because of these intense adversities that God the Holy Spirit inspired three men in three different cities to write gospels records of the life of Christ.

The three locations of writing were widely and evenly distributed.

Mark recorded Peter's gospel in Rome.

Luke wrote his gospel somewhere in Greece, probably in Achaia.

Matthew wrote from Antioch in Syria.

These three gospels were written for various reasons.

Matthew wrote to Jews, in order to convince them of the Messiahship of Jesus.

He hoped to convert them before the folly of the Zealot movement resulted in their persecution and destruction.

Already war was begun in Palestine.

Luke wrote to Greeks in order to provide an accurate history of the events of the incarnation. His second work, the book of Acts, is the accurate history of the early church.

Mark wrote to record the life of Christ as told by Peter. It is likely that Peter was in prison and close

to martyrdom when he dictated the story of Christ's life. Peter no doubt thought it imperative that the story get out. The abbreviated nature of the narrative reveals both Peter's nature and that he was in a hurry.

These three gospels, although very similar in their record of events, arose from independent sources.

Peter told the story to Mark as he remembered it.

Luke had apparently interviewed a number of people over the years and put these materials together to form his gospel.

Matthew had already written quite a lot of material in Aramaic, which had to do with the prophecies concerning the life of Christ. He used this material to form the basis for a number of his passages, and filled in the rest from memory.

These three gospels are often called the synoptic gospels, because they have roughly the same record of events. Synoptic means to 'see together'.

These synoptic gospels were all written within a year or two from one another. It is therefore doubtful that they could have relied on one another. The times of writing are as follows (all dates approximate).

Mark 65 A.D.

Matthew and Luke 66 A.D.

Notice that in the time of crisis it was important from the Spirit's point of view to provide knowledge of the life of Christ! Remember, the Spirit chose when to inspire these works. The gospel of John is very similar in that it is inspired during a time of great adversity for the church. John wrote his gospel in the eighties, most likely the late eighties.

The problems of harmonizing the gospels

Critics of the gospels have been very skeptical about the accuracy of the gospel accounts because even the synoptic gospels do not appear (at least on the surface) to harmonize well.

However when the gospels are analyzed and then harmonized by those whose work goes beyond just a surface appraisal, things work out quite well. One such harmony is Dr. Thomas' A

Harmony of the Gospels, which was written together with Dr. Gundry.

Dr. Thomas lists the following as problems with harmonization on page 302 of his book.

Accounts of Christ's words sometimes differ. One evangelist's report of the same conversation, saying, or discourse may be more less complete than another's. Differences may occur in grammatical construction. Synonyms may be substituted, verb voice or tense changed, or nouns replaced by pronouns. There may be differences in the order of discussion.

Sometimes the differences in details reported even involve what appear to be contradictions.

Occasionally, the same or similar statements will be found in contexts which appear to reflect different situations.

Somewhat similar events occur in different situations.

Sometimes what really appears to be the same event will be reported in a different order in another gospel.

Sometimes diverse descriptive details are given for what appears to be the same event; sometimes these details may have the appearance of discrepancy.

The gospel writers do not always report the same events.

The big issue is this: Do these problems undermine the historical integrity of the gospels? If they do, then they undermine the inspired nature of the word.

In the last century, the German scholars saw these problems and failed to account for them. Instead, they arrogantly denied the inspired nature of the Word, and the ministers and the people followed. The result was two world wars, both started by a nation full of people who called themselves Christians. We stand on the brink of the same possibility in our own nation.

Do not fear, however, for responsible scholarship more than accounts for these problems without compromising the historical integrity and inspired nature of these documents.

The general solutions are as follows:

Jesus spoke three languages: Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic. The gospels were all written in Greek. Therefore, by necessity many of the gospel accounts of Jesus' words are translations. In translation, there is plenty of room of variance without losing meaning.

Sometimes the words are translated quite literally, but even so the use of synonyms is quite acceptable. Sometimes the words are translated more loosely in order to emphasize the impact of the words. This is also perfectly acceptable.

In modern language we have many punctuation marks to indicate what is a direct quote and what is not; what is a clarification by the author, and what is a clarification by the original speaker; even footnotes are employed to refer to source materials. None of these things were available to the ancient writer.

Because of this it is difficult to tell when the writer is doing one of these things in his translation of Jesus' words (even if he is translating). Suffice it to say that God the Holy Spirit is the supernatural director of all translations of Jesus' words, and He ensured their accuracy.

When there are differences in translation, we can use them to amplify all the translations.

Dr. Thomas summarizes this principle in this way: "What one does expect to be reproduced in ordinary discussion are the striking or important statements, the leading thoughts, the major divisions or topics, and the general drift of discussion including transitions from one topic to another. While different reports are expected to agree on these matters, it is also expected that there will be differences on details such as changes of person, substitution of pronouns for nouns or vice versa, changes in tense, voice, or mood of the verbs, and substitution of synonyms are too trivial to be taken as serious objections to a reporter's accuracy in ordinary discussion.

"While wording is important, meaning can be conveyed in a variety of ways. Verbal inspiration does not imply that truth can be accurately communicated in only one way. Rather, it means

that the manner in which the Holy Spirit did speak through the human agents is inspired and hence accurate, word for word."

The people of the ancient world, especially the Jewish people, had highly trained memories. They were often required to memorize long passages of the Old Testament, and even in a language that was not their native tongue.

This, together with the ministry of the Holy Spirit led to tremendous accuracy with reference to the meaning of the translation.

When a translation is direct from the Greek, we can expect greater accuracy in the quotation of Jesus' words, but even so, one writer for his own reason may add or subtract from the quotation without a violation of the principle of inspiration.

Also, Christ no doubt repeated many of His words over the course of His ministry; this does not mean that He said the exact same thing every time. Even during the same sermon it is likely that He repeated Himself. One gospel writer may have recorded one part, while another different parts with slightly different wording.

Differences in the details of what appear to be the same event may in fact be a record of two quite different occurrences.

Sometimes, a writer will arrange his material according to subject and therefore take things out of chronological order. This too is acceptable, and does not corrupt the inspired nature of the text.

The conclusion is this: that harmonizing the gospels presents no major problems with reference to inspiration. The accounts do harmonize well, and the problems that go with a harmony are easily and rationally accounted for.

The Gospel of Matthew

For each gospel, we will follow this order:

Author

Circumstances of writing

Target readership

Purpose of writing, and

Characteristics of the gospel.

The Author

Matthew: God used an outcast. His name is a transliteration of the Aramaic word which means "gift of God."

In his own Gospel, Matthew uses his regular name. In other gospels, the name Levi is used. It is likely that Matthew became his name after his conversion.

Matthew was a Jewish tax collector. It is likely that he was fairly well off financially because of his profession. This makes his decision to follow Christ all the more remarkable, because he left it all behind Luke 5:28. It is likely that he worked at the toll house in Capernaum.

When he decided to follow our Lord, he threw a big party, and invited all his friends. His decision to follow Christ was immediate.

As a tax collector, Matthew was an outcast in Jewish society. He apparently had no friends who were devout in the Jewish faith for at his party there were only other tax collectors and sinners.

The Roman tax collectors were hated by the Jews because the Roman taxes were in addition to the Jewish taxes.

They were also hated because they represented the occupying forces of the Roman Empire.

The tax collectors made their living by inflating the Roman taxes. They essentially worked on commission.

Tax collectors were wealthy, but hated by their own society. They had to live with a tremendous amount of prejudice.

Because of this prejudice their social options were severely limited. They could only socialize with others who were outcasts.

It was easy for Matthew to follow Christ, considering his personal circumstances. Social isolation does not make it easy to enjoy personal wealth. No doubt he knew of the supernatural essence of Christ's ministry, and he may have even heard Him speak. It is often the outcast that finds it easiest to follow Christ.

The Circumstances Surrounding the Writing of the Matthew

Of the circumstances of the writing of this gospel we know very little. What little we can draw comes from inside the book.

The Target Readership for Matthew

The target readership for Matthew's gospel was most likely Jewish believers in Palestine. A secondary audience may be found in Jewish audiences everywhere. His was the most read of all the gospels in the first century. This popularity is a good testimony to its arrangement.

The Purpose of the Gospel of Matthew

The purpose of this gospel was generally to awaken and establish faith in Jesus Christ.

That this gospel was written primarily with a Jewish audience in mind brings a more specific purpose: To establish Christ as the Messiah and to answer the attacks of Jewish critics on the issue of the person of Christ.

It was also intended as a tool for use in evangelism for other believers.

Finally, it was probably intended as a last ditch effort to stem the tide of destruction which was descending upon the Jews in Palestine.

The Jews were their own worst enemies. They were extremely self-destructive, and especially so since their rejection of Christ as Messiah.

Their self-destructive tendencies culminated in a great number of them choosing the way of the zealot armed resistance without virtue.

The way of the zealot could only result in the destruction of the Jews in the land, and of Jerusalem. The Romans' method of warfare was far superior to that of the zealots. Anyone with common sense could see the inevitable destruction of the Jewish armies.

Therefore, Matthew wrote his gospel as a last ditch effort to stem the tide of destruction that had welled up among the Jews in Palestine.

Matthew wrote just as the zealots began their armed revolt in 66 A.D.

General Characteristics of Matthew

The most striking of the characteristics of this gospel is its emphasis on Christ as the Messianic King promised by the Old Testament prophets. Time and again Matthew points out some event in Christ's life, or one of His characteristics as being a fulfillment of a prophecy. He especially concentrates on Christ as the fulfillment of the Davidic covenant.

Matthew also concentrates on the kingdom of the Messianic king. He uses the term, "the kingdom of heaven" 32 times, but it is not mentioned elsewhere in Scripture. He stresses both the spiritual and political aspects of the kingdom. Matthew records ten parables about the kingdom which are found in none of the other gospels. His is the gospel of the New Covenant for Israel.

Matthew's gospel has a very Jewish flavor, yet at the same time he often takes the opportunity to denounce the Pharisees and their incorrect practices and perceptions of the Messiah. The latter is probably due to Matthew's social isolation. No doubt he was often victimized by the Pharisees for being a tax collector. Like so many who are the victims of prejudice, Matthew has special insight into those who perpetuate such sins.

However, Matthew does not exclude the Gentiles. Matthew was emotionally a Gentile because of his social isolation. He makes sure his readers understand that once the Jews have completely rejected Christ, the kingdom would be transferred to the Gentiles.

Matthew is the one who arranges his material by subject, and aside from the passion week he does not follow the chronological order of events. Matthew, more than any other gospel writer, has an ax to grind. It is a righteous ax, and so he arranges his material to suit the grinding.

In spite of Matthew's choice of arrangement, his gospel retains a great unity and order. This reveals the mind of a tax collector. The order of numbers and accounts lead naturally to literary order. There is great continuity in the order of the subjects, and excellent literary transition.

The Gospel of Mark

The Author(s) Mark and Peter.

There are really two persons behind the writing of this gospel. The one who gave dictation, Peter, and the one who received it, Mark.

The following is an extraordinary statement: Mark was there when both Paul and Peter died. It is extraordinary because Mark began life as a coward, and was for while in great disfavor among the other disciples. This is a testimony to the grace of God.

Mark was Jewish, and grew up in Jerusalem. No doubt he was aware of the person of Christ and the events of His life. There is even some speculation that he was the young man of Mark 14:51-52. The actions of that young man are certainly commensurate with his character flaw of cowardice which he expressed about 20 years later.

His mother's name was Mary, and he was a relative of Barnabas. When Paul and Barnabas took Mark along on the first journey, he left for home before their ascent of the Taurus mountain range on their way to the interior of Asia Minor, Acts 13:5.

This desertion set Paul's heart against Mark. When Barnabas and Paul decided on a later missionary journey, Paul refused to take Mark along on the basis of his former desertion, Acts 15:36-39. In fact, Paul and Barnabas had a sharp disagreement over the issue, and they parted ways at that point. Barnabas believed in Mark.

Whatever transpired in the next 10 or 15 years (AD 49 to AD 62), Mark had won himself over to Paul. During Paul's first imprisonment, Mark was there with him, Col. 4:10; Philem 24. In Philemon (62 AD) Paul calls Mark a fellow worker. In Colossians, Paul reminds the Colossians to welcome Mark if he comes that way. Paul is restoring Mark's reputation to others.

Mark was with Peter in Rome (called Babylon by Peter) 1 Pet. 5:13, and sent his greeting along with Peter's letter. Peter affectionately calls Mark his son.

Mark apparently left Rome shortly after Peter's first epistle (@65 AD), because when Paul is imprisoned a second time at Rome, he calls for Mark, who is with Timothy at Ephesus, 2 Tim. 4:11. Paul calls Mark 'well useful for service'. He considers Mark the deacon type, and finds great favor with him in this role. The word for well useful is *euchrestos*, a very positive and complimentary word.

If Mark obeyed Paul's command, and it is likely he did, then he was present when Paul was executed.

If Mark was there for Paul's execution, then it is equally likely that he was there for Peter's, because they were both martyred at about the same time, and both in Rome.

Mark watched the deaths of these two great believers. He faced death with courage this time, a changed man because of the truth residing in his soul. This is the man who ran at the arrest of Jesus, and who ran in the face of the unknown at the base of the Taurus mountains. Mark was a man who feared, and yet by the grace of God who grew, and then endured. It is extraordinary that he is the one chosen by God the Holy Spirit to put down in writing the gospel as told by Peter, probably just before or just after Peter's death.

Remember Mark next time that you fail! And remember him the next time that you are ready to write someone off!

Peter Peter's name was also Simon. The testimony of Peter always stands behind the writing of Mark in this epistle.

If there is one character trait of Peter which rises above all others, it is his emotionalism. Peter often let his emotions rule his thinking, much to his detriment and regret.

Peter is enthusiastic, emotional, swift to speak without thinking, full of love and anger, sometimes legalistic and snobbish, and Jewish in a prejudicial way. He is one of the independent, rebellious Galileans. He loves Christ so much, yet he cannot muster the spiritual resources to remain with Him in His arrest, trial, and death.

He is the second to the tomb on the third day, and enters first. He is the first of the disciples to see Christ after the resurrection. He is unsure of his

standing with Christ immediately after the resurrection. Peter is a leader and very much a preacher, though not careful about what he says. He makes mistakes, he broods, and then he seeks and needs forgiveness in a desperate emotional way. In the end, he writes two epistles about suffering, and speaks his remembrances of Christ in a brief, but humble manner.

The gospel includes those incidents which place Peter in an unflattering light. In these he is brutally honest about his mistakes.

It excludes those incidents which place Peter in a flattering light.

Peter is an early leader in the church, but fades from the limelight in about 50 AD. Nothing is heard from him until he writes his epistles in the early 60's, and then dictates his gospel story to Mark in the mid 60's.

Probably the best analogy to Peter's early character is a politician on the campaign trail. Always promising, always in the limelight, but never following through.

Circumstances Surrounding the Writing of Mark

The place is Rome, the situation the persecutions of Nero. Paul and Peter are in prison, soon to die at the command of Nero himself.

Mark is there with them. Peter is anxious to tell the story of Christ before he dies, and he does so, dictating to Mark.

It is not clear whether Mark actually composed this gospel before or after Peter's death. It is not important. This was a really hard time for believers in Jesus Christ, and especially so in Rome.

The Intended Readers of Mark's Gospel.

It is most likely that Peter (and Mark) had a Gentile audience in mind. This is especially interesting since Peter began with a prejudice against the Gentiles, and one which was difficult for him to leave behind. It apparently took him more than 20 years to do so. His gospel is devoid of anything that would be offensive to a Gentile,

and it does not presuppose an extensive knowledge of the Old Testament.

Also, the Roman audience would have taken priority, since it was the closest.

The purpose of the Gospel of Mark

Mark was written to win converts to Christianity. Mark portrays Christ as a suffering servant. This image fits well the Christians in Rome, and so the Romans would have been well acquainted with it.

To encourage those in Rome who were enduring persecution. Peter always had a heart for those who were suffering. He mentions the persecution of Christ often to encourage those who endured similar sufferings.

The greatest testimony and greatest encouragement for those who suffer is that of Christ.

The greatest testimony for those who are in unbelief is the suffering of Christ.

Remember, this gospel goes out to the very hotbed of the Neronian persecution. It is a voice that rises above the cacophony of persecution and says, "but it is true".

Characteristics of Mark's Gospel

Brevity it is easily the shortest of the gospels, and conspicuous among the missing are the nativity, the genealogy, and most of Christ's longer discourses.

Action Peter tells the story as he lived his own life. The story moves at a very fast pace, and its transitions force the narrative into a bangup story. The crowds are always pressing, the demons always attacking, miracles constantly being performed. Peter includes action and excludes doctrine. Mark has been called the camera man of the gospel writers for his vivid portrayal of the life of Christ.

Believability the story is told in simple and even rough language. Peter's Greek lacks perfection, but it gives the gospel a nice 'I was there' touch that makes it quite vivid and easy to believe. Many minor details are included about Christ and His person. Even the bad things are left in the story.

Centered on Christ as the Son of God and as the servant of man. This would have been a good combination for his Gentile audience. The distinction of servanthood would have been especially appropriate since their Gods were ones who demanded service instead of those who would give it. The contrast would be striking.

Chronological Apparently, Mark's gospel follows closely the actual chronological order of events in the life of Christ.

The Gospel of Luke

The Author Luke

God used a Gentile doctor. Luke is mentioned only three times in all of the New Testament, yet he is responsible for 28% of it, for he wrote both his gospel and the book of Acts.

Luke is the only Gentile writer of the New Testament, and probably the only second generation Christian writer. He was not present at the incarnation.

Luke is most likely Greek. He is an excellent writer and historian. In fact, he is the greatest of the historians of antiquity. He is objective, detailed, and well informed. He writes clearly and keeps things very well ordered.

Paul calls Luke the beloved physician in Colossians 4:14.

Although there were many charlatans in the ancient world, there were also a number of good and skilled physicians.

Medicine did not go much beyond advanced first aid in the ancient world, but such a service was very valuable.

Luke was probably behind Paul's advice for Timothy to take a little wine for his stomach.

At one point, Luke was the only one with Paul during his imprisonment, 2 Tim 4:11.

Luke would have been a valuable addition to a missionary team, considering the hazards of travel in the ancient world. Considering the number of times that Christians were beaten, stoned, or otherwise injured because of their faith, Luke got to practice his profession often.

Luke was not only the team physician, but he was often active in the evangelistic efforts, Acts 16:13. That Luke was a Gentile meant that he would have been valuable in ministering to other Gentiles. Remember, most of the missionary teams were Jewish, and Paul's ministry at first concentrated on teaching at synagogues.

Circumstances and Target Readership.

Luke wrote in about 66 AD He wrote his gospel, and later the Acts of the Apostles, to a man by the name of Theophilus. He probably wrote from somewhere in Greece, maybe even Athens. Little else is known about the circumstances of writing.

Luke addresses Theophilus as "most excellent". This title was often used of those who were in prominent social or political positions. Theophilus was likely such a man. By accepting a book dedicated to him, Theophilus would have followed the ancient tradition of taking responsibility for its publication. We owe our thanks to Theophilus for the preservation of this great gospel.

Luke wanted to produce a gospel for Gentile readers, and it is easy on the Hebraisms and explains Jewish customs and localities. He usually quotes the Old Testament when it is contained in a saying of Christ, but not otherwise. There is little emphasis on the fulfillment of prophecy.

Purpose of the Gospel of Luke

Luke comes right out and says it in chapter 1:4: "so that you might know the exact truth about the things you have been taught."

It is Luke's intent to be precise, and to more fully explain the subjects of which he has already spoken.

Verses 13 in the first chapter reveal Luke's motive and method: "Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word have handed them down to us, it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write it out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus,"

Luke wrote for Theophilus, but with the intent that Theophilus would publish this work, and pass it along to many others. Luke's purpose is broad in its scope.

It is apparent that there were many falsehoods and distortions going around about the person and life of Christ. Luke wants to set the record straight with an exact narrative of the events.

Of course, by getting the record straight, Luke's desire is for evangelism. He wants people to know the truth, and to identify Christ as their savior. Luke has a great emphasis on the cross, and the end of the life of Christ. This reveals his designs for evangelism.

Characteristics of Luke's Gospel

Luke's gospel is much more comprehensive than the others. It begins many months before the other synoptic gospels, and it ends after the ascension. Many details are included here which are not in the others. Luke is a diligent and thorough historian.

Luke concentrates on praise and worship more so than the other gospels. He records the four great nativity songs Mary's, Zacharias', that of the angels, and Simeon's.

Luke emphasizes the humanity of Christ, and the perfection of that humanity.

Luke stresses that Christ makes salvation available to all men, and not just to Jews. He clearly shows the impact of Christ on the lives of many men, women, and children. Both the rich and poor, the Jew, the Samaritan, and the Gentile are included. Luke often shows this impact as occurring right inside people's homes.

Luke records seven prayers of Jesus Christ which are not mentioned elsewhere.

Luke is literary. He has a remarkably large vocabulary, and uses many different writing styles to fit the situation at hand. His is the best written of the gospels from a literary standpoint. There are 800 words in Luke and Acts which do not occur elsewhere in the New Testament.

Luke is detailed, but not to the point of boring his readers to death. He has a knack for including

what is pertinent to the narrative, and leaving behind what is extraneous. Perhaps the powers of observation and diagnosis he developed as a doctor come into play in this regard.

Luke concentrates on the death of Christ. From chapter 9 forward he keeps the thread of Christ's death in the fabric of his narrative.

The Gospel of John

The Author John

God used a zealot. He was a cousin "according to the flesh" of Jesus Christ. Brother of James (not the epistle writer). A native of Galilee. John's mother Salome was a follower of Jesus, and ministered to Him of her own means.

John was a fisherman of the Sea of Galilee, his life was hard work, but apparently it had paid off for his family, because they had servants, and were able to support the ministry of Jesus Christ. Galilee was a region somewhat analogous to the U.S. South not too long ago. It is conservative to a fault, and more than a little rebellious in character. The fires of rebellion flamed openly in this region. In reality a lot of senseless violence took place in the name of the zealot movement, but there was very little virtue. This time was somewhat analogous to that of Northern Ireland today.

John had great humility. When John the Baptist points out Jesus as the Messiah, John follows without delay. He never mentions own name in own Gospel.

He was nicknamed, with brother James as the "Sons of Thunder", a reference to their manner in Word and Deed, Mk 3:17. It is likely that they had a fair amount of Zealot ideals in their heads.

He was outspoken about his faith from the start. He was "The disciple whom Jesus loved" was the closest to Jesus of the inner circle of Peter, James, and John.

He was the only eyewitness to the cross among the disciples, and he was eyewitness to the resurrection, Jn 20.

He was one of the "Pillars of the Church", Gal 2:9. Paul had a high regard for him. He took over as chief of Apostles some time in the late 70's.

His writing reflects the 50+ years of careful thought about the life of Christ and the Christian life.

Under his ministry, Ephesus became the center of the pivot which gave the Roman Empire its greatest time of prosperity under the Antonine Caesars, 98-180 AD

He used very basic Greek grammar to express incredibly deep theological ideas.

He was the key figure in the transition from the pre-canon period to the post canon period.

Circumstances of Writing the Gospel.

John wrote about 20 years after the completion of the synoptic gospels.

The synoptic gospels were written during the Neronian persecutions; John's gospel is written in the aftermath. The Neronian persecution set the attitude in the Roman Empire. The average Roman at least publicly viewed Christianity and Christians with disdain.

This unpopularity was worse for Christianity than the original persecution. Peer pressure was more effective in weakening Christianity than capital punishment. Martyrs make good PR figures.

At the time of writing, Christianity was much weaker than it had been some twenty years before.

John probably wrote from Ephesus, the place of his later ministry. He had formerly ministered in Jerusalem, but was apparently driven out by Jewish persecution.

John was the last eyewitness to the life of Christ, and he has a desire to retell the story in his own words.

John wrote in a time of transition to the post-canon era of the church age. The temporary spiritual gifts, with all their fantastic abilities, are being left behind.

The Target Audience

If John's Epistles are any indication of the readers of his gospel, he wrote to a crowd that needed to understand the basics of Christianity.

The Christian church had fallen into great disrepair in just twenty years' time. The average Christian did not understand even how to confess his or her sins.

The suffering of the Neronian persecution, and the relentless peer pressure of the pagan Roman citizens had led many believers to seek alternate philosophies which bore the name of Christianity, but which were anything but. John has a very tough uphill battle to fight with regard to heresy and the truth. The situation was not unlike what we encounter in our nation today.

The Purpose of the Gospel

In John 20:30-31, John communicates his purpose: "Many other signs therefore did Jesus in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book: but these are written, that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in his name."

John wants his readers to believe if they are unbelievers, and to grow to maturity if they are believers. In order to do so, he attempts to establish Jesus as the Son of God and the Messiah (Christ), and reestablish the Word of God as the authority and the Truth.

The Characteristics of the Gospel.

The gospel is very simple in the use of the Greek language and writing style.

John writes about some extremely profound concepts, and he uses many symbols to do so.

John records at least six miracles which are recorded nowhere else in the gospels. He always designates these as signs.

John's gospel concentrates on events which are not recorded elsewhere. He records Christ's early Galilean ministry, and his upper room discourse.

John concentrates on the words of Christ Himself.

John develops in a fair amount of detail the relationship between the Father and the Son.

John's gospel is like a commentary he inserts his comments on the narrative many times interpreting and illuminating the events as they occur.

YOUR NOTES:
