



THE BIBLE AS SACRED HISTORY

Tracing God's Activity in History

by
Dr. James T. Reuteler, Ph.D.

Covenant Bible Studies
Aurora, Colorado

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FOREWORD

I can't count the number of people who have said to me, "I'd like to join your Bible Study, but I don't know enough about the Bible." What they are actually saying is, "I don't know the story well enough to keep myself from appearing stupid." Many of us have tried to overcome our Biblical illiteracy by beginning to read the whole Bible. We start in Genesis and get bogged down somewhere in Leviticus or Numbers and give up.

This book is about the story of the Bible from Genesis through Revelation. It does not cover every book of the Bible. It follows the story through the Bible, preparing the reader to delve more deeply into a more comprehensive Bible Study. It is not a *Bible Handbook*. Plenty of those have been written. It is not a *Commentary of the Bible*. Plenty of those have been written, and I myself have written commentaries on every book of the Bible, including the books of the *Apocrypha*. Since most Protestants don't accept the *Apocrypha* as Scripture, I have not included very much on the Apocrypha in this book.

The Bible is not a scientific book so don't expect to find scientific answers to all the questions that emerge out of your reading of the Bible. Neither is the Bible strictly a book of history, but it is a book of Sacred History. The Bible is a theological interpretation of history. Whether all the stories are accurate in all their details is not as important as the theological interpretation of the stories themselves.

For the most part, I will paraphrase the stories as we move from Genesis through Revelation, but at times, I will make theological interpretations of the stories. My intention is not to write a book about Biblical Theology, but to demonstrate how the Bible is a book about Sacred History. Out of that Sacred History we may develop our own Theology and Ethics, but that's not my purpose here.

The Bible is a difficult and dangerous book to read. It is my hope that this book will make reading the Bible a little easier and a little less dangerous. By putting the Bible in the context of its Sacred History, we prepare ourselves not only for a more comprehensive study of the Bible, but we also prepare ourselves for applying its wisdom to our own lives.

Once you have finished this book, you may want to use it as a reference as you dive more deeply into a comprehensive Bible Study, but do that in a small group with others. You will learn so much more.

In the Appendices I have included several charts to help you in your deeper study of the Bible. I have not included Bible Maps. The best two sources I know of are online. They are: <http://www.biblemaps.com/> and <http://www.bible.ca/maps/>. The first set of maps must be purchased, but the second set, are free for your use. They are copyrighted, so I can't include them in this book.

Good luck as you begin the greatest study of your life.

Dr. James T. Reuteler, Ph.D.

THE OLD COVENANT

The LORD spoke to Moses, saying:
Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them:
You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.

Leviticus 19:1-2

1. THE BIBLE AS SACRED HISTORY

The Nature of the Bible

The Bible is a library of books that teach us about God. One might call the Bible a sacred history of God's revelation of himself. God revealed himself before the Bible came into being, but with the Bible we have a written record from a people who experienced that revelation. Since many people contributed to this sacred history of God's revelation, we should not expect all of those experiences to be the same.

In addition to being a library, the Bible is also inspired. This does not mean that God put his words in people's mouths. The sixty-six books of the Bible, were written by people, who, had personally experienced God; and, had witnessed his movements in history. Edward P. Blair shares with us the nature of that inspiration:

Since people wrote about their experiences with God, we ought not to expect inerrant fact and perfect understanding from their writings. When light shines through a glass, there is inevitably some distortion of the light. God took the risk of human distortion in order to communicate with us in our language and forms of thought. The clearest revelation, of course, came through those persons in whom there was the least opaqueness and imperfection. Only through the one perfect human personality, Jesus Christ, did the light shine without distortion.

The ability to see God in history was unique. A more common way of seeing God was in nature. The Biblical writers acknowledge the God of nature as well, but they refused to worship nature. Nature was God's handiwork. From nature one could know that there was a God, but one could only come to know that God in history.

To say that God reveals himself in history is to say that God reveals himself in human relationships. Some of those relationships are social and exist in relationships between nations, but they are also very personal and exist in relationships between friends. Leslie Weatherhead explains:

...if God can get near to us in inanimate things, He must be able to get much nearer to us through our fellows? If He can speak to me in the tones of the wind, cannot He say much more to me in the vibrant tones of my friend's voice? If the sight of a flower can speak to me of tenderness—and I think that is His voice—then, as I look into the eyes of my friend, how much nearer can God come, how much more clearly can He speak.

The Purpose of the Bible

By reading about how God spoke and acted in the past, we can get a better picture of how he is speaking and acting in our lives and in our society today. The primary purpose of the Bible is to lead us into a personal relationship with God and to enable us to do his will in our personal lives and in our life together as his people. In *The Bible Speaks to You*, Robert McAfee Brown describes the purpose of the Bible:

The Bible makes it plain that God reveals himself. He does not simply reveal information about himself. Put another way, what we find in the Bible is not an

accumulation of data about God, but rather a living God in living relationship with living people.

So the Bible is not a textbook of doctrinal statements (though doctrinal statements can be derived from it)—the Bible is an account of an encounter between God and his people.

Just as the Bible is not primarily a book of doctrinal statements about God, neither is it a law book. It does contain laws and commandments, but we cannot simply use the Bible as a law book. When we try to do that we will quickly discover that people can make it say whatever they want it to say. It contains doctrines about God and it contains laws and commandments, but the purpose of the Bible is to bring us in touch with God so that we can know what his will for us is. Martin Luther made this point well when he said: “He who merely studies the commandments of God is not greatly moved. But he who listens to God commanding, how can he fail to be terrified by majesty so great.” The purpose of the Bible is to help us come to know the commander and once we know him, our greatest desire will be to do his will.

We will only come to know the God of the Bible if we can learn how to read the Bible. As we begin to understand it we will not be so free and easy with it, making it say what we want it to say. Our purpose in reading the Bible is to become acquainted with God. In order to do that, we must also become acquainted with the people of the Bible and their stories. We must proceed with caution. What we cannot do is to look at the Bible as literal history or lessons in science. If we do that we will miss the important meanings behind so many of the stories. The Bible is filled with imagery and symbolism. It can best be described as a sacred history, which describes how God works in the lives of people and nations. If we can see his activity in the past, then we will be prepared to meet him in the present.

While the primary purpose of the Bible is to help us come to know God, there are a number of secondary purposes. Some of those purposes are described by the author of 2 Timothy 3:16-17: “All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.” When the author of 2 Timothy says “all scripture” he is talking about the Old Testament. There was no New Testament when he wrote these words. Many Christians forget this, concentrating on the New Testament, and forgetting the Old Testament. The Old Testament has as much to teach us about God as the New Testament and we ignore it at our peril.

The Creation of the Bible

Many people over many years contributed to the creation of the Bible. The creation of the Bible as we have it today was a very complicated process, which took nearly 800 years to complete. It began around 400 B.C.E. with the general acceptance of the five books of the Law, which include Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. The next stage consisted of the acceptance of the Prophets. The date for their acceptance was approximately 200 B.C.E. The third grouping of Biblical books to be accepted was the Writings, which were accepted between 98 and 200 C.E. Some

scholars say the Council of Jamnia, which met between 90 and 100 C.E., declared the Hebrew Scriptures (our Old Testament) closed.

The Old Testament	
The Law (Torah)	400 B.C.E.
The Prophets	200 B.C.E.
The Writings	98 C.E.
Council of Jamnia	90-100 C.E.

The New Testament took almost as long to accept as the Old Testament. The first attempt at naming some books for a New Testament was made by Marcion in 140 C.E., but his list of books was very limited. Eusebius came up with another more expanded list in 325 C.E., but the first list to contain the 27 books of our current New Testament was included in an Easter Letter written by Athanasius in 367 C.E. That list was accepted by the Council in Rome in 382 C.E. and the Council in Hippo in 393 C.E. The tests given to every book accepted in the New Testament were the following three:

1. Does the book have an apostolic author or context?
2. Does the book harmonize with the Old Testament?
3. Does the book harmonize with the rest of the New Testament?

The New Testament	
Marcion's List	140 C.E.
Eusebius' List	325 C.E.
Athanasius' Letter	367 C.E.
Council in Rome	382 C.E.

In addition to the creation of the Old and New Testaments, there is also another set of books, which have been included in some Bibles. We call them the Apocrypha. Judaism and most Protestants usually reject them because they were originally written in Greek. The Roman Catholic Church and the Anglican Church have both accepted these books. They are also contained in some Protestant Bibles, but usually considered of less value than the other books of the Bible.

Two Summaries of the Bible

It is difficult to give a brief summary of the Bible because, as a library of books, it contains so many different kinds of literature. Our purpose in studying the Bible however is not to know the Bible, but to know the God whom the Bible describes. Those who know God the best are also deeply acquainted with the Bible.

The following summary of the Bible is more on the academic side and was written by A.W. Tozer in his *Pursuit of God*. It goes like this:

Here are the facts as I see them. For four hundred years Israel had dwelt in Egypt, surrounded by the crassest idolatry. By the hand of Moses they were brought out at last and started toward the land of promise. The very idea of holiness had been lost to them. To correct this, God began at the bottom. He localized Himself in the cloud and fire and later when the tabernacle had been built He dwelt in fiery manifestation in the Holy of Holies. By innumerable distinctions God taught Israel the difference between holy and unholy. There were holy days, holy vessels, holy garments. There were washings, sacrifices, offerings of many kinds. By these means Israel learned that *God is holy*. It was this that He was teaching them. Not the holiness of things or places, but the holiness of Jehovah was the lesson they must learn.

Then came the great day when Christ appeared. Immediately He began to say, "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time—but I say unto you." The Old Testament schooling was over. When Christ died on the cross the veil of the temple was rent from top to bottom. The Holy of Holies was opened to everyone who would enter in faith. Christ's words were remembered. "The hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. ... But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."

Shortly after, Paul took up the cry of liberty and declared all meats clean, every day holy, all places sacred and every act acceptable to God. The sacredness of times and places, a half-light necessary to the education of the race, passed away before the full sun of spiritual worship.

Another summary of the Bible is more devotional in nature and was written by Billy Sunday. His experience with the Bible is a classic, well worth quoting:

I entered the portico of Genesis, walked down through the Old Testament art-gallery where the pictures of Noah, Abraham, Moses, Joseph, Isaac, Jacob, and Daniel hang on the wall. I passed into the music-room of Psalms where the Spirit swept the keyboard of nature and brought forth the dirge-like wail of the weeping Prophet Jeremiah to the grand, impassioned strain of Isaiah, until it seemed that every reed and pipe in God's great organ of nature responded to the tuneful harp of David, the sweet singer of Israel.

I entered the chapel of Ecclesiastes where the voice of the preacher was heard; and into the conservatory for the Song of Solomon where the Rose of Sharon and

the Lily of the Valley's sweet-scented spices filled and perfumed my life. I entered the business office of Proverbs, then into the observatory-room of the prophets where I saw telescopes of various sizes, some pointing to far-off events, some to nearby events; but all concentrated upon the Bright and Morning Star which was to rise above the moonlit hills of Judea for our salvation.

I entered the audience-room of the King of Kings and caught a vision of His glory from the stand-point of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John; passed into the Acts of the Apostles where the Holy Spirit was doing His office-work in the formation of the infant Church; then into the correspondence-room where sat John, Paul, Peter, James, and Jude penning the Epistles. I stepped into the throne-room of Revelation and I got a vision of the King sitting upon His throne in all His glory and I cried:

*All Hail the power of Jesus' name,
Let angels prostrate fall;
Bring forth the royal diadem,
And crown Him Lord of all.*

2. THE JEWISH SCRIPTURES

Questioning the Old Testament?

The first question many Christians ask is this: “If Jesus is the center of Christian faith, then why bother with the Old Testament?” Jesus is not even mentioned in the entire Old Testament, so why bother with it? Can we not just read the New Testament and forget that the Old Testament ever existed?

Such questions were raised from the moment Christianity separated from Judaism. It should be mentioned that Jews do not refer to their Sacred Scriptures as the Old Testament, nor do they organize them the way Christians do. The Jewish Scriptures and the Christian Old Testament do however contain the same books. The Jewish Scriptures are organized into three parts: the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. The Old Testament is organized into four parts: the Law, the Historical Books, the Wisdom Literature, and the Prophetic Books.

The organization of the Christian Old Testament follows a pattern set in a Greek translation of the Old Testament, which Judaism never fully accepted. This translation was called the Septuagint, because approximately 70 scholars participated in its translation from the Hebrew. Another theory suggests that the number 70 was picked because the Sanhedrin contained 70 members. At any rate six scholars were picked from each of the 12 tribes and invited to work on a Greek translation of the Jewish Scriptures, beginning with the Law (Torah). The project was begun in Alexandria, Egypt during the reign of Ptolemy Philadelphus (285-246 B.C.E.) and finished in 150 B.C.E. Some books were added that were written directly in Greek, and these have come to be known as the Apocrypha. This Greek version of the Jewish Scriptures was the Old Testament for early Christianity, and when we read quotations of the Old Testament in the New Testament, they come from the Septuagint. Sometimes the Septuagint is referred to by its Roman Numeral: LXX. The number 70 is only an approximation. If each tribe contributed six scholars, the number of translators would have been 72.

As the early Church spread throughout the world it had little difficulty accepting the Greek Old Testament. Greek was the international language of the day and outside of Palestine few people understood Hebrew. Besides, the Church grew more rapidly among non-Jews, who could not read the Jewish Scriptures in Hebrew. Some of them even objected to reading the Old Testament, just as do many modern Christians

It may sound strange that the first major personality to make a list of books for a New Testament, would also strongly object to the Old Testament. His name was Marcion (140 C.E.). Marcion held that the God of the Old Testament was vengeful and the author of evil. He was solely concerned with the Jewish people, and for them he was ready to destroy everyone else. In contrast to this God, said Marcion, there is the Christian God, who is a God of grace and love for all, who has revealed himself in Jesus Christ. According to Marcion these two Gods are not the same. Since creation was not an act of the good God of the New Testament, the Christian must reject the world. Jesus was not born of a woman, but suddenly appeared in the synagogue at Capernaum in 29 C.E. as a grown man. Marcion rejected the body as evil and taught that Jesus redeemed only the

soul and spirit. In the end Marcion denied Christianity's most basic truth—the resurrection of the Body.

Marcion tried to lead Christianity away from its Old Testament foundation by making the first list of acceptable books for Christians to read. Along with the Old Testament, Marcion rejected the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Acts, and Hebrews. He cut out of that body of acceptable literature everything that contradicted his own views, including the Pastoral letters (1 and 2 Timothy and Titus). When Marcion finished making his list it contained a mutilated version of Luke's Gospel (omitting the nativity stories) and ten of Paul's letters. He believed that Paul was the only apostle who did not corrupt the Gospel of Jesus. While many followed Marcion, the Church rejected Marcion as a false teacher (heretic).

Jesus was a Jew, who believed in and quoted from the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. Anyone interested in understanding Jesus needs to be acquainted with the Jewish Scriptures. If the Christian faith were a building, the Old Testament would make up the foundation and most of the lower stories. Even though the Apocrypha may not be thought of as Scripture, it adds significantly to our understanding of what took place between the ending of the Old Testament and the beginning of the New Testament. Roman Catholic and Orthodox Christians still follow the Septuagint and include in their Bible all of the Apocrypha, except for Esdras and the Prayer of Manasseh. They generally refer to the Protestant Apocrypha as deuterocanonical (second canon) and reserve the term Apocrypha for those books entirely outside the Bible, which Protestants call the pseudepigrapha.

The Writers of the Old Testament

The Story Tellers

The Old Testament was written over a long period of time. Some of the oldest parts of it are songs and stories. Stories make up almost half of the Old Testament. Songs, such as the Song of Moses (Exodus 15:1-18) and the Song of Miriam (Exodus 15:19-21), are inserted into these stories. The Song of Miriam, for example, is thought to be the oldest poetic couplet in the Old Testament. The storytellers had a specific purpose. They were more interested in passing on their faith than they were in writing history. Many of their stories were told to make a point and have little to do with history. Other stories have a great deal to do with history. Judaism and Christianity are considered historical religions, which is to say that their main stories are grounded in history. They really did happen. There was an Abraham and a Moses and there was a Jesus who was crucified on a cross and raised up from the dead. Not every story told is true in the historical sense, for many stories are told to illustrate how God works in people's lives and in the world. The central figure of the Old Testament stories is God. There are of course stories in the Old Testament that do not mention God, such as the story of Esther, but the central characters in these stories are people who struggle with life and death issues that have to do with faith. The Story Tellers of the Old Testament are not objective historians, but people who wanted to pass on to future generations the great spiritual truths.

The Law Giver

The heart of the Old Testament is *Torah*, which means “the Law.” This is the Hebrew name for the first five books of the Old Testament—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. These five books have sometimes been called the Five Books of Moses, who was the person through whom God gave his commandments. Even though tradition says that Moses wrote these five books, this does not mean that God dictated and Moses wrote everything he heard. The storytellers and the songwriters, before Moses, contributed much of what we read in these first five books. Moses is the primary Law Giver in the sense that he received the Ten Commandments from God and wrote them down. Many people contributed to these five books with their stories, songs, and commentaries on the commandments.

There were at least five contributors to the first five books, whom we call J, E, P, and D. J is the writer who refers to God as Yahweh [Jahweh] and lived in the southern Kingdom of Judah (950-850 B.C.E.). E is the writer who refers to God as Elohim and lived in the northern Kingdom, possibly in Ephraim, the largest of the northern tribes (750 B.C.E.). P is a writer with a priestly point of view, and D is the author of the Book of Deuteronomy, which differs from the other four books.

The Priests

The priests taught the meaning of the various laws, rituals, and festivals. Some of these parts of the Old Testament, such as Leviticus, show us truths about God’s holiness and our need of forgiveness. The primary duties of the priests were three—to minister at the sanctuary before the Lord, to teach the people the law of God, and to inquire for them the divine will by the Urim and Thummim (sacred lots). Later on in the history of Israel the prophets accused the priests of abandoning their tasks and failing to teach the Law entrusted to them.

The Song Writer

At the heart of the Old Testament lies the Book of Psalms, which is its hymnbook. Although, David wrote many of the Psalms, some of them have other authors as well. The Psalms are a collection of songs, which express how their authors felt about God. Many of them are laments, expressing deep disappointment in God; others are hymns of joy and praise to God for all that he has done in nature and in history. People were to sing the Psalms and dance to them. They call us to praise, prayer, and worship.

The Wise Men

The wise men, or sages, were known beyond Israel. There were also famous schools of wisdom in ancient Egypt, Babylon, and Persia. In Israel the voice of wisdom flourished, especially during the reign of Solomon, who had many international contacts. The books of the Old Testament that belong to the wisdom literature are Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon. Job is a dramatic wrestling with the problem of innocent suffering. Proverbs deals with a variety of everyday experiences. Ecclesiastes is brutally honest about how futile life can seem. The Song of Solomon cheers us up with the beauty and joy of human love.

The Prophets

While not every prophet wrote his message down, a considerable number of them did. The prophetic books are grouped together at the end of the Old Testament, but that does not mean that they were written last. The books are arranged by size, with the Major Prophets coming first. They were major because they wrote more than did the others. There were five Major Prophets and twelve Minor Prophets. It is important to understand the historical context in which the prophets wrote their messages. Apart from their context, their messages can be difficult to understand.

The prophets were not predictors of the future, nor were they simply social critics. None of the prophets had a social program to put forward or social scheme for national improvement. The prophets can best be thought of as poets who try to get their nation to repent and turn to God. They call God's people to move beyond the letter of the Law to the spirit of the Law. Because they are in touch with God they do have a vision of the future. They know that idolatry will cause the nation to fall and faithfulness will build the nation up.

The Apocalyptic Preacher

The prophets made some use of imagery to express what God was doing, or was going to do in the world. But in the Bible a way of writing developed which depended entirely on symbolic and visionary language. This is called apocalyptic literature. Examples of apocalyptic preaching can be found in Daniel, Isaiah, and Zechariah. *Apocalyptic* means to "uncover" what is hidden. Because apocalyptic writing contains highly pictorial imagery, it is difficult to understand and leaves itself open to all kinds of weird and wonderful interpretations.

The apocalyptic preacher needs to be compared with the prophet. The main task of the prophet was to warn people; hence, the prophet would say, "This is what will happen to you, unless you change. If you change, then it will not happen." The apocalyptic preacher has a different purpose. It is that of encouraging those who are suffering; hence, the apocalyptic preacher says, "This is what is really taking place behind all the outward appearances of world power-politics. God is still in control and these are the events he has decreed will happen. Be prepared and endure them faithfully. In the end the wicked will be destroyed and the faithful delivered."

3. IN THE BEGINNING

The first word in the Hebrew Bible is *Genesis* and it means “in the beginning.” The first book in the Bible is *Genesis*, which is a book about beginnings. In this book we find the beginning of the world, life, the Sabbath, marriage, sin, death, language, nations (especially Israel), and covenants.

Creation

The first story in the Bible is about creation, which is set in seven days. There is (1) the creation of light, (2) the creation of the firmament, (3) the creation of the seas and all vegetation, (4) the creation of the sun, moon, and stars, (5) the creation of birds and fishes, (6) the creation of the animals and human beings, and (7) the creation of the Sabbath. The author of Genesis is not trying to describe HOW the world was created, or even how long it took. The purpose of this story is to tell WHO created the world.

God Created the World

The first verse of the Bible tells us who created the world: “In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth...” (Genesis 1:1) We are not told how the world was created; only that God said the word and it was done. This creation story is not a scientific account of how God created the world. It is a simple theological statement attributing creation to an act of God. While science can and should describe how creation took place, it cannot prove that God did or did not create the world. There need not be any contradiction between the Bible’s description of creation and scientific theory about creation. They are different kinds of approaches to the same subject. Theology deals with WHO and science with HOW.

The World was Good

Creation is set within a period of seven days. At the conclusion of each day’s creative activities, God declares what has been made as good (Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). None of this means that God created the world in seven twenty-four hour days. The creation story is written in theological, not scientific language. These seven days must be understood in the same way as the Psalmist understood days, when he wrote: “For a thousand years in your sight are like yesterday when it is past, or like a watch in the night.” (Psalm 90:4) The point being made over and over is that what God has created is good. The final act of creation took place on the seventh day when God created the Sabbath, which he blessed and hallowed. (Genesis 2:3) It was not only good; it was special. God sanctified it for the crown of his creation—humankind.

Humankind is Special

God did not create humankind as just another element in his creation. Men and women were created in God’s own image. Genesis 1:26-27 describes that divine act:

Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every

creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.” So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

Men and women were to enjoy a special relationship with God; and on behalf of God, they were to look after God’s creation, using its resources with skill and wisdom. And like God, they were to hallow every seventh day.

The Fall

The story of Adam and Eve in Genesis 2-3 is well known. *Adam* means “man” or “earthling” and *Eve* means “the mother of all living.” The purpose of this story is not history, but theology. Adam and Eve represent every man and woman created by God. All of humanity was created in the divine image for fellowship with God, but Adam and Eve mar the image and reject God’s wisdom. Sin is the inevitable result.

Sin

The entry of sin into the world has little to do with an apple or sex. It has to do with doubt and rebellion. Adam and Eve were told that they could eat from any tree in the garden except one. The forbidden tree is named “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” This tree symbolizes human choice between good and evil. Being made in the divine image implies that one can choose. Without possessing freedom to choose one becomes a mere puppet. By allowing the couple to eat from all the other trees in the garden, God was providing them with everything they needed. Would they listen to his warning about the forbidden tree, or would they doubt his wisdom and rebel against his advice?

The first act of disobedience came with full awareness. The serpent instilled doubt in Eve’s mind, but Eve demonstrates that she understood what God forbid her to do. She did it anyway and sin was born. Then she pulled Adam into the disobedience and sin was shared. They became partners in evil. Both of them understood God’s warning, but they ignored it. Their rebellion was marked by selfishness, pride, and then idolatry. The result was spiritual death. Sin infected every aspect of their lives—spiritual, mental, physical, and social.

Adam and Eve’s fall continues to be repeated every day. We are confronted with the forbidden tree every day. God wants us to eat from the tree of life, but we prefer the forbidden tree. God wants us to drink from the fountain of living waters, but we prefer cracked cisterns, which can hold no water (Jeremiah 2:13). Every time we ignore God’s warnings, we participate with Adam and Eve in keeping sin alive. Sin not only destroys our relationship with God, but it destroys our relationships with one other. It even puts us at odds with our physical environment.

The Spread of Sin

Once sin entered the world it made its presence felt in ever-widening circles. Sin infects the first two children, Cain and Abel, in the form of jealousy and anger, which ends in Cain’s murdering Abel. When God asks Cain, “Where is your brother Abel?” Cain callously replies, “...am I my brother’s keeper?” (Genesis 4:9) The answer of course, is “Yes.” That’s what God intended. Sin has now spread out of control and will continue to spread spiritual death wherever it goes.

Things get so bad that God decides to wipe the slate clean by destroying all of humanity, except for one righteous man named Noah and his family. One man and his family however are not enough to change God's mind about the world. Because Noah seems to be listening, God instructs him to build an ark in preparation for an impending flood. Noah builds the ark and is ridiculed by his neighbors, but in the end it is Noah and his family that are vindicated. When the flood is over God places a rainbow in the sky as a symbol of his covenant with humanity. Never again will he completely destroy all life on earth with a flood (Genesis 9:8-17). There will be judgment, but in the midst of judgment, salvation will also be offered to those, like Noah, who are willing to accept it. This becomes a theme that can be found throughout the Bible.

Unfortunately, Noah planted a vineyard, drank some wine and got drunk. Sin began to spread again, not only among his sons, but also among the nations they came to represent. Japheth and Shem, the elder sons of Noah, came to represent the Indo-European and Semitic peoples; while Ham, the youngest son, came to represent the African peoples. Soon there are many nations and sin, symbolized by pride or arrogance, seems to infect them all. This is illustrated in the story of the tower of Babel, where people from all nations attempt to build a tower, to make a name for themselves that will reach into the heavens (Genesis 11:4). The tower of Babel can be compared to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, only now the desire to displace God is on a national or even international level. Sin has not only spread among individuals, it has spread among nations, causing confusion and spiritual death wherever it goes. Individuals and nations are far from God. What is God to do? The answer lies in Genesis 12, where God looks for another Noah, only this time his name is Abraham.

The Birth of Israel

The second half of the Book of Genesis is very different from the first. With Genesis 12 we encounter human history that can be given dates for the birth and faith of Israel.

Abraham

Everything begins with a man called Abram (later called Abraham), whom God calls to leave his native land at age 75 to go by faith into a land that God would show him.

Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." (Genesis 12:1-3)

Abraham took his wife Sarai (later called Sarah), his nephew Lot, a number of other persons, some possessions, and they all set out for the land of Canaan, the land that God had given them.

In Genesis 12, 15, and 17 God made and cut (ratified) a covenant with Abraham. This covenant consisted of at least four parts, described below:

1. To receive a Land. (Genesis 12:1) According to Genesis 15:18, it included all the land "from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates." Genesis 17:8 states that it included all the land of Canaan.

2. To become a Nation. (Genesis 12:2) God declared Abraham the Father of many nations. (Genesis 17:2, 4-6)
3. To give a Blessing. (Genesis 12:3 & 18:18) This was hard for them to understand. The people saw it as God calling them to special privileges, while God saw it as an obligation to mediate a blessing to the whole human family. Election always includes responsibility.
4. To last Forever. The land would belong to God's chosen people forever. (Genesis 13:15 and 17:7) Even if the people strayed, God committed himself to faithfulness. This land would be theirs forever.

The covenant depended upon Abraham and Sarah giving birth to a son. The birth of Isaac came when Abraham was 100 and Sarah 90 years old. It can be compared to the virgin birth of Jesus and considered a miracle.

Isaac

Even though Isaac was not Abraham's firstborn, he was the son of Sarah and so the blessing had to pass through him. He had an older stepbrother named Ishmael, whose mother was Hagar, one of Abraham's Egyptian servants. Islam traces its connection to Abraham through Ishmael.

Isaac, in a beautiful love story, marries Rebekah, who gives birth to twins, Esau and Jacob. One might expect the elder son, Esau to become the child of the covenant, but Rebekah favored Jacob and helped him to take the birthright away from Esau and gain the blessing through trickery from Isaac, when he was so old that he did not know what he was doing.

Jacob

While Isaac comes across as a very weak person, Jacob comes across as a stormy and manipulative person. Having cheated Esau out of the birthright and the blessing, he was forced to flee for his life. He went to work for his uncle Laban, who tricked him into marrying his daughters Leah and Rachel. Altogether Jacob, with the help of Leah and Rachel's maids, fathered twelve sons and one daughter.

Leah	Zilpah (Leah's Maid)
Reuben (1)	Gad (7)
Simeon (2)	Asher (8)
Levi (3)	
Judah (4)	Leah's Daughter
Issachar (9)	Dinah (11)
Zebulun (10)	
Rachel	Bilhah (Rachel's Maid)
Joseph (12)	Dan (5)
Benjamin (13)	Naphtali (6)

Jacob and Esau were eventually reconciled. Prior to their reconciliation Jacob wrestled with an angel at the Jabbok River. As morning was breaking, the angel asked to be let go, but Jacob said, "I will not let you go, unless you bless me." So the angel asked him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." Then the angel said, "You shall no

longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed.” (Genesis 32:26-28) So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, “For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved.” (Genesis 32:30)

The final story in the Book of Genesis is about Joseph. Its purpose is to tell us how Jacob’s twelve sons wound up as slaves in Egypt. The story will continue with Moses, but Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob will forever be remembered as the Fathers of Israel. Through them Israel received both its covenant with God and its special name. There will be more covenants, the next one being the Covenant on Mount Sinai through Moses. The goal of all the Old Testament Covenants will be *Holiness*.

4. THE PROMISED LAND

The Book of Genesis ended on a happy note, with the descendants of Abraham comfortably settled in Egypt as guests of the Pharaoh, who was the King. When we turn to the Book of Exodus, the story continues nearly 400 years later with the words: “Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph.” (Exodus 1:8) Consequently, the descendants of Abraham lose their privileged status and end up as slaves in Egypt. In the Books of Exodus through Joshua, the story is told of their deliverance from Egypt and their journey into the Promised Land.

The Exodus

The story begins with Moses, who was adopted by the Pharaoh’s daughter and brought up in the Pharaoh’s house. God called Moses to confront the Pharaoh about the enslavement of Abraham’s descendants (Hebrews) and to lead them out of Egypt. Moses became aware of the cruelty of the Egyptians over the Hebrews and murdered an Egyptian, whom he saw beating a Hebrew man (Exodus 2:11-12). Fleeing to Midian, he met Reuel, a Midianite priest, who had several daughters. He married one of them, Zipporah, who gave birth to their first son, Gershom.

Moses may have thought that he was going to live out his life in exile, but God had a different plan for him. The encounter with God comes at the burning bush, where he was tending the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro. In Exodus 2 his father-in-law was given the name Reuel, which means “friend of God.” In Exodus 3, where Moses encounters the burning bush, his father-in-law is named Jethro. The name Jethro means “his excellency” and might be a title, used interchangeably with Reuel.

As Moses approaches the burning bush, God speaks, telling him to remove his sandals for he stands on holy ground (Exodus 3:5). God then calls him to deliver his people from slavery in Egypt and to take them into the Promised Land. Not feeling that he is the man for the job, Moses resists, but finally gives in and returns with his brother Aaron to face the Pharaoh with the divine message to let God’s people go. The Pharaoh was not interested and so Moses and Aaron confronted him with the following plagues from God:

- | | |
|-----------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Blood | 6. Boils |
| 2. Frogs | 7. Hailstorm |
| 3. Gnats | 8. Locusts |
| 4. Flies | 9. Darkness |
| 5. Cattle | 10. Death of the first-born |

With the conclusion of the ten plagues, the Pharaoh reluctantly let them go, but not without pursuing them to the Sea of Reeds, where in the most important miracle of the Old Testament, God parted the waters and set them free.

The Law at Sinai

Freedom does not come easy. The people complain about the lack of water, food, and the comforts they enjoyed as slaves in Egypt. God provided them with water from rocks and manna from heaven. Within three months these former slaves stood before Mount Sinai, where God presented them with the Ten Commandments and some other laws. These laws were not given to enslave them, but to enable them to maintain their freedom. God was making a third covenant, the other two being the Covenant through Noah, symbolized by a rainbow and the Covenant through Abraham, symbolized through circumcision. The Covenant, which God made with Moses; was symbolized by the Ten Commandments. God expected his people to obey his Will, which would enable them to remain free. It would also make them *Holy*.

None of the above came easy. While Moses waited forty days and forty nights for the Ten Commandments, the people convinced Aaron that they needed a god. Aaron made a golden calf for them, and when Moses returned, he found them worshipping the idol. In great anger he broke the two tablets of the Law, symbolizing their breaking of the Covenant. God's response was to destroy the people, but Moses interceded on their behalf, pleading for forgiveness and reminding God of the promises he had made. God responded by pardoning the people and remaking the Covenant with a new set of Ten Commandments. Instructions were also given to make an Ark in which to carry them and a Tabernacle in which the Ark could be placed.

Some important lessons were learned about God in the Sinai. The first lesson was that only one God exists. At the burning bush, God revealed his name to Moses. Abraham had called God *El Shaddai*, which means "God Almighty." Moses wanted to know God's name before he confronted the Pharaoh and so God revealed his name to Moses as *Yahweh*, a form of the verb "to be," which is translated "LORD" in English. This lesson has been summed up in Deuteronomy 4:32-35:

For ask now about former ages, long before your own, ever since the day that God created human beings on the earth; ask from one end of heaven to the other: has anything so great as this ever happened or has its like ever been heard of? Has any people ever heard the voice of a god speaking out of a fire, as you have heard, and lived? Or has any god ever attempted to go and take a nation for himself from the midst of another nation, by trials, by signs and wonders, by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and by terrifying displays of power, as the LORD your God did for you in Egypt before your very eyes? To you it was shown so that you would acknowledge that the LORD is God; there is no other besides him.

The second important lesson learned was that God initiated the covenant and that they were delivered from their slavery by the grace of God alone. Their deliverance had nothing to do with how good they were; rather, it had to do with God being concerned about their oppression. God did not send Moses into Egypt with the Ten Commandments, saying, "If you obey these commandments, then I will deliver you from slavery into freedom." God delivered these people out of love and faithfulness to his earlier promise to Abraham. Only after he rescued them did he give them commandments. The commandments were to be kept not only out of gratitude, but in order to maintain the

freedom they had been given. They in turn were to become holy priests, showing this new freedom, which contained a *spiritual* dimension, to the world. The New Testament idea that we are saved by grace alone as we respond to God's initiative through faith already has its origin in the Old Testament. Obedience always follows faith. The heart of this idea is described in Exodus 19:4-6, where God says:

You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a *holy* nation.

When we think of the Law the Ten Commandments come to mind, but there is much more to the Law than the Ten Commandments. According to some scholars there are 613 commandments, divided up into four sections, which are:

1. The Ten Commandments. This is the foundation of the Law and can be found in Exodus 20:1-17 and Deuteronomy 5:6-22. These commandments make up the basic requirements that God has for his people.
2. The Covenant Code. This is the name given to a whole code of laws found in Exodus 21-23. This code was used when God first made his covenant, which is described in Exodus 24. These include instructions about justice and compassion for the poor.
3. The Levitical Law (The Holiness Code). This section of the Law deals with the regulations and duties of the priesthood and can be found in the Book of Leviticus, which has to do with offerings and feasts. The most important chapter is Leviticus 19, which begins with words: "You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy." (Leviticus 19:2)
4. The Deuteronomic Law. These laws, found in Deuteronomy 12-26, give fresh interpretations of earlier laws. They give new reasons to motivate people to obey those laws. There are some new laws contained in this section as well, which focus on generosity and kindness.

Each section of the Law contains a variety of material. There are criminal laws, civil laws, and family laws. There are also laws covering worship and charitable giving. While some laws were to be enforced by threat of capital punishment, others were to be enforced by social pressure. Underlying all of this however is the idea that God's people would want to obey God's Law. By doing so they would experience freedom from slavery and freedom from sin. They would become *Holy*.

5. THE STRUGGLE FOR LEADERSHIP

The Division of the Land

After Joshua defeated the major kings in the Promised Land, the land was divided up among the tribes by lot. The only tribe that did not receive any land was the tribe of Levi, the tribe given priestly responsibilities. The Levites were to live among all the people. In order to maintain twelve tribal areas, the favored tribe of Joseph was given two allotments, which were named after his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh.

Since the Levites had no inheritance of land, they were allotted cities and pasture land around them. This ensured that the leaders of the nation's faith and worship would be dispersed among the tribes. Levi had three sons, Kohath, Gershon, and Merari, and so the cities were divided among their descendants. There were 48 cities in all.

Cities of refuge were also set up throughout the land. These cities were a safeguard against the vengeance of a relative who had the obligation to avenge the death of a loved one. Those who caused an accidental death were protected from such personal vengeance. One who desired refuge had to meet with the elders of the city at the gate. The gate was not merely an opening in the wall, but an enclosed structure containing several rooms and more than one story. Shelter in one of these cities provided time for tempers to cool down, and it was open to foreigners (strangers) as well. Eventually the accused had to stand trial before the covenant community.

Having taken the Promised Land and divided it up among the twelve tribes, Joshua gathered the elders, the heads, the judges, and the officers at Shechem to renew their covenant with God and warned them of the danger of idolatry. This warning, which includes a word from God on the land as a gift, can be found in Joshua 24:13-15:

I gave you a land on which you had not labored, and towns that you had not built, and you live in them; you eat the fruit of vineyards and olive yards that you did not plant. "Now therefore revere the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness; put away the gods that your ancestors served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. Now if you are unwilling to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served in the region beyond the River or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.

Joshua then retired to Timnath-serah, a town in Ephraim, which had been given to him for his long and dedicated leadership. After Joshua's death in 110 B.C.E., a new struggle for leadership emerged, which we call the period of the Judges.

The First Leaders

For approximately 200 years after the death of Joshua, the 12 tribes struggled for survival. They faced two major enemies—hostile people with superior technology and idolatry. During this time, between 1200 and 1050 B.C.E., 12 judges upheld the laws and customs of the Israelites. Some of them were tribal military heroes and others were city or district rulers. They became heroes by divine call and empowerment and they led the

various tribes to deal with their surrounding enemies. Another term for these judges might be “revolutionary leaders,” for none of them, were elected by the people. They operated in a time when there was no central power or unity. Justice had to be administered by someone, for no one had replaced Joshua. At best, the 12 tribes formed a loosely knit confederation. Those persons, military or otherwise, who could bring order out of chaos, were thought of as heroes. Below is a brief summary of each of the 12 judges:

1. OTHNIEL. This kinsman of Caleb’s defeated an invasion from Hittite-controlled Mesopotamia.
2. EHUD. The Moabites, joined with the Ammonites and Amalekites, oppressed Israel. Ehud killed the Moabite King and then led Israel into battle against them, killing 10,000 soldiers.
3. SHAMGAR. Although not described as an Israelite Judge, he was a contemporary of Deborah’s, and was known for having killed 600 Philistines.
4. DEBORAH. She was the only woman judge, who was the inspiration behind Barak, her military commander. Barak wanted her to accompany him as he and his men killed 10,000 Canaanites led by Jabin and Sisera. As Sisera sought safety in Jael’s tent (a Kenite woman), she killed him with a tent peg.
5. GIDEON. The Midianites swept through southern Israel in about 1175 B.C.E. Gideon scored a decisive victory over them with 300 soldiers. He refused the invitation to become a king over Israel, and peace followed for the next 40 years. Contrary to the Mosaic Law, he did form an image out of golden earrings.
6. TOLA. Following the chaotic rule of Abimelech, Tola ruled for 23 years. He was not a military ruler, and he faced no enemy. He came from Shamir in the Tribe of Issachar.
7. JAIR. Like Tola, Jair was more of a civil ruler than a military leader; and he ruled for 22 years. He came from Gilead and belonged to the Tribe of Manasseh. Jair became known for his 30 sons, 30 donkeys, and 30 cities.
8. JEPHTHAH. The Ammonites attacked the eastern borders of Israel, and Jephthah freed the eastern tribes from them. The Ephraimites were apparently invited to help, but complained that they had not been invited. Conflict arose between Gilead (Manasseh) and the Ephraimites, with Jephthah and his men killing off 42,000 Ephraimites. They recognized the Ephraimites by asking them to pronounce “shibboleh,” which they could not do.
9. IBZAN. That he had 30 sons is an indication of his importance, but nothing is said of his acts of deliverance. The giving of his 30 daughters outside the tribe was standard practice for the time. He judged Israel for seven years, as the Philistine threat continued to grow.
10. ELON. All that is known about Elon is where he came from and that he judged Israel for ten years.

11. ABDON. He had 40 sons and 30 grandsons, who rode on 70 donkeys. This was a sign of his prominence in society. He judged Israel for eight years.
12. SAMSON. Coming from the Tribe of Dan, Samson had to deal with the Philistines, who finally drove the Danites north. While Samson never organized any military armies to fight them, he did resist them in more personal ways, such as by setting fire to their fields and slaying many of their soldiers with the jawbone of an ass. Following 40 years of oppression, he managed to rule 20 years, during which time he became a hero because of his great strength.

The retelling of the above stories had a specific purpose. They demonstrated how victory came from God and idolatry led to disaster. The theological and moral lessons to be learned were that loyalty to God is the prerequisite for national success and disloyalty a guarantee of disaster. The role of the Judge was not to rule, but to call the people back to God and to execute judgment. According to Gideon, God himself is the ultimate judge. Some scholars choose to call Gideon the ideal Judge, but even he, following his military victory over the Midianites, resorted back to idolatry by forming an image out of golden earrings (Judges 8:24-27).

A fourfold cycle of events can be discerned in the stories of the judges. First, there is APOSTASY, which is followed by JUDGMENT. Judgment usually consists of foreign oppression, which brings the Israelites to REPENTANCE. Repentance begins with a cry of distress and ends with divine DELIVERANCE.

Apostasy means the abandonment of one's faith. This was a serious problem in the Promised Land. There were many hostile enemies, whose technology was superior to that of the Israelites. If an enemy had superior technology, it meant that they also had superior gods. While there were many enemies, the Philistines posed the greatest threat, for they possessed ships, horses, chariots, and iron swords and spears. The Israelites were thus dependent upon their enemy to sharpen their objects of iron (1 Samuel 13:19-20). The Philistines, however, were not native to the Promised Land. They too migrated there from another place, the Island of Crete.

While there were a multitude of gods in the land of Canaan (the Promised Land), the main gods mentioned are Baal and Ashtoreth. Baal was the Canaanite name for "god." There were many Baals, who were thought to own the land and make the crops grow. Ashtoreth was the Canaanite goddess, who was the wife of Baal. She was the goddess of fertility, providing people with children. The practices coming from these gods and goddesses undermining the Israelites were sacred prostitution and child sacrifice. These practices took place in groves of trees and on tops of hills. Strong leaders were needed to keep the Israelites from forsaking their God and worshipping the gods and goddesses of the Canaanites. The Book of Judges ends with a warning: "In those days there was no king in Israel; all the people did what was right in their own eyes." A stronger leader than a judge was needed to unite twelve disorganized tribes. The story of Ruth follows the Book of Judges because it lays the foundation for a King who would finally unify the 12 tribes into one. Although Ruth was a Moabite woman, she worshipped Yahweh and married Boaz. They became the great-grandparents of David, Israel's greatest King.

A Transitional Leader

Israel did not become a monarchy overnight. The transition took some time and involved two leaders, Eli and Samuel, who served as priests, judges, and prophets. Their roles are difficult to categorize. Both had wayward sons. Joshua had set up the Tabernacle with the Ark of the Covenant in Shiloh, where Eli was given responsibility for its care. His sons Hophni and Phinehas took the Ark onto the battlefield against the Philistines and lost it. Hophni and Phinehas were killed on the battlefield. When news of their death and the loss of the Ark was reported to Eli, he fell over and died of a broken neck. The shock of the capture of the Ark seemed to affect him more than the death of his sons. Eli was 98 years old at the time and had judged Israel for 40 years. Samuel, who had been raised by Eli, succeeded him.

The Philistines experienced nothing but trouble with the Ark and soon devised a plan to return it, but it could not be returned to Shiloh, for Shiloh had been destroyed. The Ark was placed on a cart and yoked to two cows, separated from their calves. The natural thing for these two cows was to stay in the Philistine city of Ekron, but they set out for Beth-shemesh, 12 miles away. Messengers were sent to Kiriath-jearim to inform the people of the Ark's return. The Ark was then taken to the house of Abinadab in Kiriath-jearim, where Abinadab's son Eleazar was placed in charge of it. The Ark stayed there until David had it transferred to Jerusalem, his new capital.

Samuel led the people in a revival, encouraging them to put away their foreign gods, the Baals and the Ashtaroth (plural of Ashtoreth). While Samuel was a godly and good man, his sons, Joel and Abijah, did not follow after him. They took bribes and perverted justice; for these reasons, the people demanded that Samuel appoint a King. Another reason given in the Bible is that the Israelites wanted to be like the other nations (1 Samuel 8:19-20), who had Kings. Samuel feared that this would drive a wedge between the people and their covenant with God. The theological conclusion was that Israel's defeats had been caused by sin, not by political incompetence; and for Samuel, the solution was not the establishment of a monarchy, but obedience to God and His ways. Samuel warned the people that their request for a king was not pleasing to God. It would mean conscription for war, economic taxation, and the loss of personal liberty (Deuteronomy 17:14-17). In desperation, Samuel prayed to the Lord and the Lord said to Samuel, "Listen to the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them." (1 Samuel 8:7)

It is clear that God did not want kings. He wanted His people to consider Him their king. God would only bless human kings that were loyal to the divine Covenant. This meant that the king was subject first to God and his Law, just as any other Israelite. The king was not to be regarded divine, as other countries regarded their kings; rather, Israel's king was to set an example by observing the Law. Kings were to be leaders in faith and morals.

Wandering in the Wilderness

In preparation for their journey through the wilderness to the Promised Land, they built the Ark of the Covenant to hold the two tablets of the Law (the Ten Commandments); the Tabernacle (a tent) with two rooms, an outer room and an inner

room; an Altar for animal sacrifices; and all of the furnishings needed for worship, including a bath for the priests to wash, an altar for burning incense, a table with loaves on it, and a seven-branched candelabra. Around the Tabernacle was an enclosed outer courtyard. All of this was important because it symbolized the presence of God in their midst. It was God who would lead them through the wilderness to the Promised Land.

The priests would of course have to speak for God and Aaron was the first High Priest. Moses functioned as a religious political leader; hence, leadership at the highest levels was kept in the family. As they proceeded through the wilderness that leadership was challenged on several occasions, but each time the rebellion was put down. Moses, Aaron, and their sister Miriam had to deal with people who did not always think that they were effective leaders. Even Aaron and Miriam challenged Moses, claiming that he was not the only one through whom God speaks (Numbers 12:1-16), but Moses continued as the primary leader.

Eleven days after they left Mount Sinai, Moses sent twelve spies into Canaan from Kadesh Barnea to find out what kind of resistance might be encountered in the Promised Land. When the spies returned they reported that it was indeed a land of milk and honey, but that its cities were well fortified and its people like giants. Only two of the spies, Caleb and Joshua, voted to enter and conquer the Promised Land. The other spies voted against it (Numbers 13). There was an attempt to invade and conquer, but it was against Moses' advice, without the presence of the Ark of the Covenant, and it failed. Eventually there was a rebellion led by Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, who blamed Moses for their failures and challenged Aaron's monopoly of the priesthood. Moses and Aaron interpreted the rebellion as being against the Lord and challenged it. They won the challenge and continued as leaders.

The failure to conquer the Promised Land was costly. It symbolized disobedience and lack of faith not only on the part of the people, but also on the part of their leaders. In the wilderness there had been mumbling, rebellion, disobedience, and worst of all idolatry. The only solution was to purge the people of an entire generation, including their leadership. The only two persons who would be allowed to enter the Promised Land at the end of this purge would be Caleb and Joshua, the two spies who voted to move ahead in faith and take the Promised Land. Even Moses and Aaron would not be allowed to enter. As their leader, Moses would be given a glimpse of the Promised Land from the top of Mount Nebo, but he would not be allowed to enter it. This meant that they would have to sit in Kadesh Barnea for 38 years as they waited for the older generation to die off and a new generation to be born and mature. Caleb and Joshua would lead that new generation in the conquest of the Promised Land.

The Conquest

Having defeated the two kings on the eastern bank of the Jordan River, King Sihon and King Og, Moses commissioned Joshua to enter and conquer the Promised Land. Since two and one-half of the twelve tribes desired to occupy the eastern bank of the Jordan River, Sihon's former territory went to the tribes of Reuben and Gad and Og's former territory went to one-half of the tribe of Manasseh. The condition was that these two and one-half tribes would help Joshua conquer the Promised Land on the western

side of the Jordan River. After that was accomplished they could return and settle on the eastern side.

In a way reminiscent of the crossing of the Sea of Reeds, the waters of the Jordan River stopped and they crossed over on dry land. The first city to be conquered was Jericho. Everything went smoothly and so they proceeded onto Ai, where they failed in their first attempt. Having perceived that someone in their ranks violated the laws of holy war, they proceeded to search for that person. It seems that Achan had taken a mantle from Shinar, 200 shekels of silver and a bar of gold weighing 50 shekels. After stoning Achan and his family, they attacked Ai a second time, defeating it.

Joshua then proceeded south, first making a treaty with the city of Gibeon, which triggered hostilities with five local, Amorite kings. Using speedy marches and surprise attacks, Joshua defeated Adonizedek (Jerusalem), Hoham (Hebron), Piram (Jarmuth), Japhia (Lachish), and Debir (Eglon). Joshua then turned his attention to the north, where the powerful King Jabin of Hazor organized a tremendous military alliance, more powerful than the five southern kings. Joshua wiped them out at the waters of Merom. A number of territories, including Jerusalem, were not defeated in Joshua's military campaigns and would have to be dealt with by slower guerrilla warfare. Jerusalem would prove to be very difficult to conquer and would have to wait for the military campaigns of King David.

Occupying the land was very important to the descendants of Abraham, for it was part of God's promise. That is why we call it the Promised Land. We may look back at Joshua's taking of the Promised Land and think of it as an unfair invasion of one people over another; but in the Old Testament, the land belongs only to God, as Leviticus 25:23 says: "The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; with me you are but aliens and tenants." The Canaanites were being punished for violating three divine laws. First, they worshipped idols; second, they sacrificed children to the gods represented by their idols; and third, they tried to motivate their many gods through sacred prostitution to give them many children and fertile land. These are the reasons why they lost the land that God alone owned.

Out of gratitude for gift of the land, God expected his people to honor him with the first fruits of their harvest and the firstborn of their livestock, which came to be known as the tithe. As long as they avoided the sins of the Canaanites and expressed their gratitude to God for His gift of the Promised Land, they would be permitted to occupy the land, which belonged to God. At times they recognized this and would say:

A wandering Aramean was my ancestor; he went down into Egypt and lived there as an alien, few in number, and there he became a great nation, mighty and populous. When the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, by imposing hard labor on us, we cried to the LORD, the God of our ancestors; the LORD heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. The LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with a terrifying display of power, and with signs and wonders; and he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. So now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground that you, O LORD, have given me. (Deuteronomy 26:5-10)

The conquest and occupation of the Promised Land was an extremely important event in Old Testament history. The worst punishment God's people could experience was the loss of the Promised Land; yet, that is precisely what happened to them. They lost the land, but not without having been warned.

You shall keep all my statutes and all my ordinances, and observe them, so that the land to which I bring you to settle in may not vomit you out. You shall not follow the practices of the nation that I am driving out before you. Because they did all these things, I abhorred them. But I have said to you: You shall inherit their land, and I will give it to you to possess, a land flowing with milk and honey. I am the LORD your God; I have separated you from the peoples. (Leviticus 20:22-24)

6. THE UNITED MONARCHY

Neither Samuel nor God wanted a king, but the people wanted one, mainly to protect them from their many enemies. The worst of their enemies were the Philistines, who had settled on the western coastal plain. They possessed superior weapons and had humiliated the Israelites by stealing the Ark of the Covenant; and even though they returned it, the Israelites began to feel that their only hope lay in a strong king. The first person chosen by God and the people was Saul.

Saul

The process of selecting Saul as the first king of the 12 tribes involved three steps: (1) the anointing at Ramah, (2) the election at Mizpah, and (3) the coronation at Gilgal.

The Anointing at Ramah

Saul enters the story as a tall and handsome Benjamite, who was in search of his father's lost donkeys. As he looked for those donkeys, in the area where Samuel lived, his servant encouraged him to visit Samuel. After dining with Samuel and about 30 other persons, Saul was offered a place to sleep on the roof. The next morning Samuel anointed him privately on the edge of the city with olive oil, and informed him that three signs would confirm him as God's choice of the first King of Israel. Although the three signs are not of great importance, they were as follows:

1. Saul would meet two men by Rachel's tomb, who would tell him that the donkeys had been found.
2. Saul would meet three men at the Oak of Tabor, who would be carrying provisions for a sacrificial feast at Bethel.
3. In Gibeath-elohim, where a garrison of Philistines was located, Saul would meet a band of prophets and prophesy with them.

The Election at Mizpah

When Saul returned home he said nothing about Samuel anointing him the first King of Israel. Samuel then called the people together at Mizpah, one of the places where Samuel acted as a judge, to choose their king by sacred lot, probably with the help of the Urim and Thummim. The Tribe of Benjamin was chosen, then the family of Saul, and finally Saul himself. At the time of his election, Saul could not be found. He had hidden himself among the baggage. When he was found, it was noted that he was a head taller than anyone else. After Samuel explained the regulations for kingship (Deuteronomy 17:14-20), Saul returned home to Gibeah. The election was not unanimous; there were some who had an unfavorable opinion of Saul, for he had not yet proven himself an able leader.

The Coronation of Saul at Gilgal

The opportunity for leadership soon presented itself with the challenge of Nahash and the Ammonites, who declared war on Jabesh-gilead. Nahash gave them one week, after which he threatened to gouge out everyone's right eye to disgrace all of Israel.

Messengers went out over all of Israel seeking someone to rescue them. It was Saul who, after having recruited 300,000 men from Israel and 30,000 men from Judah, soundly defeated the Ammonites. This resulted in the coronation of Saul at Gilgal. Saul's victory over the Ammonites had stirred up a new confidence and united the people behind Saul, but his greatest challenge was yet to come—the Philistines.

Saul, with the help of his son Jonathan, initiated war with the Philistines. On one occasion Saul had to wait seven days for Samuel to come to make a burnt offering, which would assist them in defeating the Philistines. Saul grew impatient and decided to make the offering himself. When Samuel finally did arrive, he was angry and informed Saul that his dynasty was over. This meant that Saul would finish out his reign, but none of his sons would succeed him. The sin of Saul seems to be his exercising of priestly duties. Why David and Solomon are not chastised for exercising priestly duties is never explained in the Bible. Saul is the one accused of disobedience.

Perhaps Saul's greatest disobedience was his tolerance of the Amalekites. Saul had been commanded to annihilate the Amalekites, men, women, children, and even their animals. There were to be no survivors. Saul and his men did attack the Amalekites, but they did not destroy everyone. They spared Agag, the King, capturing him alive. A number of others were also spared and the best animals were saved for sacrificial purposes. By sparing the Amalekite king and their best animals, Saul violated the rules of holy war. To obtain the blessings of God the nation was to offer its best animals as sacrifices, not animals contaminated by a pagan enemy.

Saul demonstrated his complete incompetence in understanding the Law. The Lord wanted obedience, not simply sacrifice. Acting as a prophet, Samuel informed Saul that God disapproved of his disobedience and was withdrawing his blessing from his reign. As Samuel left to return to Ramah, Saul grabbed hold of his skirt and tore it. Samuel interpreted this to be a sign of God's complete rejection of Saul. In spite of the difficulty that we might have with the way in which God treated Saul, the message is crystal clear. Obedience brings divine blessing and disobedience brings divine judgment. This later became the message of the prophets. Saul's reign, however, was not yet over, but the blessing of God on it was. Saul returned to Gibeah, never again to meet Samuel. We now turn to the selection of a new king—David.

David

Prior to Saul's Death

Even though Saul continued to reign as King, Samuel set about finding God's choice of a successor. It was not going to be one of Saul's sons. The search led Samuel to the family of Jesse in Bethlehem. Jesse had eight sons, and even though Eliab seemed the obvious choice, Samuel chose the youngest, a shepherd boy named David. He was not chosen for his outward appearance, but for what resided in his heart. At the same time that God withdrew the spirit from Saul, he gave it to David. This left Saul with deep depression. Music therapy was sought and David was brought in to play the lyre (harp). At first Saul loved David and made him his armor-bearer, giving him plenty of military experience.

The Philistines were still Israel's greatest threat. Goliath, a 10 foot tall Philistine wearing 150 pounds of armor, challenged any Israelite to take him on in battle. The losers would become servants of the winners. Saul offered his oldest daughter, Merab, in marriage and exemption from taxes to any Israelite who could bring down Goliath. The encounter finally took place in the Valley of Elah. David stepped forward, against the advice of his brothers and Saul, but David assured them that he knew what he was doing. As a shepherd he had to take on lions and bears; hence, Goliath was the same kind of challenge. Saul gave him some armor, but David took only his staff, five smooth stones, and a sling. He finished off Goliath with one stone and cut off his head with Goliath's own sword. Saul did not complete his side of the bargain. His oldest daughter Merab was given to someone else, although a younger daughter, Michal, was given to David.

The relationship between David and Saul deteriorated. That women began to sing the following song about the military exploits of David and Saul did not help:

“Saul has killed his thousands,
and David his ten thousands.”

1 Samuel 18:7

It only made Saul angry and more intent on killing David. Saul tried to kill David on several occasions, but his own son Jonathan and his daughter Michal interceded on David's behalf, helping him to escape. David had opportunities in which he could have killed Saul, but he had too much respect for the office of king to do that. Instead, he fled into the wilderness, and at times lived among the Philistines, making it extremely difficult for Saul to catch him. While in the wilderness, David took two more wives, Abigail and Ahino-am, probably to extend his influence deeper into the southern territory of Judah.

About this time Samuel dies and Saul seeks the advice of a medium, which he had earlier outlawed. Saul's military forces at Gilboa were facing the Philistines at Shunem. While Saul asked the Lord what he was to do through the traditional means of dreams, the Urim and Thummim, and prophets, he received no answer. That is why he disguised himself and went with two other men to visit the medium at Endor. He wanted her to bring up Samuel from the dead so that he could speak with him. Samuel's "spirit" gave Saul no reassurance, but simply told him that his future was limited. He had not obeyed God, nor had he carried out God's wrath against the Amalekites. His kingdom would be taken away.

Saul's final battle took place on Mt. Gilboa. Three of his four sons, Jonathan, Abinadab, and Malchishua, fought with him. Only Ishbaal was not present. When Saul was seriously injured in battle, he appealed to his armor-bearer to kill him. The armor-bearer refused to do so, and so Saul took his own life. The next day the Philistines found his body, cut off his head and hung both of them on the wall at Beth-shan. Some of the people from Jabesh-gilead, in gratitude for his having saved their town, took Saul's body, along with the bodies of his three sons, also killed in battle, and cremated them at Jabesh-gilead. Their bones were buried under a tamarisk tree.

After Saul's Death

While Saul was still alive, David respected his position as King and never attempted to seize the throne. Following Saul's death David inquired of the Lord through the ephod (the urim and thummim). The answer he received was to go to Hebron, where he would be anointed King; so he took two of his wives, Ahinoam and Abigail, and went to Hebron. The first thing he did was to send a message of gratitude to the men of Jabesh-gilead, who had buried Saul and his three sons.

Meanwhile, Abner, Saul's military commander, took Ishbosheth (previously Ishbaal), the only remaining son of Saul, to Mahanaim, one of the principal towns of Gilead, to make him King. Ishbosheth was only being set up as a puppet King. Ruling in Mahanaim was not the easiest thing for him to do, since the city was located on the eastern side of the Jordan River. With two persons claiming the throne, civil war broke out for nearly two years, with David ruling Judah and Ishbosheth representing Israel.

The next few years were chaotic as Abner, representing Ishbosheth, and Joab, representing David, struggled to help unify the nation. During this time Ishbosheth returned Michal, one of David's wives to him, and Joab murdered Abner. David attended Abner's funeral to demonstrate his disapproval of what Joab, his military commander, had done. The resolution to the divided nation came with the assassination of Ishbosheth by Baanah and Rechab. They took Ishbosheth's head to David, expecting to be rewarded. They were not aware of David's deep respect for royalty. Instead of receiving a reward, they were promptly executed. All this tragedy led the way for David to reunite Israel and Judah.

All the tribes of Israel committed themselves to David in Hebron, where David ruled for seven years and six months. Hebron did not make an ideal capital for a united kingdom and so David attacked and captured Jerusalem, where he ruled for another 33 years. One of David's first acts was to have the Ark of the Covenant brought to Jerusalem from Kiriath-Jearim, where it had been stored in the house of Abinadab. During the trip, Uzzah, one of Abinadab's sons, touched the Ark and dropped dead. Uzzah's death angered David, making him unwilling to continue the journey; so the Ark was left at the home of Obed-edom for three months. When Obed-edom experienced nothing but blessings, David went back to get the Ark and took it to Jerusalem leaping and dancing in front of it. His wife Michal was ashamed of his behavior, but God approved, blessing David and cursing Michal. Michal would be isolated from David for the rest of her life and bear no more children.

Feeling guilty about living in a palace of cedar, while God lived in a tabernacle (tent), David suggested to the prophet Nathan that a Temple be built. At first Nathan agreed, but after having a dream, he reported to David that it was not God's will. A Temple would be built, but not by David. David's reign was too violent and during times of violence, one does not have time to build temples. Rather than David building a house for God, God promised to build an everlasting house (dynasty) for David (2 Samuel 7:16).

David's reign was indeed a violent one, but Joab, his military commander, led the nation to victory after victory. In the spring of the year, David sent his army out to fight the Ammonites, while he remained behind in Jerusalem. During his rest period, he saw

Bathsheba on a nearby roof, bathing herself. One thing led to another and soon he had committed adultery with Bathsheba, a willing participant. When Bathsheba informed David that she was pregnant, he recalled her husband Uriah from the front in Rabbah so that he might have sexual relations with Bathsheba and think the child was his own. Uriah was a loyal soldier and could not conceive of enjoying himself during a holy war; besides, it was a violation of holy war. David then made an arrangement with Joab to put Uriah in a dangerous position so that he would be killed. The plot worked, except for a prophet named Nathan, who confronted David with his sin. To David's credit, he confessed his sin and repented of it. Psalm 51:4 contains the essence of his repentance: "Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight...."

The next tragic event in David's life was the rape of Tamar by her half-brother Amnon, who was also David's eldest son and potential successor. The rape of Tamar angered both David and another son named Absalom. Since David did nothing about the rape, Absalom took things into his own hands and had Amnon murdered. One question must be asked. Did Absalom have Amnon murdered because he raped his full sister, or was he simply trying to eliminate Amnon as David's successor? If Amnon were dead, then Absalom would be next in line to succeed David. Deep alienation set in between David and Absalom, forcing Absalom to flee. After about three years, David allowed Absalom to return, but he was not allowed inside the royal court.

Since David was a better military leader than an administrator, Absalom appeared at the gate and began to help people obtain what they wanted. Over a period of four years, he won the hearts of the common people. When the time was right Absalom went to Hebron to pay a religious vow, and while he was there, he organized a rebellion against David. Hebron was an ideal place for him to do this. It was not only Absalom's birthplace, but it was also the city deserted by David in favor of Jerusalem. There was a lot of discontent in Hebron. When news of the rebellion reached David, he decided to leave Jerusalem with his family, officials, and friends. As they were leaving the priests, Zadok and Abiathar, picked up the Ark of the Covenant to take it along, but David commanded them to remain in Jerusalem with the Ark. He promised them that he would return.

After Absalom took over the throne, he asked Ahithophel for some advice. Ahithophel asked for 12,000 men to pursue and kill David immediately. Absalom also asked Hushai, a secret friend of David's, for advice. Hushai advised Absalom against Ahithophel's plan. Going after David prematurely, he said, would be like cornering a bear, robbed of her cubs. It would be better to gather all of Israel under him first, and then go personally into battle against David. Absalom foolishly followed Hushai's advice. This bought David some time. During that time David's friends brought supplies to him at Mahanaim.

David planned his attack on Absalom by dividing his seasoned troops into three groups, placing one-third under each of his leaders—Joab, Abishai, and Ittai. David wanted to accompany them, but they convinced him that he was too valuable to risk losing in battle. David's advice was that they deal gently with Absalom. The battle was fought in the Forest of Ephraim, with the forest claiming more lives than the sword. In an attempt to escape, Absalom rode off on a mule, but was caught in the branches of an oak tree. He could have been delivered to David alive, but Joab knew that Absalom needed to

be killed, so he thrust three darts into his heart. David was not happy with the news of Absalom's death and went into deep mourning. Joab confronted David over his ungrateful attitude and paid for his confrontation by being demoted.

David began to show symptoms of senility, and so they appointed Abishag, a young nurse, to care for him. As David lay dying, he called his son Solomon in for some final instructions, mainly that he was to obey the Lord and the written Law of Moses. After giving a few more instructions to Solomon, including the promise to make sure that Joab would not die a natural death, David died, having served as King for nearly 40 years.

Solomon

Even before David died, there was a struggle going on for the throne. Who would succeed him, Adonijah, the eldest living son, or Solomon, Bathsheba's son and choice? Adonijah just assumed that he would inherit the throne and Joab, the military commander, and Abiathar, the High Priest, supported him. The opposition came from younger leaders, such as Nathan, the prophet, Zadok, the priest, and Benaiah, a military leader, who would eventually replace Joab as commander in chief. Nathan took the initiative to influence David through Bathsheba; so prior to David's death, he gave the order for the coronation of Solomon. Solomon was to ride on David's own mule to a place near the Spring of Gihon, where Zadok was to anoint him with scented olive oil. A trumpet was to be blown and all were to cry out, "Long live King Solomon." This meant the death of Adonijah and Joab, with the High Priest Abiathar being spared, but banished.

The Early Years

While we do not know how old Solomon was when he assumed power, we do know that he was quite young (1 Kings 3:7). He was also very religious and prayed to God for wisdom, which pleased the Lord; so, wisdom was granted. Everyone is aware of the story of the two harlots who claimed the same child. Apparently one child died and these two harlots both claimed the remaining child. When they asked Solomon to pass judgment on their claim, Solomon's answer was to cut the child in two and give each woman half. The true mother then gave up her claim and Solomon awarded the child to her. This story spread throughout the Kingdom, illustrating Solomon's great wisdom. That wisdom can also be found in some of Solomon's 3,000 proverbs and 1,005 songs. Some of the most notable examples can be read in Proverbs 10:1—22:16 and Psalm 72 and 127.

In addition to being wise, Solomon also became wealthy. The nation was finally at peace and prosperity was the fruit of that peace. The time was right for building the Temple. Solomon turned to Hiram, a friend of his father's, for help. Hiram was the King of Tyre and could provide many of the products needed to build the Temple, mainly cedar. The Temple was begun in the fourth year of Solomon's reign, about 960 B.C.E. It was designed more as a place for God to live than a gathering place for a congregation; hence, it was more like a chapel than a cathedral. Solomon did realize that no Temple could contain God and he also provided a court surrounding the Temple where people could gather.

The center of the Temple was the Holy of Holies, where the Ark of the Covenant was placed. Inside the Ark were the two tablets on which were written, the Ten

Commandments. On top of the Ark were two Cherubim, made of olive wood, guarding the throne of God. The top of the Ark was called the Mercy Seat. In the eleventh year of Solomon's reign, the Temple was dedicated, with the main part of the ceremony being the transfer of the Ark of the Covenant from the City of David to the Temple. The Temple was to represent the presence of God on earth, with the Israelites being God's chosen people so "that all the peoples of the earth may know that the Lord is God; there is no other." (1 Kings 8:60). In response to Solomon's prayer of dedication, the Lord appeared to him in a vision stating the conditions of the covenant and the continuation of his dynasty. Disobedience would lead to national ruin and the destruction of the Temple.

The Later Years

It took 7 years to build the Temple and another 13 years to build the palace and the administrative complex. The lengthy building project left the treasury empty and so Solomon was forced to sell 20 cities to Hiram. Other extreme measures had to be taken as well, such as taxation and slavery; nevertheless, from the outside the nation still looked good. Solomon managed to build a fleet of ships harbored at Ezion-geber at the north end of the Red Sea (Gulf of Aqaba). Its purpose was purely commercial. Products like gold, silver, ivory, apes, and peacocks were brought from the far corners of the known world. Chariots and horses were imported from Egypt and other major centers of horse breeding. Solomon himself accumulated 1,400 chariots and 12,000 horses. Some of his stables can still be seen in Israel today. Under Solomon's leadership, the whole nation seemed to prosper and silver was as plentiful in Jerusalem as stones.

The Queen of Sheba came from Southwest Arabia (Yemen) in order to find out whether the news of Solomon's wisdom and wealth were true. In keeping with Oriental etiquette, she gave him gifts of spices, gold, and precious stones. She was very impressed by what she saw, and Solomon gave her whatever she asked for when she departed for home.

There were obviously more visitors from faraway places than the Queen of Sheba, for Solomon began to accumulate foreign wives and concubines, along with their priests and gods. In all Solomon married 700 women and took 300 concubines, women without legal status as wives. The gods and goddesses related to these women were Ashtoreth (Astarte), Milcom, Molech, and Chemosh. Altars to these pagan deities were built on the mountain east of Jerusalem.

While everything looked good on the outside, the dynasty of Solomon was beginning to crumble from within. The multitude of wives had to do with Solomon's entangling alliances with other nations, which began to grow very confusing. These wives and concubines brought with them their religion, which began to corrupt Solomon and his administration. Even though the nation was at peace, there was always the fear of war; hence, Solomon built stables at locations all over Israel. Heavy taxation and enslavement of people, including Israelites, began to take its toll.

The enemies of Solomon began to increase. There were Hadad and Rezon, but his greatest enemy would be Jeroboam, the Ephraimite. In good times Solomon promoted Jeroboam by making him supervisor of forced labor among the tribes of Manasseh and Ephraim. One day when Jeroboam was traveling from Jerusalem he met the prophet

Ahijah, who tore his new robe into 12 pieces and gave Jeroboam 10 pieces. This was to symbolize that the Lord would give 10 tribes to Jeroboam to rule, and that the remainder would be given to Solomon's son, as a favor to David. This was, of course, dependent upon Jeroboam's faithfulness to the Covenant. When Solomon tried to kill Jeroboam, he escaped to Egypt, where he stayed until Solomon's death. Solomon had ruled for 40 years.

7. THE COLLAPSE OF TWO KINGDOMS

The Split

After the death of Solomon his son Rehoboam went to Shechem to take over as the new King. Shechem was the place where Solomon had been anointed as King, and there was considerable concern over Solomon's oppressive reign. When Jeroboam, who had been living in Egypt, heard about the new King, he returned and asked Rehoboam to consider lifting the oppression of the northern tribes, which probably suffered more than Judah. Rehoboam consulted his advisers. The older advisers recommended less oppression, but the younger advisers called for more oppression than ever. Rehoboam sent Adoram (Adoniram) in to continue the oppression. When Adoram was stoned to death, Rehoboam fled to Jerusalem.

The 10 northern tribes made Jeroboam their King in Shechem and Rehoboam was left to rule over Judah. To keep people from going to Jerusalem to worship, Jeroboam named Bethel and Dan as the religious centers of the northern kingdoms. A golden calf (bull) was placed at each center, representing a return to paganism. If the southern Kingdom of Judah was oppressive, the northern 10 kingdoms moved towards idolatry. Both idolatry and oppression would cause the collapse of the two kingdoms.

The Collapse of the Northern Kingdom

Ahijah, who had encouraged Jeroboam to revolt against Rehoboam and predicted his rise to the monarchy of Israel, turned against him in bitter disappointment and predicted the nation's fall because of its return to pagan worship. For some unknown reason Jeroboam moved his capital from Shechem to Tirzah, where it remained until the reign of Omri. Following the death of Jeroboam, Israel was plagued with a constant struggle for power.

The king that finally brought some stability to Israel was Omri, who began a powerful reign in approximately 885 B.C.E. Omri conquered Moab and formed an alliance with Sidon (Phoenicia). The alliance with Phoenicia was strengthened with the marriage of Omri's son Ahab to the Phoenician princess Jezebel. For the next 150 years the Assyrians referred to Israel as the House of Omri. During his reign Omri purchased a hill and built the city of Samaria on it for his new capital. It remained the capital of Israel for the remainder of its history.

The most notorious of Israel's kings was Ahab. During his reign religious life reached its all time low. Under the influence of his Phoenician wife, Jezebel, an attempt was made to substitute Baal worship for the worship of Yahweh. The prophet Elijah resisted Baal worship and demonstrated to everyone the superiority of Yahweh in a powerful encounter with 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah on Mount Carmel. Both sides were to set up a sacrificial bull and have their deity strike it with fire. The prophets of Baal and Asherah called upon their gods until mid-afternoon and nothing happened. Elijah doused his sacrificial bull with four jars of water. When he called upon Yahweh to strike the sacrifice with fire, everything was burned up.

Jezebel's response to Elijah's demonstration was to swear an oath by her gods that she would kill Elijah. Fearing for his life, Elijah fled to Mount Horeb (Sinai), where he sulked in a cave. A strong wind, an earthquake, and a fire appeared in succession, but Elijah did not sense Yahweh in any of these natural events. Contrary to all of his expectations, Elijah finally heard Yahweh speak to him in the whisper of the still, small voice. God called Elijah to fulfill a threefold mission and to prophesy to Israel that he would: (1) anoint Hazael as King of Damascus, (2) anoint Jehu as King of Israel, and (3) choose Elisha as his own successor. Elijah chose Elisha to succeed him and Elisha anointed Hazael and Jehu as kings. After Elijah predicted a violent end for Ahab and Jezebel, Ahab met his death in battle and Jezebel was killed in a bloody revolution led by Jehu.

Elijah's very name summed up his life's work. It means "Yahweh is God." His whole mission evolved around calling Israel back to the worship of Yahweh, the only living and true God. Elijah was also concerned with social justice. When Jezebel convinced Ahab that he had the right to kill Naboth and take his vineyard away, Elijah confronted him with his sin. In the story, Elijah does not die, but Elisha, whom he prepared for a life of prophecy, did succeed him. Elisha's name means, "God saves." Elisha prophesied for 50 years, through the reigns of six kings. God worked many miracles through Elisha, such as healing the sick, feeding the hungry, and raising the dead. Jesus compared John the Baptist to Elijah. As Elijah called Israel to repentance, John called the Jews to repentance; and as Elisha succeeded Elijah, Jesus succeeded John. Jesus' name had a similar meaning as Elisha in Hebrew—"the Lord saves." The miracles of Jesus were similar to, but greater than the miracles of Elisha.

The longest reigning king in Israel was Jeroboam II, who ruled for 41 years (782-753 B.C.E.). His reign could be characterized as one of expansionism, but it only represented an Indian summer in Israel's history. Jonah, the hero of the book of Jonah, was surprisingly his prophetic supporter. Jeroboam II brought wealth and luxury to his court in Samaria and on the surface it seemed as if Israel and God were getting along fine. Beneath the surface the poor were getting poorer and were being driven off their land by debts.

It was during Jeroboam II's reign that two prophets spoke out. The first was a Shepherd from Tekoa (Judah) named Amos, who spoke out in Bethel (Israel). The heart of his message is contained in Amos 5:21-24, where he spoke out on behalf of God:

I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals I will not look upon. Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

The second prophet to speak out was Hosea, who married Gomer, a harlot, to illustrate God's commitment to Israel. Even though Gomer was unfaithful, Hosea loved her and remained faithful. Israel, said Hosea, has been unfaithful, but God loves her. Like Amos, Hosea tried to define what God wants from his people. The heart of his message can be summed up in Hosea 6:6, where he speaks for God: "For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings."

A third prophet who spoke primarily to Judah, but may have had some ministry in Israel was Micah, who also summed up religion in concise terms in Micah 6:6-8:

With what shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? “He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”

Few people in Israel took the voices of these prophets seriously and so within 25 years of Jeroboam II's death, Israel simply collapsed from within. It had no theological direction or moral foundation to keep it afloat. The Bible's evaluation of the 19 kings of Israel is that they were all evil, even those who managed to maintain some kind of stability and prosperity. The last kings tried to save Israel by forming military and political alliances, all of which were useless. Hoshea, the last king of Israel, was paying a heavy tribute to Assyria and sought help from Egypt, but Egypt could not help. The Assyrian King Shalmaneser V began a siege lasting for three years against Samaria, which ended in 721 B.C.E. Sargon II claimed to have been King of Assyria when Samaria finally fell, but he probably took over immediately after the fall. Sargon's account of the fall of Israel is as follows:

I led away as prisoners, 27,290 inhabitants and 50 chariots I collected for my royal force. I rebuilt the city and made it populous by settling here people from lands I had conquered. I set up one of my officers as their governor and imposed taxes customary to Assyrian citizenry.

It was a common practice to remove all who might lead or participate in a rebellion. Assyria went much farther than was common. Israel itself was settled and controlled by the enemy. When we refer to the “Lost Tribes of Israel,” we mean those exiled Israelites, scattered throughout the Assyrian Empire. The Israelites who remained intermarried with the foreigners. These mixed people became known as the Samaritans. The hostility between the Jews and the Samaritans, referred to in Jesus time, began following the collapse of Israel. The northern kingdom was no more and would never be restored.

The Collapse of the Southern Kingdom

When we turn to the southern kingdom of Judah, we discover a more stable environment. What is the difference? In Israel there were ten competing tribes, but in Judah there was essentially only one. This made succession much simpler and Jerusalem remained the capital of the southern kingdom. Following the split between Rehoboam and Jeroboam, Israel and Judah were in constant conflict with one another; although on occasion, they fought together against a common enemy.

In 1 and 2 Kings the 20 kings of Judah are evaluated: 7 are called good, 12 are condemned as evil, and 1 is given a mixed review. This is much better than Israel's record, where all 19 kings are condemned as evil. One of the good kings was Uzziah (767-740 B.C.E.), who ruled Judah at the same time that Jeroboam II ruled Israel. This

was a time of prosperity for Judah as it was for Israel. Uzziah extended Judah's borders conquering neighboring nations. He even managed to reopen the port of Elath to trade and so his reign of 52 years recalled the great days of Solomon. At the end of Uzziah's reign, two problems emerged. First, with his great success he grew arrogant and this led him to burning incense in the Temple, an act reserved only for the Aaronic priesthood. Second, he did not destroy the high places, where his own people continued to sacrifice and burn incense to pagan deities. For these two weaknesses, the Biblical writers say that God gave him leprosy, a conclusion that would most certainly be questioned today. At the death of Uzziah, a young man named Isaiah experienced a dramatic vision and call at the Temple to become one of Judah's greatest prophets. He would be a prophet to kings and he would describe the ideal king, which could only be fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

Ahaz ruled Judah at the time of Israel's fall to Assyria. Prior to that fall Israel and Syria tried to interest Judah in joining an alliance with them against the invading Assyrians. When Ahaz refused to join the alliance, Israel and Syria attacked him. With this threat from the north and another from Philistia and Edom in the south, Ahaz panicked, ignored the prophet Isaiah's advice, and offered to pay Tiglath-pileser of Assyria for help. In order to make payments to the Assyrians, Ahaz had to strip the Temple of its silver and gold. Following the fall of Israel and Syria, Ahaz went to Damascus to meet with the Assyrian King. He was so impressed with an Assyrian altar that he had a duplicate of it built in Jerusalem. Ahaz also revived the practice of human sacrifice (2 Kings 16:3) and was evaluated as one of Judah's worst kings.

If Ahaz had been one of Judah's worst kings, his successor Hezekiah became known as one of Judah's best kings. Hezekiah reversed all that Ahaz had done. He removed the idolatrous shrines (the high places), he broke the pillars, and he even destroyed a bronze serpent made by Moses. In his opinion the people had begun to worship the bronze serpent. In addition to these religious reforms, Hezekiah rebelled against Assyria by attacking Philistine territory, which Assyria had captured. This of course angered Sennacherib, who was the King of Assyria at the time. Sennacherib launched an attack on Judah, conquering 46 cities and taking 200,150 captives, shutting Hezekiah up like a "bird in a cage." Archaeological excavations at Lachish have confirmed heavy casualties there by unearthing a huge pit containing more than 1,500 human remains.

Hezekiah began to read the writing on the wall and agreed to pay tribute to Assyria. It was costly and could only be paid for by taking more silver and gold out of the Temple and Palace. In the end, the only thing Hezekiah had left was his throne and Jerusalem, his capital city. Sennacherib sent three Assyrian representatives to Jerusalem demanding Hezekiah's surrender in the Hebrew language, so that everyone could hear and understand. Hezekiah's officials wanted to conduct the negotiations in Aramaic, but this was not acceptable to the Assyrians, who wanted the citizens of Jerusalem to know just how desperate the situation was. In this time of great distress, Hezekiah turned to the prophet Isaiah and asked him what he should do. Isaiah assured Hezekiah that Jerusalem would be delivered and that he should not submit. During the night an angel of the Lord killed 185,000 Assyrians in their camp. Herodotus says that a plague of mice attacked the Assyrian army. It is not clear what happened in the scriptures, but some scholars think that the Assyrian camp experienced an outbreak of the bubonic plague. According to Assyrian records, Sennacherib never claimed to attack Jerusalem. What can be confirmed

is Sennacherib's return home to Nineveh, where his sons, Adrammelech and Sharezer killed him with a sword.

When Hezekiah became sick, Isaiah told him to prepare to die, for he would not recover. Hezekiah prayed and the Lord heard his prayer, giving him an additional 15 years to live. After Hezekiah's recovery, he received some ambassadors from Herodach-baladan, King of Babylon, whom he showed throughout the Temple and Palace. This angered Isaiah, who was a neutralist in foreign affairs. He opposed any alliance with any nation and warned that the temple and palace treasures would eventually be carried off to Babylon. Hezekiah had made a tragic mistake in showing these things to the Babylonians.

We cannot leave the reign of Hezekiah without mentioning Hezekiah's famous tunnel, which can still be viewed today. Hezekiah improved the city's water supply in preparation for enemy attacks. He built a tunnel running from Gihon's Spring, outside the wall, to the Pool of Siloam, inside the wall. In 1880 an inscription was found identifying this tunnel, which runs through 1,700 feet of solid rock. It is considered to be a remarkable engineering achievement for that time.

With the death of Hezekiah, Manasseh, Judah's most wicked king began a reign of 55 years, the longest of any king in Judah. Manasseh is compared in wickedness to Ahab of Israel. Some of the evil he did was as follows: He rebuilt the shrines (high places); built altars for Baal; made an Asherah; worshipped the host of heaven (astral worship); sacrificed his own son, encouraging child sacrifice; approved of soothsaying and augury; and dealt with mediums and wizards. Jewish tradition affirms that the prophet Isaiah was sawed asunder, martyred by Manasseh, and some have supposed that Hebrews 11:37 alludes to Isaiah's death. It was during Manasseh's reign, according to 2 Kings, that God became so angry that Jerusalem's fate was sealed (2 Kings 21:12-13). This does not mean that the demise of Judah was all Manasseh's fault, but that rebellion against God reached its peak under him. It must be said, however, that the Assyrian Empire also reached its peak at this time and that limited many of Judah's options. 2 Chronicles tells of a religious reform initiated by Manasseh, but it was too little too late. Reform would have to wait for Josiah, Judah's greatest king.

During Josiah's long reign, Assyrian power began to decline. Assyria had at last overreached itself. Babylon was emerging at the same time and Josiah took advantage of the transition, asserting Judah's independence. In the eighteenth year of his reign, he ordered the Temple repaired; and as workmen were repairing it, the High Priest Hilkiah found the Scroll of the Law (Deuteronomy) in a collection box or among the rubbish. Josiah immediately appointed a committee of five men, Hilkiah, Ahikam, Achbor, Shaphan, and Asaiah to seek divine direction concerning the Scroll. The five men sought advice from the prophetess Huldah, who told them to tell Josiah to put it into practice. The Scroll was read in public and all foreign idols and altars were destroyed, even those on the high places. To control the priesthood, and the reforms just made, Josiah centralized worship in Jerusalem.

In the early days of Josiah's reign the prophet Zephaniah appeared warning people that Judah could not continue very long. Zephaniah quoted God as saying, "...I will search Jerusalem with lamps, and I will punish the people who rest complacently on their

dregs, those who say in their hearts, ‘The LORD will not do good, nor will he do harm.’” (Zephaniah 1:12) It was also during Josiah’s reign that the young and unwilling prophet Jeremiah began to prophesy. Jeremiah approved of the reforms of Josiah, but Jeremiah was an active prophet right up to the fall of Jerusalem and so he had the awesome task of calling for Judah’s submission to Babylon. This message did not go over very well, not even with other prophets. The prophet Habbakuk understood that God would use the Babylonians to conquer Judah, but he was upset about it and argued with and questioned God. The answer God gave to him was, “Look at the proud! Their spirit is not right in them, but the righteous live by their faith.” This theme became the spark of the Reformation led by Martin Luther and the Evangelical Revival inspired by John Wesley.

In spite of all Josiah’s reforms, Judah was doomed. The reforms came too late and Josiah’s successors did not follow through with them. Nineveh, the capital of Assyria fell in 612 B.C.E. In order to maintain a balance of power, or to extend his own influence over Syria, the Egyptian Pharaoh, Neco, went to help Assyria make its final stand against the Babylonians at Carchemish. For some misguided reason, Josiah tried to oppose the Egyptian army at Megiddo in 609 B.C.E. and lost his life. The decisive battle between the Assyrian-Egyptian alliance and the Babylonians took place at Carchemish in 605 B.C.E., with a Babylonian victory. Jeremiah could read the handwriting on the wall. The only option Judah had left was to submit to Babylon. That was his unpopular advice to the remaining kings of Judah, but neither they nor the general population of Judah would listen to him.

The end came in two deportations. The first deportation took place after Jehoiachin had ruled Judah for only three months. According to Babylonian records, Jehoiachin surrendered to Nebuchadnezzar in 597 B.C.E. and was taken off to Babylon with all of Jerusalem’s leading citizens and its treasure. Various figures are given for this first deportation. In 2 Kings 24:14 we are told that the number deported was 10,000; only to have 2 Kings 24:16 give a new number of 8,000. In Jeremiah 52:28, the prophet said that 3,023 had been deported, but that may only be the men. It is very difficult to come up with an accurate number. What we do know is that Jehoiachin was deported and that a young prophet named Ezekiel was also taken at the same time.

The second deportation took place after the last king, Zedekiah, rebelled against Babylon by withholding tribute. Jeremiah opposed Zedekiah’s rebellion. Both He and Ezekiel saw Babylonia as an instrument of divine judgment; hence, opposing the Babylonians was futile. Nebuchadnezzar responded with a siege of Jerusalem that lasted for two years, ending in 586 B.C.E. Conditions during the siege were deplorable. By the middle of 587 B.C.E. Jerusalem was near starvation, as described in Lamentations 4:9-10. Zedekiah broke through the wall in a desperate attempt to escape, but he was quickly captured near Jericho and taken to military headquarters in Riblah, where his sons were killed before his very eyes. He was then blinded, bound, and taken to Babylon, along with 832 others (Jeremiah 52:29).

With the abolition of the monarchy, Gedaliah was appointed as a native governor under Babylonian control. Jeremiah was given the option of going to Babylon or remaining in Jerusalem. He chose to remain in Jerusalem. This should have been a time

of peace and stability for those who remained, but Ishmael, a member of the deposed royal family and a nationalist, assassinated Gedaliah in the new provincial capital of Mizpah, making things very complicated for everyone, including Jeremiah. In the wake of the assassination, the nationalists had no alternative but to flee to Egypt. They took an unwilling Jeremiah with them.

One question remains in this story. What happened to the Ark of the Covenant, which contained Moses' tablets of the Ten Commandments? Nothing is said in the Bible about the Babylonians having taken it from the Temple as it was destroyed along with the entire city of Jerusalem. The only record that we have concerning the Ark of the Covenant is given in 2 Maccabees 2:1-8, where we are told that Jeremiah hid the Ark in a cave on Mount Nebo. They intended to mark the cave, but failed to do so; hence, the Ark will remain hidden until "God gathers his people together again and shows his mercy." (2 Maccabees 2:7)

The loss of the Ark would not have worried Jeremiah too much, for he foresaw a time when the Ark would be replaced with the human heart. This he wrote in Jeremiah 31:31-33:

The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt — a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

8. WAITING FOR A NEW KING

The Exile

According to Jeremiah 25:11-12 and 29:10, the Exile would last 70 years. If one calculates the Exile from the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.E. to the completion of the Temple in 515 B.C.E., one comes up with approximately 70 years. We know however that the Exile technically began prior to the fall of Jerusalem. The larger number of persons, including King Jehoiachin and Ezekiel, were exiled from Jerusalem in 597 B.C.E. Five years later, Ezekiel got the call to prophesy and so he became the first of the Exilic Prophets. He faced two problems with those living in exile. Some believed that the situation back in Jerusalem was not so bad and that they would return soon. Others despairing of their faith, agreed with the Psalmist, who wrote: "How could we sing the LORD's song in a foreign land?" (Psalm 137:4) Ezekiel spoke to both concerns.

For those who expected a miracle similar to what happened in Hezekiah's time when the Assyrians were prevented from taking Jerusalem, Ezekiel gave no hope. He demonstrated, with a toy siege works against a clay brick or tablet with an image of Jerusalem on it, just how the end would come. Few people believed Jerusalem could fall; after all, God dwelled in the Jerusalem Temple. To counter that claim, Ezekiel had a vision in which he saw God depart from the Temple (Ezekiel 10:1-22), leaving Jerusalem vulnerable. What Jeremiah had been saying in Jerusalem, Ezekiel said in Babylon. Judah's only hope was to submit to the Babylonians. When the fall of Jerusalem finally came, Ezekiel lost his wife, the delight of his eyes (Ezekiel 24:15-27), and was told not to mourn his loss. This was to be an example to the exiles. They were not to mourn the loss of the old Jerusalem.

After the fall of Jerusalem, Ezekiel had a new message, one of hope. God would establish a new shepherd, like his servant David. In Ezekiel 34:23-24 we read about that promise: "I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. And I, the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them; I, the LORD, have spoken." Judah and Israel would be restored, resurrected, becoming one nation again. God would have no difficulty giving life to that valley of dry bones, which was a symbol of the death of the nation (Ezekiel 37). He would simply connect all those bones together, attach them with new flesh, and breathe new life into them. Jerusalem and the Temple would be rebuilt. The new Temple would be grander than the old one. In a final vision, Ezekiel saw the Spirit of God returning to a new and better Temple. Since He left by means of the East Gate, he would also return through the East Gate (Ezekiel 43). After God's return, the East Gate was to be shut; never to be opened again (Ezekiel 44:1ff). God would dwell forever with his people. Even today, the East Gate, now called the Golden Gate, is symbolically sealed shut.

Toward the end of the Exile, we encounter another exilic prophet, who wrote under the name of Isaiah. His prophecies can be read in Isaiah 40 to 55. These chapters are some of the most beautiful in the Old Testament. The message of this prophet is that God will lead a new exodus; only this time, it will be out of Babylon instead of Egypt. God's

people will be led across the desert, just as they had been previously led through the wilderness. There would be a new leader and a new covenant, initiated by the only God who exists. That God would call forth a remnant of people, the faithful, to be a Light to the nations. To make his point this prophet speaks of a new figure, the anointed king, who will represent Israel and take on her mission. He is called the “Servant of God” and described in four special passages called “The Servant Songs.” They can be found in Isaiah 42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; and 52:13—53:12.

Two of the Servant Songs are especially significant. In Isaiah 49:6 we come across what has been called the Great Commission of the Old Testament, where God says to Israel, “I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.” Then there is that beautiful passage in Isaiah 52:13—53:12, which has been called the Gospel of the Old Testament. In this passage God’s new shepherd is described. The heart of that description can be found in Isaiah 53:7, which says, “He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.” It is clear that Jesus identified with these Servant Songs and saw the fulfillment of them in his own life and death.

The Exile was a very important period of time, even though it only lasted from 586 to 538 B.C.E. It was during this brief and tragic time in their history that the Jewish people began to identify the first five books, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy as important books to read so that their disaster might not be repeated. These books would not be elevated to the status of scripture until approximately 400 B.C.E., but they, along with some of the prophetic writings, were now being read. With the loss of Temple worship, the Synagogue, as an assembly or place of meeting, was introduced for the reading of their sacred history (scripture) and prayers. The Synagogue is of course the forerunner to the Church.

The Return

In 539 B.C.E. the Persian King Cyrus conquered Babylonia at the Battle of Opis on the Tigris River. The Babylonian priest Berossus, who lived about the time of Alexander the Great, wrote: “In the 17th year of Nabonidus, Cyrus came out of Persia with a great army, and, having conquered all the rest of Asia, came hastily to Babylonia.” Babylon fell like an overripe plumb. In the first year of his reign over Babylonia, Cyrus issued a proclamation, permitting the Jews to return to their homeland, taking with them all their sacred vessels. This seemed like the fulfillment of Jeremiah 29:10. Cyrus was viewed almost as a messianic king, sent by God to deliver his people from exile (Isaiah 45:1-3). This does not mean however that everyone was ready to return to Jerusalem. People had settled down in Babylonia and were not very anxious to make the long and dangerous journey home; besides, they faced a formidable task of rebuilding a land, where agriculture had been neglected for decades. The nation’s villages and towns, including the city of Jerusalem were skeletons of what they had been. Most of the exiles never did return and Babylon had one of the largest Jewish populations in the world for centuries.

According to Ezra 2:64, the Jews who did take the four month trip back to Judah numbered 42,360. The man appointed by Cyrus to govern the group was Sheshbazzar, the son of King Jehoiachin, who died in exile. Some scholars think that Sheshbazzar is

another name for Zerubbabel, but both names are Babylonian. It could be that Sheshbazzar led the first return and Zerubbabel led the second return. At any rate, the two dominating figures in the rebuilding of the Temple are Zerubbabel and Jeshua. The altar was rebuilt first in order to assure people that God was with them in this venture and would protect them from their enemies. The foundation of the Temple was begun in 520 B.C.E. The older priests and Levites wept as they watched, remembering the glory of the old Temple. The laying of the foundation was celebrated with music and praise and so they wept and praised God at the same time.

The Samaritans from the Northern Kingdom came to offer assistance in the rebuilding of the Temple, but their help was turned down. Foreigners had intermarried with the Jews of the Northern Kingdom and so they were not considered pure enough to work on the Jerusalem Temple. Having been rejected, the Samaritans went on to build their own Temple on Mount Gerizim, overlooking Shechem. In addition to the developing hostility between the Jews and Samaritans, the returned exiles also had to contend with local people who had not been exiled. Some of them were suspicious and opposed the rebuilding efforts. Then there was the difficult economic situation with food and clothing in short supply. It was easier for the people to concentrate on rebuilding their own homes and making a living than to focus on rebuilding the Temple. Into this situation stepped Haggai and Zechariah, who called the people to get their priorities straight. Their economic woes, proclaimed these prophets, were related to their misplaced priorities. If they would rebuild the Temple, God would bless them. For once the people listened to their prophets and proceeded to work on the Temple. Haggai and Zechariah prophesied in 520 B.C.E. and by 515 B.C.E., the Temple was finished. All this took place when Darius I ruled Persia. Darius supported and even funded some of the rebuilding efforts.

The people of Judah still lived in danger of being absorbed into the non-Jewish population. Into this situation stepped two men, Nehemiah and Ezra. Both had risen to high positions in the Persian civil service and were given permission to return to Jerusalem with new exiles. Not everyone agrees with which one returned first. Tradition put Ezra (458 B.C.E.) in Jerusalem before Nehemiah (445 B.C.E.), but more recent scholarship puts Nehemiah (445 B.C.E.) in Jerusalem before Ezra (397 B.C.E.). Good reasons are given for both conclusions. More important than the dates of their return are the reasons for their return.

The problems in Jerusalem were twofold. The walls of Jerusalem needed to be rebuilt and the faith of the Jewish people needed to be strengthened. The work of rebuilding the walls fell to Nehemiah. He accomplished the task in 52 days in the face of stiff opposition. Ezra's task was far more difficult. He was an expert in the Law of Moses and along with other scholars he had spent the exilic years studying and copying the Law, which had not yet been given the status of Scripture. Ezra encouraged the people to obey the Law. He approached his task by arranging for the Law to be read to all the people, after which he initiated specific reforms to bring Judah into line with the Law of Moses. Since many of the people had intermarried with pagans, Ezra demanded that they divorce their pagan wives. Ezra believed that the Jewish faith had been corrupted by pagan idolatry and he did not want to see that happen again. Ezra was responsible for laying the foundation of modern Judaism, a community based on and shaped by the Law of Moses. By 400 B.C.E. the Torah (Law) or the Pentateuch (5 books), was established as Scripture.

The Wait

Although we have no Scriptures to cover the next 400 years, we do have the Apocrypha and secular history to fill in this huge gap. It is important to understand what happened. There arose an almost fanatical desire to keep the Law; after all, the Exile had been viewed as divine judgment upon the people for disobeying the Law. They had to be careful not to let that happen again. This led to a special class of experts in the Law, called the Scribes. Ezra had been one of those Scribes. The Law was eventually elevated to the status of Scripture. Events also took place in this period that led to an expectation of a new Jewish King. When the people returned from Exile there was great hope that the Davidic Kingdom would be restored, but it was not. Israel became a minor nation as two new super powers emerged—Greece and Rome. Each one set out to dominate the world, including Palestine.

The first super power was led by Alexander the Great, who challenged the Persian Empire in 334 B.C.E. and conquered Palestine in 332 B.C.E. Alexander desired a world united by Greek culture and language, which became known as Hellenization. This policy was also pursued after Alexander's death in 323 B.C.E. by his generals, two of whom created dynasties—the Ptolemies in Egypt and the Seleucids in Syria and Mesopotamia. Ptolemy captured Jerusalem in 320 B.C.E. and the Seleucids gained control of Palestine in 198 B.C.E. The Ptolemies were sensitive to Jewish religion, but the Seleucids tried to undermine it. The most difficult time came under the reign of the Seleucid Antiochus IV (195-164 B.C.E.), whose title "Epiphanes" means "God made manifest." Antiochus ruled from 175 to 164 B.C.E., pursuing a radical policy of Hellenization. This angered most Jews because Antiochus IV seemed intent on eliminating Judaism itself. He did this first by ordering the destruction of all copies of the Torah (their Scriptures) and then by requiring offerings to Zeus, one of the Greek gods. A statue of Zeus was placed in the Temple and a pig was sacrificed to him there. This was the final insult to Jewish sensitivities.

The first major opposition came from Mattathias and his five sons—Judas, Jonathan, Simon, John, and Eleazar. Mattathias came from a priestly family in the small village of Modein. A Greek altar had been set up there and Mattathias refused to pay any attention to it, and killed Antiochus's representative in Modein. This began a twenty-four year revolution, known as the Maccabean Revolt. Judas Maccabeus won independence for Judah and liberated Jerusalem in 164 B.C.E. His victory has been memorialized in the Festival of Dedication now called Hanukkah (John 10:22). The liberation of Jerusalem was not to last for long. The Hasmonean dynasty (134-63 B.C.E.), established by Mattathias' family, turned into an aristocratic, Hellenistic regime that resembled the Seleucids. Jews who had supported Mattathias and his sons began to oppose the new Hasmonean dynasty. The most popular of the Hasmoneans was Simon's son John Hyrcanus I, who became the High Priest when his father was murdered. John Hyrcanus I was a strong leader and was frequently compared to King David. He forced the Idumeans to convert to Judaism, imposed Jewish ritual observance on them, and destroyed the Samaritan Temple on Mount Gerizim. The dynasty finally ended in 63 B.C.E. as the second super power, Rome, began its domination of Palestine.

The Roman general, Gaius Pompey, conquered Jerusalem in 63 B.C.E. in a three-month siege of the temple area, in which he not only murdered priests performing their duties, but he dared to enter into the Holy of Holies itself. This angered the Jews and fed on their hope for a new Jewish King, like David, to deliver them from the Romans. In the meantime they had to accept the kings whom Rome permitted. Hasmonean priest-kings were allowed to rule under the protection of Rome until 37 B.C.E., when Herod the Great (37-4 B.C.E.) began his long reign in Judea. The Roman Senate appointed Herod King of the Jews in 40 B.C.E., but Herod was not able to conquer Judea until 37 B.C.E. Herod was an Idumean, whom the Jewish people hated. He was more Hellenistic than Jewish, but he survived for such a long time because he was extremely loyal to Rome. In an attempt to pacify the Jews Herod began a project to rebuild and expand the Temple in 20 B.C.E. The Temple platform was doubled in size. The surrounding valleys had to be filled in and retaining walls had to be built to accomplish this task. One of those retaining walls can still be viewed in Jerusalem today—the Western (or Wailing) Wall. Although the Temple was dedicated around 30 C.E., it was not finished until 63 C.E. Herod was still King when it was announced that a new Jewish King would be born in Bethlehem. Herod reacted to the news by having all the male children under two in Bethlehem slaughtered.

Three Jewish groups emerged in the time period between the Exile and the beginning of the New Testament. The **Sadducees** made up the first group. They were the aristocrats, closely related to the Temple. The Greek world made its greatest impact on them; because of their position, they tried to maintain the status quo. Even though they were few in number, their influence exceeded their numbers. They accepted only the Torah, and since it had nothing to say about the resurrection of the dead, they rejected this doctrine, preferring to believe that justice had to be gained in this world. The second group consisted of the **Pharisees**, who were connected to the synagogue. They recognized that the world had changed radically since the days of Moses; so they tried to reinterpret the Law for contemporary times. They contributed commentaries to the Torah and tried to make faith relevant. They affirmed a belief in angels and in the resurrection of the dead, and gave birth to modern Judaism. The last group, were the **Essenes**. They gave up on Judaism and retreated to places like Qumran, where they devoted themselves to personal purity and preparation for the final conflict between the “Sons of Light and the Sons of Darkness.” They practiced an apocalyptic faith, looking back to the “Teacher of Righteousness” and forward to the coming of two or three Messiahs. Some scholars suggest that John the Baptist and Jesus might have been Essenes. This cannot be proven, but it must be admitted that both John and Jesus were apocalyptic preachers. If we divorce them from their apocalypticism, then we make it difficult to understand their message, the message of the New Testament. The Jews waited eagerly for that time when God would suddenly appear and establish His Kingdom, liberating Israel and putting an end to foreign domination. The person for whom they waited was given a variety of titles, such as Elijah, the Son of David, the Son of Man, and the Messiah. In the midst of these expectations John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness crying, “Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.” (Mark 1:3) John only claimed to be the forerunner of the new King, for whom he was calling people to get ready. “The time is fulfilled,” proclaimed Jesus, “and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.” (Mark 1:15) The wait was over.

THE NEW COVENANT

Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Matthew 6:48

Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

Luke 6:36

Instead, as he who called you is holy,
Be holy yourselves in all your conduct; for it is written,
“You shall be holy, for I am holy.”

I Peter 1:15-16

9. THE CHRISTIAN SCRIPTURES

The Early Sources

We must begin our study of the New Testament with the development of the Christian Scriptures, those 27 books we call the New Testament. It may be surprising to discover that the early Christians had no New Testament and that what became the New Testament was not written in the language of Jesus. The original language of Jesus was Aramaic, but Jesus wrote nothing down. In fact, nothing significant was written down for nearly 30 years after his death; and when something was written down, it was written neither in Aramaic, nor classical Greek, but in the colloquial or common Greek of the day. This means that ordinary people would have been able to read it.

What then were the Scriptures for the early Christians? The earliest Scriptures were the Old Testament (2 Timothy 3:15-17); the sayings of Jesus (Acts 20:35; 1 Corinthians 7:10, 12; 9:14; and 1 Timothy 5:18); oral traditions, and apostolic interpretations. All of the above were used primarily for worship and instruction (Colossians 4:16; 1 Thessalonians 5:27; and Revelation 1:3) and eventually became the New Testament. That, however, took a couple of centuries.

Unlike the books of the Old Testament, which were written over centuries, the books of the New Testament were written in less than 100 years. Although we have no original manuscripts, we do have approximately 5,000 Greek copies. The most important ones of course are the older ones, and about 300 of them date back between the second and eighth centuries. This is unique. When we compare this to the ancient classical authors, we discover only a few of their manuscripts, and rarely do they date back beyond the Middle Ages. This means that the works of these ancient classical authors are separated from their originals by more than 1,000 years. This is not true of the New Testament authors.

The Writers of the New Testament

Like the Old Testament, the New Testament is a library, which contains essentially four different kinds of literature. They are as follows:

The Gospel Writers

The word *Gospel* comes from an Anglo-Saxon word which means “Good Story” or “Good News.” This word in turn came from the Latin *Evangelium* and the Greek *Evangelion*. This Greek word appears in Mark 1:1, and represents a new literary form. The Gospel writers knew that they were not writing fiction, biography, or history. They were writing sacred history. They had a purpose, which was consistent with the name of this new kind of literature. The purpose was to present the Good News in order to convert unbelievers and build up believers in the faith. The Gospel Writers proclaimed, interpreted facts, and called for a decision.

There are of course some secondary and underlying purposes in the Gospels. They were written to instruct converts, discipline members, reject false teachings, and enhance early Christian worship. What was not necessary was not included; hence, the Gospels

were not concerned about Jesus' early life and chronology. They do not tell the whole story of Jesus from birth to death. They are four testimonies written that people might believe in Jesus. Each one has a different purpose.

While there are four Gospels with four different purposes, there is still only one Gospel, the Good News of Jesus Christ. All four accounts of this one Gospel have a unifying purpose. That purpose is best described in John 20:31, where the Gospel Writer concludes: "But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name." It might help to understand these Gospel Writers better by making a few brief comments about each one of them.

Matthew. The purpose of the writer of the Gospel of Matthew was to give careful proof to Jewish readers that Jesus fulfilled the words of the Old Testament prophets and is indeed the Messiah. Because of this connection to Judaism and its ancient Scriptures, Matthew was placed first in the New Testament. It also contained important teachings of Jesus for new believers and portrays Jesus as the New Moses.

Mark. The first Gospel written was the Gospel of Mark. The purpose of this author was to help those who thought the Messiah would be a political leader. Mark helps them to understand that Jesus came as a crucified Savior, who chose the path of humble service and suffering. Only in his second coming will he appear as the King of Glory.

Luke. In the Gospel of Luke Jesus is carefully presented to the Hellenistic (Greek) world as a figure in history. The Gospel Writer rejects any notion that he was simply a mythical figure. Jesus is both an ideal human being and the Son of God. Since this Gospel Writer made an attempt to present the story of Jesus in chronological order, his book is the most historical of the four Gospels.

John. Of all the Gospel Writers, John is the most theological. He attempted to show how Jesus was sent by God to be the Savior of the world. Not only is his Gospel more theological than the others, it is also more sermoniac. Sometimes it is difficult to tell the difference between the words of Jesus and the author's own interpretation.

With which Gospel should we start? Mark is shorter and to the point, but Matthew contains more of Jesus' teachings. Luke gives a better chronology and John is more theological. All have their own agenda, but all four Gospels focus on the Good News that Jesus is the Messiah and that God has raised him up from the dead.

The Historical Writer

One of the Gospel Writers, Luke, wrote a second volume, *The Book of Acts*, to tell the story of the young Church that was given birth on the Day of Pentecost. Luke was a doctor who traveled with Paul and observed the spread of Christianity first-hand. He went about his writing in a careful and methodical manner. *The Book of Acts*, summarized in Acts 1:8, shows how Christianity spread from Jerusalem throughout Judea and Samaria, into Asia Minor and Greece, and finally all the way to Rome, the center of the known world. Since *The Book of Acts* ends before the deaths of Peter and Paul, some think that there might have been a third volume, but no third volume has ever been found.

The Letter Writers

Although the Gospels are by far the most important writings of the New Testament, they were not written first. Most of Paul's letters to the churches were written before Mark wrote the first Gospel. The letters written to those early churches fall into two categories, those written by Paul and those written by others. The latter are known as the Catholic or General Letters. Paul's letters can further be divided into those letters written to churches, to individuals, and from prison. Tradition has attributed 13 letters to Paul and 8 letters to other authors, James, Peter, John, Jude, and some unknown individuals.

Where did this practice of letter-writing begin? The Romans were great letter-writers. They wrote personal, business, political, and social letters. Paul took over this practice of letter-writing, filling it with Christian content, in order to encourage the churches and deal with some of their theological and moral challenges and problems. He encouraged the churches to circulate and read his letters in worship. Eventually they were highly regarded. We still find them relevant today, even if we do not agree with all of Paul's advice. His letters were written to particular churches and individuals to deal with specific needs. They were not written as Scripture, even though the Church finally elevated them to that high status.

The Apocalyptic Writer

Apocalyptic literature was discussed briefly in chapter two of my *Survey of the Old Testament* entitled, *The Jewish Scriptures*. We first encountered it in that material which refers to the disclosure of God's will and intent for the future. While elements of this literature appear in the Gospels, mainly in some of the teachings of Jesus, who was an apocalyptic preacher, the only truly apocalyptic book in the New Testament is *The Book of Revelation*. The writer was a man named John. His entire book consists of visions and messages to encourage churches that were suffering under the persecution of the Roman Empire.

It would have been dangerous to write clearly so that everyone could understand; therefore, John used highly symbolic language, which would have been understood by his Christian readers, but not by their pagan persecutors. The only way that we can understand all this symbolic language is to familiarize ourselves with the sacred history of the Jewish people, which is so well developed for us in the Old Testament. Even then we must be careful not to misinterpret John's visions. He did not work out a precise timetable for the end of the world. What he did do was to assure his readers that Christ would return to judge the world, eliminate evil, and establish the Kingdom of God. Since no one knew when all these climatic events would take place, everyone should be ready at all times.

The Purposes of the Christian Scriptures

The writers of the New Testament did not get together to publish a New Testament in order to replace the Old Testament. Jesus wrote nothing down; neither did he tell anyone else to write anything down. His Great Commission to his followers was to proclaim the Good News throughout the whole world and to invite all people to become his disciples. As Jesus' disciples began to spread that Good News throughout the world, it soon became

clear to them that something needed to be written down. If the story was not written down, it could not be accurately told to future generations.

The four Gospels represent four different attempts to define the Good News of Jesus' life, work, suffering, death, and resurrection. Although no attempt was made to make everything consistent, some of the Gospel Writers used similar sources and may have even used material from each other. The writers of Matthew and Luke, for example, used material from Mark, from each other, and from other sources as well. The first three Gospels are called the synoptic Gospels. The word *Synoptic* means, "seeing together." These three Gospels take a similar, but not precise, approach to the Good News. John was the last Gospel written and he could have used the other three. Because John had a different purpose, he wrote a very different account of the same Good News.

None of the writers were all that concerned with giving a chronological account of the life of Jesus. The purpose of every Gospel was to spread the Good News about the death of Jesus and how God raised him from the dead. Through his death and resurrection forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with God are possible. The Gospel writers all knew the Good News needed a context and so they all gave one. When all four Gospels are studied, the following eight parts of Jesus' life can be known:

1. The Birth and Childhood (4 B.C.E.)
2. The Preparation for Public Ministry (29 C.E.)
3. The Beginning of Ministry
4. The Galilean Ministry
5. The Judean and Perea Ministry
6. The Journey to Jerusalem
7. The Last Week (33 C.E.)
 - a. Death
 - b. Resurrection
8. The Resurrection Appearances

Spreading the Good News was the primary reason why the Scriptures needed to be written down, but a secondary reason produced the first written documents of the New Testament—the Letters. While the first generation of Jesus' disciples was still alive, early Christians could always obtain answers about faith and morality from those who had been with Jesus. As Jesus' disciples and apostles grew older, it was evident that the Gospel needed to be written down for future generations. The letters, however, were written to congregations and people who needed answers to immediate questions. What were Christians to believe and how were Christians to behave? These questions were often answered in person, or by calling a special meeting. The first major conference is described in Acts 15 to decide whether Christians had to become Jews before they could become Christians. As the Church grew, it was more practical to write letters; hence, Paul and others wrote letters to those early congregations telling them what to believe and how to practice their new faith in Jesus.

There were many threats to the faith; hence, there was a great need to defend it. Judaism was hostile to the rise of Christianity and tried to stop it. The Apostle Paul, prior to his conversion, was part of that movement. Judaism did not look kindly on a new

religion that was dividing it and forming churches from its people. Even those Jews who willingly converted to Christianity were confused as to what the relationship should be between their Jewish traditions and their new faith in Christ. The letter to the Hebrews was an attempt to define that relationship. As Christianity moved beyond Judaism into the Greek world, it faced another problem. People tended to mix Christianity with Greek philosophy and religious cults. Paul's letters to Colossians and Galatians were written to deal with some of these problems. Finally, there were the Roman authorities who, looked upon any new religion as a challenge to patriotism, especially if that religion came out of Judea, a known trouble spot. Luke tried to remove Roman suspicions by writing the Book of Acts to a Roman official named Theophilus. Paul, who was proud of his Roman citizenship, warned the new Church in his letter to the Romans not to worship the Emperor, but to pray for him.

Unlike the Jewish Scriptures, which remember a tragic past so that it will not be repeated, the Christian Scriptures challenge the Church to get ready for a future that is coming, ready or not. The Book of Revelation tells the Church about the coming conflict with Rome and about the Kingdom that God will finally establish. The Christian Scriptures, which we call the New Testament, tell us the direction that history is going to take.

10. THE NEW KING ARRIVES

Into a Roman World

Rome ruled the lands around the Mediterranean Sea and the island of Britain. The armies of the Roman Empire were the most powerful in the world, dominating every nation with whom they came into contact, including Judea. The positive aspects of Roman domination were the well-built Roman roads, the massive structure of Roman law and justice, and the peace and stability that were enjoyed throughout the Roman Empire. The language spoken by most people was Greek, but many Jews also spoke Hebrew and Aramaic. Some may have spoken all three languages.

Under the rule of Gaius Octavius, known as Augustus Caesar (27 B.C.E. to 14 C.E.), a nephew of Julius Caesar, conquered people were allowed to rule themselves. The Jews ruled themselves by local courts and by the Sanhedrin, a council of Jewish leaders, which included both Sadducees and Pharisees and was presided over by the High Priest. Herod the Great was King at the time, but over him was a Roman Governor, who lived in Caesarea. Herod was called the Great because he built many cities and palaces. He also remodeled and expanded the Temple in Jerusalem making it much larger and more beautiful than ever. The Western Wall, Judaism's most holy site, is one of the outer retaining walls, which supported the expanded Temple Mount. Herod was also a cruel man who killed his own wife and children when he thought they threatened his position as King. When Herod died, violence broke out in Judea and Galilee. Thousands were killed. The Roman army stepped in and put an end to the violence, restoring peace under three Roman governors. When Pontius Pilate became the governor of Judea, more violence erupted, which resulted in more executions.

Many of the Jews longed for a time of freedom from foreign rule. Different religious and political groups argued about how that freedom might be realized. The Zealots wanted to fight against Rome and establish an independent Jewish kingdom as Judas Maccabeus had done against Antiochus IV Epiphanes. Their approach was not very practical, for the Promised Land was but a small province in the huge Roman Empire. There were 4,000,000 Jews in the world, but only 700,000 lived in Judea, Galilee, and Perea, three areas divided by Samaria. The Sadducees, who controlled the priesthood, sought the way of accommodation with Rome, so that they could keep their own political power. While they were few in number, they were highly educated and wealthy. The Pharisees, who numbered about 6,000, sought to keep God's law hoping that would result in the coming of a new King (Messiah), who would bring freedom from Roman domination. One group, the Essenes, which numbered about 4,000, devoted themselves to an ascetic life, forming colonies in the various towns of Judea. The wilderness near Engedi was a favorite place. One can visit one of their colonies today at Qumran, on the shores of the Dead Sea.

The Birth of the New King

Two of the four Gospels, Matthew and Luke, begin with stories of the birth of Jesus, the long-awaited King. The Hebrew word for King is "Messiah" and the Greek word is

“Christ.” Beginning with Jesus’ genealogies, Matthew and Luke trace his royal blood back through King David. Because Matthew and Luke have different purposes, their genealogies are structured differently; but in the end, they say the same thing. The new King (Messiah or Christ) is related to King David. God’s promise to Israel was to maintain the Davidic dynasty.

In order to emphasize Jesus’ royalty, Matthew and Luke trace his birth back to some of the prophetic longings for a King. Angels appear to Joseph and Mary to inform them that the long-awaited King is to be their son. Since Joseph and Mary have not yet engaged in sexual relationships, Mary is told that the Holy Spirit will be the father (Matthew 1:23 and Luke 1:34). In other words, even though she was still a virgin, she would become pregnant and give birth. Joseph needed to know this as well, lest he cast her aside for being unfaithful. This raises another question. If Joseph is not the “biological” father, why trace Jesus’ ancestry back to David? One answer is that Joseph was Jesus’ “legal” father. Since there are differences in the genealogies, another answer might be that Luke was tracing the genealogy through Mary’s side. The genealogy in the Gospel of Luke begins with an interesting phrase: “He was the son (as was thought) of Joseph....” (Luke 3:23) Again, the main point of the genealogies is that Jesus is a descendant of David. Both Mary and Joseph were descendants of David. It was important, however, for the King to have a “legal” as well as a “biological” lineage.

History has been divided by the birth of Jesus into B.C., which means “before Christ” and A.D., which refers to the Latin “anno domini,” which means “in the year of our Lord.” Instead of B.C., and A.D. it is common to use B.C.E., which means “before the common era,” and C.E., which means “the common era.” It was the Roman abbot and theologian-mathematician, Dionysius Exiguus, who tried to identify the precise day of Jesus’ birth. He did this in approximately 525 C.E. Concluding that Jesus was born on December 25, 753 years after the founding of Rome he named his birth date as December 25, 1 C.E. Later scholars discovered that Dionysius made an error in his calculations on the death of Herod the Great and concluded that Jesus had to be born at the end of 5 B.C.E. The December 25th date cannot be confirmed.

Joseph and Mary lived in Nazareth. According to the prophet Micah, the new King was to be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). Bethlehem was significant because it was the birthplace of King David. What took Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem was a census for the purpose of taxation. While it is difficult to confirm a census when Quirinius was governor of Syria-Cilicia at the time of Jesus’ birth, a census was indeed taken, perhaps in two stages. The enrollment stage would have begun during Jesus’ birth, but that would have taken place when Saturninius was governor. The assessment stage, when the taxes would have been declared, would have taken place when Quirinius was governor. At any rate, the couple made their way to Bethlehem to be counted. Mary was ready to deliver her baby. Since there was no room in the Inn, she gave birth in a simple cave, beneath the Inn, where animals would have been stabled. The appearance of the shepherds symbolizes Jesus’ humanity and the appearance of the angels symbolizes his divinity. In Luke 2:11, Jesus is given three titles: Savior, Christ (Messiah), and LORD. These titles claim that he is more than the long-awaited King. He will save all people and rule over all nations. While Rome might bring political peace, he will bring inner peace. He is indeed the Prince of Peace.

The Presentation of the New King

Two rituals were observed, one by Mary (The Ceremony of Purification) and one by Joseph (The Redemption of the Firstborn). The first one is described in Leviticus 12:2ff and the second in Exodus 13:2, 12-13. The mother was considered unclean for a period of seven days, after which a male child would be circumcised. A mother would not have been considered purified for another 33 days. Since Jesus was a firstborn child, the family would also have to redeem him. Firstborn children were considered holy, belonging to God. They had to be redeemed for five shekels. The offering of a pair of turtledoves and two young pigeons symbolized the poverty of Mary and Joseph. The proper sacrifice would have been a one-year-old ram. None of this sounds like the presentation of a King, but two people present at the Temple that day recognized what was happening.

The first was Simeon. Nothing is known about Simeon. Because he held the baby Jesus in his arms and blessed the holy family, some have suggested that he might have been a priest on duty in the Temple. The hymn of Simeon, which can be found in Luke 2:29-32, has become known as the *Nunc Dimittis*. These words are taken from the first words of the passage as it has been recorded in the Latin Vulgate and they mean: “you are dismissing...” Simeon had been dreaming of seeing the new King about whom the prophet Isaiah had been speaking and now that he had seen him and held him in his arms, he could be dismissed in peace.

The other person present that day was Anna. Since a woman could not be a priest, she might have been a prophetess like Miriam (Exodus 15:20), Deborah (Judges 4:4), and Huldah (2 Kings 22:14). In the New Testament we have another example of prophetess in the daughters of Philip (Acts 21:9). Anna’s name means “grace,” and is Hannah in the Old Testament. She praised God for Jesus as Hannah praised God for Samuel (1 Samuel 2:1-10). All we know about Anna is that she had been married and that she was 84 years old at the time of Jesus’ birth. She seems to have been a widow for many years and spent all of her time around the Temple. She may have been allowed to live in one of the many rooms in the Temple area. Like Simeon, she spoke about the newborn baby of Mary to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. Led by the Spirit, Simeon and Anna recognize Jesus as the universal Savior, Christ (Messiah), and LORD. They also perceive his impending suffering and death.

International Recognition of the New King

Why Mary and Joseph did not return home to Nazareth is unknown. All that we know is that they remained in Bethlehem for approximately two years. During this time wise men from the East, discerned the coming of a Jewish King in the movement of the stars. The wise men were a learned class in Persia, who were advisers to the ruler. Daniel is described as an adviser to Cyrus, nearly 500 years before Jesus was born. Although the author of the Gospel of Matthew may have remembered the promise of the star of Jacob in Numbers 24:17, he makes no reference to the star as a fulfillment of Scripture. Many have tried to explain the star. If one is looking for a natural explanation, one might conclude that it was the conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn, which took place around 7 B.C.E. This would not explain how the star led them to Bethlehem, but then the wise men

gained this information from Herod the Great, who consulted his chief priests and scribes.

We do not know how many wise men followed the star. Tradition tells us that there were three, the same number as the gifts they brought. The gifts pointed to the royal position attributed to Jesus, who was now approaching two years of age. Gold was for a King, frankincense for God, and myrrh for mortal human beings. The appearance of the wise men gave international recognition to Jesus' royal status. It was enough to frighten Herod, who immediately tried to eliminate the child as he had eliminated his own sons. The killing of the children under the age of two was completely within character for Herod. While the number of children killed was small, 20 to 30, the killing of the children was highly symbolic. Herod was trying to put down any and every challenge to his power as king.

Prior to the killing of the children, Mary and Joseph were warned by an angel in a dream to flee to Egypt, where they would find refuge until the death of Herod the Great. After Herod the Great died, his three sons divided Palestine up into three parts. Archelaus ruled Judea, Samaria, and Idumaea; Antipas ruled Galilee and Perea; and Philip ruled Traconitis, the territory North and East of Galilee. When Mary and Joseph returned, they were advised in another dream to settle in Nazareth, which would fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah that the new King would be a *Nazarene*. While it is difficult to find the word *Nazarene* in Isaiah 11:1, we do find a Hebrew word in this verse that sounds like the Aramaic word for *Nazareth*. The word is *Netzer*, which means, "sprout" or "shoot." This term had become a common symbol for the restoration of the Davidic monarchy, which had international recognition. The prophets did indeed foretell the coming forth of a shoot (*Netzer*) from the stump of Jesse, who was David's father.

The Anointing of the New King

Two stories of Jesus might be grouped under the anointing of the New King. The first is the account of him as a boy in the Temple. At about 12 years of age he accompanied his parents to celebrate Passover, one of the three major feasts that were to be celebrated in Jerusalem. The other two feasts were Pentecost and Succoth (Tabernacles or Booths). At the age of 12 Jesus became a "son of the Law" and was expected to fulfill his religious obligations as an adult. The group that made its way to Jerusalem would have been large, and it would have been normal for parents to not know where their children were. The city of Jerusalem would have been alive with excitement as it grew from 25,000 to nearly 100,000 in population during Passover. When Mary and Joseph left the city, they did not notice Jesus' absence until the end of the first day. The second day would have been spent returning to Jerusalem, and the third day would have been spent looking for Jesus. Their surprise in finding him sounds strange. The birth stories indicated that they knew who Jesus was, but this story seems to indicate that they might not have known. When Jesus answered their questions, he indicated that they should have known. Where else but in his "father's house" would he be? Mary and Joseph gave him a mild rebuke, after which, the family returned to Nazareth, where he increased in wisdom and in years and in divine and human favor (Luke 2:52). The same thing was said about Samuel (1 Samuel 2:26).

We do not hear of Jesus again until his baptism by John. The precise date cannot be determined, but since Jesus would have been around 30 years of age (Luke 3:23), one might say that John baptized Jesus early in 27 C.E. Tradition names January 6th as the date, but that cannot be confirmed. John's parents were Zechariah and Elizabeth, descendants of Aaron (Tribe of Levi), who lived somewhere in the hills of Judea. Since Elizabeth was a cousin to Mary, there would have been a link in her ancestry to the Tribe of Judah. Not only were John and Jesus related; but, they were very close in age. John was born about six months before Jesus. They probably knew each other but nothing is said about that. John suddenly appears on the scene warning everyone that the Kingdom of God is at hand and that everyone should repent and get ready for it. John was baptizing people in the Jordan River, just above the Dead Sea. The Essenes, who lived in the Qumran Community where the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered in 1947, may have influenced him. Whether John ever lived in that community is not known. Malachi 4:5, says that the prophet Elijah was to appear before the day of the Lord would come. Although John denied being Elijah, he certainly fulfilled the role with the spirit and power of Elijah. Even the clothing he wore was reminiscent of Elijah's. When Jesus came to John to be baptized, John immediately recognized him as the long-awaited King.

If John's baptism was a baptism of repentance, why did Jesus submit to baptism? This question was asked in the early Church as well as in the contemporary Church. Baptism had been used primarily as a symbol of cleansing for Gentile converts and for Jews entering the Essene community at Qumran. It was not considered necessary for the average Jew; yet, even the Pharisees and Sadducees responded to John. Because of the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and Sadducees, one might be able to understand their submission to baptism, but why did Jesus submit? Two answers might be offered: (1) Jesus was identifying with human sinfulness, and (2) baptism became a symbol of Jesus' ministry to overcome that sinfulness. It was Jesus' ordination into the ministry of proclaiming and establishing the Kingdom of God. While John could only baptize with water, Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit. With his baptism, Jesus began his messianic or kingly rule. Jesus' baptism was symbolized with the descent of a dove and the words of God, saying, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." (Luke 3:22) Even the place where Jesus was baptized has great significance. It was in the lower Jordan River, near the very spot, where Joshua led the children of Israel into Canaan. John the Baptist can be compared to Moses, who only gained a glimpse of the Promised Land; Jesus can be compared with Joshua, who crossed through the waters leading his people into it. It was no accident that the Hebrew name for Jesus was Joshua.

The Temptations of the New King

Full of the Holy Spirit, Jesus went into the Wilderness, where he was tempted for 40 days. The 40 days can be compared to other special events in Jewish history, such as the Flood in Genesis 7:4, Moses on Mount Sinai in Exodus 24:18, Elijah's journey in 1 Kings 19:8, and Jonah's prediction of judgment on Nineveh in Jonah 3:4. The temptation is not to be thought of as happening only within the specific period of 40 days, but must be viewed as something that continued throughout his entire ministry. The big issue for Jesus was, "Should I use secular or divine methods to usher in the Kingdom of God? His temptation had to do with how he, as the new King, would act in the economic, political,

and religious worlds. The Gospels of Matthew and Luke differ in the order in which they present the three temptations, but they do not differ significantly in their content.

The first temptation was economic. Was Jesus to gain disciples, or citizens for the Kingdom, by performing the economic miracle, to provide everyone with bread? Although he later proved he could do it by feeding the 5,000, Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 8:3 to declare that God's Word was more vital to life than bread. He refused to use any economic miracle to gain followers for the Kingdom of God.

The Devil's second temptation (third in the Gospel of Matthew) was for Jesus to bow down and worship him. By doing this Jesus would be assured of political power and could control the whole world. Quoting Deuteronomy 6:13, Jesus committed himself to serving and worshipping God alone. The real issue was, "Does the *End* justify the *Means*?" Jesus' answer was, "No!" The *Means* only corrupts the *End*. One can compare the *Means* to a river flowing into a lake. If there is poison in the river, it will find its way into the lake. Jesus chose the Divine, rather than the Secular *Means* to establish the Kingdom of God.

In the third temptation the Devil quoted Psalm 91:11-12 to encourage Jesus to perform a sign that he was the New King, the Messiah. He was challenged to jump off the pinnacle of the Temple. According to Scripture, God would protect His anointed one from injury. The pinnacle of the Temple was either located at the corner where Solomon's porch and Royal porch met, 450 feet above the Kidron Valley, or at the place where the priest blew the trumpet at the first light of dawn to announce the time for the morning sacrifice. In either case, a large crowd could see the pinnacle of the Temple. It would be the perfect place to offer a sign of one's religious power, but Jesus, quoting from Deuteronomy 6:16, insisted that signs would not be given to gain followers for the Kingdom of God.

When the Devil finally left, it would only be until he had another opportunity. Temptation is never finished, neither for Jesus nor for us. As one draws closer to God, the temptations increase in their power. That angels ministered to Jesus during his temptations was a sign of God's continuing favor and support. The new King is worthy of reigning.

11. THE MESSAGE AND PERSON OF THE NEW KING

It is impossible to describe the events in the life of Jesus in the order in which they occurred. Even if we could do that, it would not be all that important. What is important is the message and person of Jesus as the new King. Before turning to his message and person, it may help to sketch out a very brief outline of his life.

Following his baptism, Jesus enjoyed a brief ministry in Judea, where he captured the imagination and following of some of the disciples of John the Baptist. The longest period in Jesus' ministry took place in Galilee, where he announced his message and revealed something of his person. It is difficult to determine how long he ministered in Galilee. The Gospel of John notes three, possibly four, trips to Jerusalem to observe Passover (John 2:13; 5:1; 6:4; and 13:1). On the basis of these references to the Passover, it has been determined that Jesus' ministry lasted approximately three years. At the end of this time, Jesus went to Jerusalem for the last time, ministering as he went, first in Perea and then in Jericho and other villages along the way. The Gospels close with the last week, which includes the cleansing of the Temple, the Last Supper, the Trial, the Crucifixion, and finally the Resurrection. The importance of the last week can be seen in how Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John dedicate nearly one-third of their Gospels to describe and interpret the final events of Jesus' life.

The Message

According to the Gospel of Mark, Jesus waited until John the Baptist was arrested before he began preaching the Good News of the Kingdom of God. In Mark 1:15 we see the heart of Jesus' message:

The time is fulfilled,
and the kingdom of God has come near;
repent, and believe in the good news.

Everything else that can be said about Jesus' message is nothing but commentary on this initial proclamation. This brief statement was and is still today his message to the world.

The message of course cannot be separated from the messenger. When Jesus preached at the Synagogue in Nazareth, he quoted portions of Isaiah 58:6 and 61:1-2. According to Luke 4:18-19, he read:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

After he finished reading, he sat down and taught them, saying, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." (Luke 4:21) While Isaiah was referring to the liberation of the Jews from Babylonian captivity, Jesus taught that he was about to liberate *all* people

from the captivity of sin. This means that Jesus was claiming to be the New King (the Messiah) and the proof could be found in what he was about to do.

At first they marveled at his gracious words and said, “Is not this Joseph’s son?” Then Jesus quoted the proverb: “Doctor, cure yourself!” In contrast to this proverb, he quoted another: “Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet’s hometown.” These two proverbs are joined together in the Gospel of Thomas, where they read: “No prophet is acceptable in his village; no physician heals those who know him.” Apparently Jesus was unable to perform the same kind of miracles in Nazareth, which he performed in Capernaum, and he attributes his failure to their lack of faith. Since Luke has not mentioned the ministry of Jesus in Capernaum, we can only conclude that this incident in Nazareth is out of chronological order, or else Luke has not recorded everything Jesus did. Mark 6:1-4 seems to indicate a different chronological order, for he has Jesus involved in ministry prior to this incident in Nazareth.

The two illustrations Jesus uses from the Old Testament make the congregation very angry. The first was a reference to Elijah, who provided never-failing meal and oil for the widow from Zarephath near Sidon (1 Kings 17:8-24), and the second was a reference to the way in which Elisha healed Naaman the Leper from Syria (2 Kings 5:1-27). Not only did Jesus imply that they experienced no miracles in Nazareth because of their lack of faith, but that the Gentiles did experience miracles through their faith in God. That is why the Gentiles would be more open to him. This alienated the people of Nazareth to such an extent that they tried to kill him, but he simply moved through the middle of the crowd and went on his way.

Instead of working among those of little faith, Jesus moved to Capernaum, which became his headquarters for his Galilean ministry and mission. In Galilee he was able to cast out demons and heal the sick, including Peter’s mother-in-law. The crowds flocked to him, but he retreated to evaluate what his primary mission was. His primary task was not that of healing, but of proclaiming the Good News of the coming Kingdom of God. Hence, he moved on to teach the Good News in the neighboring towns.

Jesus’ ability to exorcise demons inaugurated his ministry. He had the power to destroy the demonic completely, but he only exorcised demons from the possessed. The demons immediately recognized who he was and feared their own demise. Then, though they cried out, “You are the Son of God!” He silenced them. It was too soon to make an announcement as to whom he was; besides, the demons were not the ones to be commissioned to proclaim this to the world. That would be left to his disciples, whom Jesus had been calling gradually. As they came to recognize who he was, he cautioned them to keep it a secret until they fully understood what it meant. This has become known as the Messianic Secret. Jesus began by explaining his message to his disciples.

Over an undetermined amount of time, Jesus selected 12 men to be his disciples. In Luke 6:12-16, these men are listed as follows:

- | | |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1. Simon Peter | 7. Matthew (Levi) |
| 2. Andrew | 8. Thomas |
| 3. James | 9. James, Son of Alphaeus |
| 4. John | 10. Simon the Zealot |
| 5. Philip | 11. Judas, Son of James (Thaddaeus) |
| 6. Bartholomew (Nathanael) | 12. Judas Iscariot |

Sometimes the 12 are referred to as disciples and at other times apostles. While not too much should be made of the distinction between *disciple* and *apostle*, it is at least worth noting. The word *disciple* means “pupil” and the word *apostle* means “ambassador,” or “one sent forth, a messenger.” The first task of these 12 men was to become acquainted with the message of Jesus. After they understood it, then they could be entrusted to become his ambassadors.

Although the teachings of Jesus are scattered throughout the four Gospels, they can also be found in a condensed form in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7 and the Sermon on the Plain in Luke 6:17-49. Neither of these are copies of a particular sermon; rather, they are collections of Jesus’ teachings from many sermons delivered in a variety of settings. In the Gospel of Matthew Jesus teaches his disciples, but in the Gospel of Luke Jesus teaches a great crowd. One question frequently raised about these teachings has to do with whether these teachings are for life on earth or life in the Kingdom of Heaven. While Matthew generally uses “Kingdom of Heaven” instead of “Kingdom of God,” these two terms should be viewed as synonymous. They mean the same thing.

Jesus began his ministry preaching that the Kingdom of God was breaking into this world. People were to repent in readiness for its final establishment. When he was asked by the Pharisees when the Kingdom of God would come, he replied in Luke 17:20-21, “The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or ‘There it is!’ For, in fact, the kingdom of God is among you.” Jesus then went on to say that its final establishment would take place suddenly like the flood came in Noah’s time (Luke 17:22-35). The only conclusion one can draw is that the teachings of Jesus found in the Sermon on the Mount and in the Sermon on the Plain are for those who are responding to Jesus message of the Kingdom of God. Jesus expected his followers to live according to these teachings in this world in preparation for the world to come, when the Kingdom of God would be fully established.

Both sermons begin with the Beatitudes. The most complete form of the Beatitudes however can be found in the Gospel of Matthew, where they form an introduction to Jesus’ teachings. They can be divided into the following three parts: (1) the conditions for spiritual perception, poverty and sorrow; (2) the characteristics of the Christian life, meekness, righteousness, mercy, purity, peace; and (3) the consequence of following Jesus, persecution. The sermon in the Gospel of Matthew then moves on to discuss six other issues: (1) the tasks of discipleship, that of being salt and light in the world; (2) the permanence, meaning, and fulfillment of the Law, as it relates to murder, adultery, marriage, oaths, and retaliation; (3) the secret disciplines of prayer, giving, and fasting; (4) one’s relationship to material possessions; (5) one’s attitude towards God and others;

and (6) the demands of the Kingdom of God and how one gets into it. By reading the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7, one can get a fairly thorough understanding of what Jesus taught.

The Sermon on the Mount and the Sermon on the Plain describe life as it is to be lived by those who submit to the Kingdom of God, which was and is Jesus' primary message. Life in the Kingdom begins the moment we repent and submit to the reign of Jesus as our King. Jesus illustrates his message in parables, which only his followers can fully understand. These parables can be found throughout Matthew, Mark, and Luke, but Matthew 13 brings together a string of parables on the Kingdom. In this chapter we find seven parables about the Kingdom of God, which Jesus taught not only to his disciples, but, to a crowd at the Galilean lakeside. The crowd was so large that he had to teach while sitting in a boat. There is a natural progression in these seven parables. One might sum them up as follows:

1. The Seed and the Soil. Individuals respond differently to the Invitation of God into the Kingdom.
2. The Wheat and the Weeds. Citizens of the Kingdom live among the people of the world, growing together until God's final harvest or judgment.
3. The Mustard Seed. The Kingdom begins insignificantly, but its greatness will be revealed.
4. The Leaven. The Kingdom penetrates our lives with purpose and meaning.
5. The Treasure in the Field. The Kingdom possesses a hidden attraction.
6. The Pearl of Great Price. The Kingdom demands the abandonment of all other values.
7. The Fisherman's Net. The Kingdom will be fully established with the final separation of the righteous from the unrighteous.

What Jesus taught about the Kingdom of God can be summed up in what has been called his Great Commandment. When asked which was the greatest of the commandments, Jesus joined together Deuteronomy 6:4-5 and Leviticus 19:18.

Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. (Mark 12:29-30)

You shall love your neighbor as yourself. (Mark 12:31)

The Apostle John changed the second part the new commandment, giving it a slightly different interpretation. In John 13:34, Jesus is quoted saying, "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another." If one does not know how to love one's self, one can look to Jesus for an example. That example needs to be taken seriously because of who Jesus is.

The Messenger

Jesus came to proclaim the Kingdom of God, but his followers proclaimed him. Why? The reason is simple. They gradually recognized who he was—the King of that Kingdom. Although John the Baptist had some questions about who Jesus was, he recognized something different about him from the beginning. When Jesus came to John for baptism, John cried, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” But Jesus answered him “Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness.” Then John consented. (Matthew 3:14-15) When John ended up in prison, he sent a couple of his disciples to ask, “Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?” Jesus answered them, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them.” (Matthew 11:3-5)

Throughout all four Gospels the miracles point to who Jesus was and is. He performed approximately 27 miracles: 16 healings of diseases, 3 exorcisms, 3 raisings from the dead, and 5 demonstrations of power over nature. All of these examples illustrate Jesus’ power over disease, evil, death, and nature. Every Gospel but John has at least one miracle in all five categories. In the Gospel of John there is no exorcism. In fact, John deals very differently with the miracles. He calls them signs and lists seven of them throughout his Gospel. The first sign is the changing of water into wine at a wedding in Cana and the last sign is the raising of Lazarus from the dead in Bethany. The signs build in intensity pointing to the one who has power to perform such signs. The seven signs in John are as follows:

1. Jesus turns Water into Wine at Cana in Galilee (2:1-11)
2. Jesus heals a Royal Official’s Son (4:46-54)
3. Jesus heals a Paralyzed Man by the Pool of Bethesda (5:1-18)
4. Jesus feeds the 5000 in Galilee (6:1-14)
5. Jesus walks on the Water on the Sea of Galilee (6:16-21)
6. Jesus heals a Blind Man at the Pool of Siloam (9:1-41)
7. Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead at Bethany (11:1-57)

The high point of the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke is Peter’s recognition and confession of Jesus as the anointed King (Messiah or Christ) at Caesarea Philippi. The accounts of this can be found in Matthew 16:13ff, Mark 8:27ff, and Luke 9:18ff. Caesarea Philippi was famous in Jesus’ time for a couple of reasons. First, it was a place of natural beauty, where the Jordan River begins. Second, it was the capital city of King Herod Philip. Third, a sanctuary had been built there to the god Pan, the god of nature. Fourth, there was a cave known as the Cave of Pan, or the Gates of Hades. Josephus wrote the following about the Cave of Pan:

...by the foundations of Jordan...there is a top of a mountain that is raised to an immense height, and at its side, beneath, or at its bottom, a dark cave opens within which is a horrible precipice that descends abruptly to a vast depth; it contains a mighty quantity of water, which is immovable; and when anybody lets down anything to measure the depth of the earth beneath the water, no length of cord is sufficient to reach it.

Archaeologist and dean of the Jerusalem Center for Biblical Studies, Charles R. Page II suggests that this cave was known as the entrance to the underworld or the “gates of Hades.” In other words, Jesus took his disciples to the “gates of hell” to ask them if they understood who he was. In front of these gates and in the midst of the pagan headquarters for the worship of Pan, Jesus asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” The disciples replied that most people thought he was John the Baptist, Elijah, or one of the prophets. Jesus then asked them, “But who do you say that I am?” It was Peter who recognized who he was and confessed, “You are the Messiah.” (Anointed King or Christ) And Jesus sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him. (Mark 8:27-30) The reason why Jesus told them not to tell anyone who he was is because they did not fully understand it themselves. They had much to learn.

Following Peter’s profession, Jesus began to define what it would mean. As King he would have to suffer, die, and be raised from the dead. This was not part of the Jewish expectation for the new King. The idea of a suffering King could be found in Isaiah 53, but the concept of a triumphant King found in Isaiah 11 caught on more easily. For Jesus, suffering had to precede triumph and so he began the first of three predictions of his suffering and death. He saw in Peter’s resistance to suffering and death the continuation of Satan’s temptation. Nothing personal was meant by Jesus’ scathing remark to Peter. Peter was still to become the leader of the Church, but he had a great deal to learn about who Jesus was and what it would mean for them and the world.

The Gospel of John has no account of Peter’s recognition and confession of Jesus at Caesarea Philippi; instead, it offers a list of seven claims Jesus made for himself. These seven claims are as follows:

1. I AM the Bread of Life (6:35)
2. I AM the Light of the World (8:12; 9:5)
3. I AM the Gate (10:7, 9)
4. I AM the Good Shepherd (10:11, 14)
5. I AM the Resurrection and the Life (11:25)
6. I AM the Way, the Truth, and the Life (14:6)
7. I AM the Vine (15:1, 5)

The above are seven claims to divinity. The words “I AM” come out of a conversation Moses had with God. When Moses encountered God at the burning bush, he asked God to identify himself. In Exodus 3:14, God replied, “I AM Who I AM.” “I AM” is related to the Hebrew word YAHWEH, which is the sacred name of God. Even though Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob worshipped the same God, they used other names to refer to Him. That is why Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are mentioned in Exodus 3:15. Just as God was present with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, he would be present with Moses; only, he would go by this new name. These verses in Exodus tell us that God is holy, but personal, and that he will go with Moses to Egypt, where they will work together to liberate the Hebrew people from slavery to the Promised Land. All of this lies behind Jesus’ seven claims, all of which begin with the basic verb, “I AM.” Jesus promises to work together with the disciples as God worked with Moses. These seven claims to divinity did not endear Jesus to all of his listeners. Even his disciples had difficulty understanding what he meant.

The first “I AM” saying can be found in John 6:35, where Jesus claims to be the bread of life, which his listeners took literally. One can understand why as one follows the story. In John 6:53 Jesus told his listeners that they would have to eat his flesh and drink his blood. Nothing could have been more offensive to Jews than the eating of flesh and the drinking of blood (Genesis 9:4; Leviticus 3:17; Deuteronomy 12:23; Ezekiel 39:17-19; and Acts 15:20). This first claim was so offensive to the crowd that it drove off everyone but the disciples. As the crowd left, Jesus asked his disciples if they too planned on leaving him. Peter spoke up for the group, “Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life.” (John 6:68). This is John’s description of Peter’s recognition and confession of Jesus as the new King of God’s Kingdom. All seven “I AM” sayings point to the divinity of Jesus. He is not only King of Israel, but, the King of the Universe.

None of this means that Jesus will be accepted; in fact, precisely the opposite happens. Opposition to him and his claims increase; hence, Jesus must prepare his disciples for the worst—the cross. In the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, he does this with the transfiguration. The transfiguration took place on an unnamed mountain, possibly Mount Tabor or Mount Hermon. No one knows for sure. The three disciples singled out to see the transfigured Christ were Peter, James, and John. They were to become pillars in the Jerusalem Church. They needed this special vision of Jesus, not only to get them through Jesus’ crucifixion, but, to help them get through their own inevitable suffering. But why did they have to see Moses and Elijah? Moses experienced a similar kind of transfiguration and had been Israel’s great lawgiver. The Mosaic Law was the basic authority in Judaism. Elijah was Israel’s first great prophet, and Malachi 4:5-6 predicted that he would return to act as the forerunner of Israel’s long-awaited King. In the transfiguration of Jesus, Moses and Elijah approve of and confirm Jesus as the new King. Their disappearance, leaving Jesus alone with his three disciples, symbolizes that Jesus replaces them in the new order of things—the Kingdom of God.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus prepares his disciples by promising a place for them in the coming Kingdom. When they say that they do not know the way, Jesus replies in John 14:6, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” When they still seem puzzled, Jesus says in John 14:10-12:

Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves. Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father.

The task of proclaiming the coming Kingdom of God and its King will be passed on to the disciples. In order to do these “greater works” they will need the help and direction of the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus promises to give them (John 14:16-17, 25-26; 15:26-27; and 16:5-15). John baptized with water, but Jesus baptizes with the Holy Spirit.

Titles for the New King

Jesus taught that the Kingdom of God was breaking into the world, but that it would never be completely established in this world. His Kingdom was spiritual and eternal.

Not only did Jesus claim to be its King, but, he claimed oneness with God Himself. We must now review four titles claimed by or given to Jesus.

Anointed King

The most important title given to Jesus is that of *Anointed King*. In Hebrew the word is *Messiah* and in Greek *Christ*. Although we normally call him Jesus Christ, the more correct way of saying it would be *Jesus the Christ*, or *Jesus the Anointed King*. The word refers to someone who has been anointed, that is commissioned, to do God's work. The Judges of the Old Testament were anointed and filled with God's spirit for tasks of leadership. When Kings replaced Judges, they were anointed with oil to symbolize their leadership roles. When Israel and Judah collapsed and the Kings descending from David came to an end, people began to look to the future, hoping for a new Anointed King. The new King would have to be a descendant of David, anointed and empowered by God to deliver the people from their enemies, just like David had done in the past.

By the time of Jesus, the expectation for an Anointed King had turned very nationalistic and political. They wanted a powerful military leader who would deliver them from the political domination of Rome, just as David had delivered his people from the Philistines and other Canaanite tribes. Although Jesus accepted the title of "Anointed King" (Messiah or Christ), he was very cautious about its use; hence, he told his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Anointed King. Jesus knew that the Kingdom of God was not primarily worldly or political, even though Satan had tempted him to move in that direction with his ministry. It was not until after his crucifixion and resurrection that people could fully understand his reign as the Anointed King. Isaiah 53 stated that the Anointed King had to suffer before he could conquer. Jesus fulfilled Isaiah's vision of the suffering servant in his life and death on the cross. In his resurrection he was crowned the Anointed King who would conquer every enemy, beginning with sin and death. Once these enemies were conquered, the others would be easy.

Son of Man

The *Son of Man* was Jesus' favorite title for himself. The title, coming from Aramaic, the language Jesus spoke, could mean "mankind" or "human being." Using the phrase could be a way of talking humbly about oneself, instead of saying "I" or "me." Jesus probably used it in that sense, but he must have been aware of the meaning given to it by the prophet Daniel as well. Daniel talks about a "Son of Man," that is a "human being," coming to conquer the beastly kingdoms of this world and establishing an eternal Kingdom without end. This vision can best be seen in Daniel 7:13-14:

As I watched in the night visions, I saw one like a human being [son of man] coming with the clouds of heaven. And he came to the Ancient One and was presented before him. To him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed.

Jesus had to know about Daniel's use of "Son of Man" when he used the very same term to describe himself. He may have used the term because it had a double meaning. When he used it to describe himself, the Jews did ask themselves and him what it meant. In

Mark 14:61-62, the High Priest asked him, “Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?” Jesus said, “I am; and ‘you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power,’ and ‘coming with the clouds of heaven.’” The High Priest tore his clothes and accused Jesus of blasphemy. He interpreted Jesus to be using the term in the way in which Daniel had used it. It was no simple and humble reference to himself as a human being. It was a title of a King, who was about to establish an eternal reign.

Son of God

When Jesus was baptized, a voice from heaven said, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.” (Mark 1:11) The term “Son of God” came from the Old Testament, where Kings were viewed as sons of God because they were called and anointed to do God’s will. This is how Jesus thought of himself. He had come to do God’s will, even when it conflicted with his own. The cross is an example of the conflict of wills. As Jesus faced the cross, he prayed, “Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want.” (Mark 14:36) Jesus was a loyal Son of God, just as Israel was supposed to be. Even Jesus’ use of the word “Abba” illustrated the intimate relationship between him and God. “Abba” is the equivalent of “daddy,” a term that Jews would never use for God. Jesus even taught his disciples to use this term as they approached God in prayer. “Abba” is the term used by Jesus in the Lord’s Prayer, which he begins with, “Our Father [Abba].” (Matthew 6:9)

As strange as it may sound, Satan and the demons, who, possessed people were the first to call Jesus the Son of God. In the case of Satan, it must be admitted that he only said, “If you are the Son of God...” (Matthew 4:3) The demons, however, feared Jesus as the Son of God and begged for mercy (Matthew 8:29ff). They knew that Jesus, as Son of God, had come to overcome evil and save his people from sin and death. This is summed up in John 3:16, where John says: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.” As Son of God, Jesus is not only the Anointed King of the Kingdom of God, but he is also the Savior of the world.

Lord

“Lord” was not a title Jesus gave to himself, but it quickly joined “Messiah” as the most popular title attributed to him, following his resurrection from the dead. It had a way of summing up what Christians believed about him. It was the word used in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, to translate that special name of God—Yahweh. When that translation is made in the Bible, it is usually done in all capital letters. “Yahweh” in Hebrew becomes “LORD” in Greek. “Lord” in Greek could also mean something as simple as “Sir.” Christians however knew what they meant by it and referred to Jesus as the “Lord Jesus Christ.”

In the Roman world the Emperor had to be addressed as Lord. This troubled the early Christians, who identified the title “Lord” with deity. In their opinion the emperor was not a god, even though some of them accepted the title. In response to the idea of the emperor’s deity, the early Christians began to sing hymns to Jesus as Lord, and all who became disciples were expected to confess their faith in one simple sentence, “Jesus is Lord.” This early profession of faith can be found in Romans 10:9, where Paul says, “...if

you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” That is what they believed. Jesus is not only the “Anointed King” of this world, but he is also the “Lord of the Universe.”

12. THE CROWNING OF THE NEW KING

Opposition to Jesus

Although Jesus gained a great many followers, he also faced stiff opposition. Before looking at his death and resurrection, it will be helpful to look at the reasons why he was opposed.

Over The Sabbath

One of the first reasons why Jesus was opposed has to do with his apparent violation of the Sabbath Law, which was the most sacred and distinctive of all Jewish institutions. Jews were known by their careful observance of the Sabbath. Jesus and his disciples were accused of violating the Sabbath Law when they plucked heads of grain as they walked through the grain fields (Mark 2:23-28) and when Jesus healed a man with a withered hand (Mark 3:1-6). To the Pharisees these were flagrant violations of the Sabbath, which could only be broken in life-threatening emergencies. The difficulty with these two examples is that neither one was a life-threatening emergency. Jesus and his disciples would not have starved to death and the healing of the man with the withered hand could have waited until the next day.

The first response made by Jesus was that if David could get away with eating the holy bread in the Temple (1 Samuel 21:1-6), surely the Messiah could eat some grain on the Sabbath. In his second response, Jesus insisted that compassion was more important than legalism. The Sabbath, he concluded, was made for humankind and it is always lawful to perform good deeds, even on special days. None of these things interfered with God's original purpose in the creation of the Sabbath. In being made for humankind, the Sabbath served two special functions. It was a day for physical rest and spiritual nourishment. Eating and healing were not inconsistent with observing the Sabbath. This attitude was incomprehensible to the Pharisees, who had developed their own set of rules concerning the Sabbath.

Over The Temple

The Gospel of John describes Jesus cleansing the Temple in the early part of his ministry, while the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke describe Jesus cleansing the Temple in the final week. The timing of this event is not as important as what it signifies.

The merchants were selling pigeons, which were needed for sacrificial offerings, and the moneychangers acted as bankers to help the people exchange currencies, so that they could purchase sacrifices. Jesus responded to what they were doing by combining Isaiah 5:6-17 and Jeremiah 7:11 to emphasize the way in which the Temple, and its surrounding area, were intended to be used. One of the major problems is that the Jews were depriving the Gentiles of a place in which to participate in the worship of God. They sold their sacrifices and exchanged money in the Court of the Gentiles, the only place where Gentiles could gather for worship.

The cleansing of the Temple, however, was not simply an attempt on the part of Jesus to reform worship to include Gentiles. Jesus' sacrifice on the cross was going to put an

end to the whole sacrificial system, which would make Temple worship unnecessary. That is why, as Jesus was uttering his last words on the cross, Mark 15:38 says, “And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.”

Jesus changed the meaning of the Temple forever when he challenged his opponents to tear down the Temple. They thought he was talking about Herod’s Temple, which was not yet finished, but he was talking about his own body. Prior to Jesus’ crucifixion, no one understood what he meant, but following Jesus’ resurrection, Paul got the message and wrote to the Church in Corinth: “...do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body. (1 Corinthians 6:19-20) The New Testament ends with the complete elimination of any Temple made of stone and cedar, with John proclaiming: “I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb.” (Revelation 21:22)

Over Royal Claims

When Jesus revealed his identity to his disciples at Caesarea Philippi as the long expected King (or Messiah), he also told them that the consequence of such a claim would be death on a cross (Mark 8:27-38). At first, Peter resisted, but Jesus persisted. Jesus knew that people would not understand his claim to royalty, especially when he claimed to be King because he was one with God. To most of the religious leaders, such a claim seemed blasphemous. This is why Jesus told his disciples not to say anything about who he really was. The time was not right.

When the time was right, Jesus entered Jerusalem riding on a colt. This entry into Jerusalem has become known as his triumphal entry, which symbolizes two things: the fulfillment of Zechariah 9:9 and a claim to be the King of that prophecy.

Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

Those watching Jesus enter Jerusalem that day understood what he was claiming, but they did not yet understand what kind of a King he intended to be. They thought he would liberate Jerusalem from Roman domination and set up his throne in the holy city. Such was the mood of the crowd.

Only John says that they spread Palm branches on the road (John 12:13). Palm branches were not native to Jerusalem. They would have been brought in from Jericho. This would indicate that the crowd followed him from Jericho, expecting him to liberate all of Judea from the Romans. When the crowd cried out, “Hosanna!” they were saying, “Save Now!” That is what *Hosanna* means. This however was not Jesus’ intention. At least he had no intention of delivering Judea from Roman political domination. The crowd expected him to attack the Roman authorities, but he attacked the Temple instead, putting an end to the whole sacrificial system. Once this was understood, his crucifixion on a cross was inevitable.

Jesus’ violation of the Sabbath angered the Pharisees, who were strict observers of the Law. Jesus’ attack on the Temple enraged the Sadducees, who had a vested interest in the

Temple. Jesus' failure to overthrow the Romans disappointed the crowd, which expected a royal son of David to deliver them from political oppression. Because Jesus could not or would not fulfill the hopes and dreams of the Pharisees, Sadducees, and the crowd, they all turned against him, setting the stage for his crucifixion and resurrection. The resurrection would be the crowning of the King.

The Crucifixion

Jesus entered Jerusalem on Sunday, cleansed the Temple on Monday, taught in the Temple on Tuesday, and was anointed on Wednesday, the day Judas was hired to betray him. Opposition to Jesus had been building for some time and Jesus knew it. That is why he called his disciples together on Thursday evening for a meal, which we call the Last Supper.

The Last Supper

All four of the Gospels agree that Jesus shared a Last Supper with his disciples, but they do not all agree that it was a Passover Meal. Matthew, Mark, and Luke identify the Last Supper with Passover, but they do not mention such essential elements as the Lamb and bitter herbs. John insists that Jesus was crucified at the same time as the paschal lamb was prepared for Passover. This would have been on the day before Passover. Whether or not the Last Supper was a Passover Meal has been debated from the second century to the present. That Jesus was compared to the paschal lamb is much less controversial.

Another issue raised in the Last Supper is the drinking of blood. Roman Catholics have taken Jesus' words literally, while Quakers have taken them completely symbolically. The very idea of drinking blood would have been repugnant to Jews, who were forbidden the drinking of blood in their dietary laws. It is difficult to imagine Jesus even saying this, much less taking it literally; yet in the Gospel of John, Jesus tells his disciples that they must eat his flesh and drink his blood or they have no life in them (John 6:53). On the other hand, Luke takes all references to wine as blood out of his account. Paul makes a claim for it in 1 Corinthians 11:23, but his ministry was primarily to Gentile Christianity, where there was much less aversion to it.

The main point of the Last Supper is that Jesus will initiate the New Covenant by the spilling of blood, not the drinking of it. There is little in the Gospels to suggest the drinking of wine to symbolize blood as a weekly ritual. Only in John 6:52-58, is any sacramental significance given to it. The drinking of wine, according to the Gospels, will only take place again when the Kingdom of God is finally established.

In the Gospel of John "foot-washing" takes place within the context of the Last Supper, which is not treated as a Passover Meal. The emphasis falls not on bread and wine as sacramental elements, but on Jesus' example of servant-hood. Jesus teaches the disciples to follow his example of humility and love. Following the foot-washing is the prediction of Judas' betrayal and Peter's denial. In between these two predictions is the new commandment (John 13:34-35), where Jesus tells his disciples to love one another as he has loved them. Christ's love is the standard. Satan prompts the betrayal of Judas. Because he refuses to follow the Light, which is Jesus, Judas goes out into the darkest night, which finally destroys him. Peter's threefold denial will be followed by Jesus'

threefold invitation to love (John 21:15-19). In spite of Peter's initial denial, he will still follow the Light.

The Prayer in Gethsemane

Following the Last Supper, Jesus went into the Garden of Gethsemane, asking his three closest disciples, Peter, James, and John, to wait while he prayed. They fell asleep three times. The heart of Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane can be found in Mark 14:36, where he prays, "Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want." He had taught this as one of the petitions in the Lord's Prayer; now he was going to have to live it out.

Following the prayer in Gethsemane, Judas appeared with a crowd sent by the chief priests, scribes, and elders, who were armed with swords and clubs. Judas betrayed Jesus with a kiss. No reason is given as to why the betrayal was accompanied with a kiss. In defense of Jesus, Peter cut off the ear of the slave of the High Priest. According to John 18:10, the slave's name was Malchus.

In the confusion that followed, everyone forsook Jesus. Only one unidentified man tried to follow along, but when they tried to seize him, he too fled. Since this story is told in the Gospel of Mark, some think Mark is talking about himself, but many doubt this. Because the man was dressed only in a linen cloth, he might simply have been a nearby householder, who came out to see what was going on. This would explain why he was so scantily dressed. The incident was not important and so the man was not identified.

The Religious Trial

The religious trial took place illegally at night in the house of Caiaphas, the High Priest and leader of the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin was made up of 71 persons from influential families. There would have been elders, lawyers, Pharisees, and Sadducees in the Sanhedrin.

Several things indicate that this was not a proper trial and that it was held illegally. No Sanhedrin trial could take place at night, the witnesses had to agree, and no death sentence could be made. This trial did not pass the first two requirements and there is some suspicion about the third.

The accusations made against Jesus in this trial were blasphemy against the Temple and Blasphemy for claiming to be the Messiah. Since the accusations of the witnesses conflicted, Caiaphas asked Jesus point blank, "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?" Jesus' answer was direct, for he said, "I am; and 'you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power,' and 'coming with the clouds of heaven.'" (Mark 14:61-62) That was enough. They condemned him. This does not mean that they commuted the death sentence. If the Sanhedrin would have commuted the death sentence it would have been death by stoning, in accordance with Leviticus 24:13-16. At this time the Sanhedrin did not have the authority to commute the death sentence. Jesus would now have to be sent to Pilate for the Political Trial, where any death sentence would be crucifixion, a Roman punishment.

How would anyone know what was said at the religious trial? The disciples had all fled, except for Peter and John, who were known to be in the vicinity of the religious trial.

Peter tried his best not to be discovered, but he could not hide himself completely. He was recognized by his Galilean accent. Trying to distance himself from Jesus, Peter denied him three times. While the details differ in the various Gospels, the fact of his denial does not. One of the most authentic sites in Jerusalem is the place where this event took place.

The Political Trial

Since the Sanhedrin could not carry out an execution, Jesus was sent on to Pilate for a political trial, which took place in the Antonia Fortress. Pilate, who normally lived in Caesarea, happened to be in Jerusalem at the time. When the charge was presented to Pilate, it had to be translated into political terms. Instead of blasphemy it became insurrection and treason. Pilate seems to have seen through what the Jews were trying to do. He did ask Jesus if he were a King, but he took Jesus' evasive answer as a negative. Actually there had been a double charge, that of calling himself a King and, of encouraging others not to pay tribute to Caesar. Pilate never seemed to have taken the secondary charge seriously, for Jesus was known to have taught the people to pay Caesar what he was due (Luke 20:25).

Pilate tried to set Jesus free by offering the crowd a choice between Jesus and Barabbas, a convicted insurrectionist. The pressure from the crowd became too great and Pilate yielded by setting Barabbas free. Barabbas may have been the kind of revolutionary that the crowd wanted in Jesus, for he advocated the way of violence. It is difficult to understand why Pilate would have gone along with the release of Barabbas. It would not have been to his or Rome's advantage, but then, nothing ever became of Barabbas. He faded into the mists of history.

Noticing that Jesus was a Galilean, Pilate referred him to King Herod Antipas. Since there had been great animosity between Pilate and Herod, it is difficult to see why he would have done this. The only reason why it might have happened is their mutual respect for authority. Herod saw no reason to condemn Jesus, but he treated him harshly. Perhaps he was trying to appease the Jews. With sarcasm he had Jesus treated as a king, but it was all in mockery.

Although Pilate tried to wash his hands of the whole affair, he could not avoid it completely. The punishment carried out against Jesus was Roman. The Jews would have had Jesus stoned for blasphemy. It was the Romans who executed slaves and insurrectionists; since Jesus was not a slave, he was crucified as an insurrectionist. The crucifixion could only take place with Pilate's permission and under his authority.

The Death of Jesus

The scourging of a condemned man was a normal part of carrying out the death penalty. Frequently men died under the scourging itself. In the case of Jesus, he probably died quickly on the cross because of it. Prior to his crucifixion they mocked him by placing a purple cloak and crown of thorns on him. Matthew calls it "a scarlet robe" and Luke an "elegant robe." It was probably some worn out military garb used to mock him. The reed represented a king's staff. All three of these symbols reinforce the idea that the charge against him was his claim to be the Messiah, the King of the Jews. None of these

items would have been with him when he was actually crucified. He was naked when they nailed him to the cross. Pictures showing him otherwise are mistaken.

As Isaac had to carry the wood for his own sacrifice (Genesis 22:6), Jesus had to carry his own cross. That Jesus collapsed under the weight of it was due to the scourging. Simon of Cyrene helped him carry his cross the rest of the way. Not much is known about Simon. Since Cyrene was a North African city, tradition suggests that Simon was black. Mark names Simon's sons as Alexander and Rufus. A man named Rufus is named in Romans 16:13. This may be the same Rufus, but we cannot be certain.

The place where Jesus was crucified was called *Golgotha*, which is an Aramaic term, meaning, "place of the skull." Since the Greek term was "kranion" and the Latin "calvaria," the English term became Calvary. Two sites are shown in Jerusalem today—the Church of the Holy Sepulcher and Gordon's Calvary. While the latter looks more like the "place of the skull," the former is believed to be authentic.

Jesus was nailed to the cross at 9:00 A.M. Darkness covered the earth at 12:00 Noon, and he was dead by 3:00 P.M. Was the darkness the result of natural events, or was it a supernatural event? It might have been created by a dust laden sirocco wind, which could also explain the tearing of the curtain in the Temple. This would not however rule out a supernatural origin.

There were seven last words or sentences. None of the Gospel writers lists them all. The seven last words or sentences were:

1. Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.
2. Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.
3. Woman, here is your son." "Here is your mother.
4. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
5. I am thirsty.
6. It is finished.
7. Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.

During Jesus' crucifixion, two highly symbolic things happen. The first has to do with the tearing of the Temple curtain from top to bottom. This symbolizes that access to God has been achieved through the death of Jesus and that the Temple and its whole sacrificial system are no longer needed. The second symbolic thing has to do with the raising of God's saints from the dead. This is a foretaste of what is about to happen to Jesus.

A Roman Centurion concluded that Jesus was truly the Son of God. This can be interpreted in a number of different ways, but for Gentile Christianity, it was the recognition of Jesus' divinity. This confession went a step further than the disciples, who were simply expecting a Jewish King in the lineage of David. Pilate had a sign placed above Jesus on the cross, which read in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews."

In addition to the Apostle John, the following four women were present: Mary, Jesus' mother, Mary's sister Salome, Mary, the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.

After Jesus' death, they did not break his legs. Instead, they pierced his side and blood and water gushed out. The spiritual significance of the blood and water is not clear, but it is frequently related to the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

Although the Romans tended to leave crucified bodies hanging on the cross as an example to others, Jewish Law required their removal (Deuteronomy 21:22-23). When it was time to bury Jesus, two secret disciples suddenly appeared to claim the body. They were Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus. Joseph was a minority leader in the Sanhedrin and Nicodemus was a Pharisee. They may not have agreed with the decision to execute Jesus, but they may have been powerless to stop it.

The Resurrection

If we assume that Jesus was crucified in 30 C.E., then the actual date of the first Easter would have been April 7, 30 C.E. Since dating Jesus death and resurrection can only be accurate within a few years, the date can only be an approximation. Likewise, there is no way to reconstruct all the details of that first Easter. What the Gospels offer are four testimonies to the fact of Jesus' resurrection.

That the resurrection occurs at dawn is very significant. A new era has dawned. The resurrection of Jesus from the dead is God's confirmation of who he is and everything he taught. The new King has been crowned. This is the supreme miracle of all four Gospels.

The Empty Tomb

Sunday morning began with the empty tomb. All four Gospels testify to that. Some women went to the tomb to anoint Jesus' body. The women named in various Gospels were Mary, the mother of Jesus, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, Salome, and Joanna. They were worried about rolling the stone away, but when they arrived, they found the stone rolled away and the tomb empty.

One or two angels were present, who spoke to the women. They were afraid and ran to tell the disciples, who had trouble believing them. Mary Magdalene returned with Peter and an unnamed disciple, perhaps John. All they saw at this time was an empty tomb with the linen wrappings lying there. After the two disciples left, Mary had a conversation with someone whom she thought was the gardener, but turned out to be the risen Jesus. She was told not to hold on to him until he ascended to the Father. A new kind of relationship between Jesus and his disciples was about to begin.

The Bribing of the Guards

Only Matthew tells of the bribing of the guards. The alternative is that they fell asleep, which would have been a serious charge, punishable by death. Instead, the guards were bribed to say that the disciples stole Jesus' body from the tomb. No one had anything to gain by stealing the body, neither the authorities nor the disciples. The fact of Jesus' resurrection makes up the foundation of Christian faith. It is its central teaching, with everything else revolving around it.

The Road to Emmaus

Two disciples, discouraged by Jesus' crucifixion, left Jerusalem for Emmaus. Only one of them is named—Cleopas. Some scholars identify him with Clopas, the father of

Simeon (John 19:25). Simeon later succeeded James as the leader of the Jerusalem Church. The other one was either his wife or a friend. Tradition has named Cleopas' friend Simon in light of Luke 24:34, but the Simon mentioned there might very well be Simon Peter.

The two disciples were aware of the women's report of the empty tomb and probably thought someone had stolen the body. The risen Jesus joined them on their journey, but they did not recognize him until they stopped for the night and shared a meal. As Jesus shared bread with them, their eyes were opened and they recognized him. Then Jesus disappeared from their sight, and they ran back to Jerusalem to share their good news with the other disciples. When they arrived, they discovered that the Lord had already appeared to Simon Peter. That Jesus appeared first to Simon Peter agrees with 1 Corinthians 15:5, which is the earliest account we have of any resurrection appearances.

Three Appearances to the Disciples

The first appearance to the disciples took place on that first Sunday evening as they gathered together behind locked doors. Jesus appeared in the midst of them and said, "Peace be with you." He showed his hands and side to them as proof that he was indeed the one who had been crucified and was now risen. Only Mark and John tell this story and both of them include within it their version of the Great Commission. One of the disciples, Thomas, was absent and so Jesus' first appearance to his disciples was to ten of them.

Eight days later Jesus appeared to the disciples again, only this time, all of them, including Thomas, were present. Because Thomas had not been present at the first resurrection appearance, he doubted, refusing to believe until he had seen Jesus with his own eyes and touched his wounds with his own hands. That opportunity was given to him in Jesus' second appearance to his disciples. Upon seeing and touching him, Thomas cried, "My Lord and My God." Jesus then gave to his disciples a new beatitude, saying, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." (John 20:29)

The third appearance took place in Galilee. Only seven of the disciples were present. Five of them are named: Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, James, and John. Not knowing what else to do, the disciples seem to have gone home to Galilee. Peter took the lead, taking them fishing. Jesus appeared on the shore and the seven slowly began to recognize him. After instructing them on how to catch fish, Jesus invited them to have breakfast with him on the shore. How important was their catch? John reports that they caught 153 fish. Jerome concluded that since there were only 153 known species of fish, this could be symbolic of the need to take the Good News of Jesus' Resurrection to all tribes and races.

A Special Appearance to Peter

The special appearance to Peter forms a background to the lifting up of Peter as the natural and chosen leader of the early Church. Since Peter denied Jesus three times, Jesus questions him three times, asking him, "Do you love me?" Peter seems disturbed by the threefold questioning and by the conclusion that loving Jesus would lead to Peter's death. As the writer of this story, John must have been familiar with Peter's death under Nero. According to tradition Peter was stretched out on a cross, upside down, and according to

a third century source, bound with a belt and crucified. At the time of the writing, John had aged to such an extent that he did not expect to die a martyr's death.

The Great Commissions

Every Gospel has at least one account of a Great Commission. Matthew's account occurs in Galilee, while the other accounts occur in Jerusalem. It is possible of course that the Great Commission was given on several occasions in various places. All of the Great Commissions have the common theme of proclaiming Jesus' call to repent and believe in the Good News of God's Kingdom, which of course includes Jesus' resurrection as the long awaited King, who has now been crowned by being raised from the dead. The Disciples are now to become Apostles and continue what Jesus has started. They will be his physical presence in the world.

The Ascension of Jesus

The resurrection appearances lasted for 40 days, after which, Jesus ascended into Heaven. The Ascension took place on the Mount of Olives in Bethany as the disciples were discussing the Kingdom with the risen Jesus. They wanted to know when it was finally going to be established on earth. Jesus replied that no one knew except the Father. The Ascension affirms that the risen Jesus reigns as King, seated on the throne in Heaven. With his Ascension, a new era begins. In ten days, the promised Holy Spirit will be given, and the Church will be expected to carry out the wishes of its newly crowned King.

13. SEEKING CITIZENS FOR THE KING

The Commissioning

Since Jesus' primary message had been about the coming Kingdom of God (Mark 1:14-15), his disciples asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6) They expected Jesus to establish his Kingdom, making Jerusalem its capital. They were also hoping that the Jews would become the rulers, who would then conquer the Romans. They did not yet understand Jesus' definition of the Kingdom. They thought Jesus was going to rule on earth and did not realize that he was establishing a spiritual Kingdom.

Instead of promising political power to the disciples (pupils), who had now become apostles (ambassadors), Jesus promised them spiritual power. He told them that they were to become his witnesses. They were not being given spiritual power to rule over others, but to bear witness to the eternal Kingdom of God. This witness, according to Acts 1:8, was supposed to begin in Jerusalem and then spread to Judea, Samaria, and to the end of the earth, or the whole wide world.

Before the apostles were to proceed with their commission to witness, they were to first wait for the power of the Holy Spirit, which could only come after Jesus ascended into Heaven. The Ascension of Jesus took place 40 days after his Resurrection. What did his Ascension mean? It meant that while Jesus would no longer be physically present on earth, that his Spirit would be present throughout the whole world. If he established a political Kingdom in Jerusalem, people would have to go to Jerusalem to see him; but if his Spirit were alive throughout the world, then everyone could have fellowship with him at the same time.

Including the 11 disciples, Jesus mother and brothers, 120 of Jesus' followers gathered together in an upper room in the house of Mary, mother of John Mark, to observe Pentecost and pray for the Holy Spirit. Pentecost was the Jewish Holiday, which observed the coming of the Law to Moses and for Christians would become the Holiday on which they observed the coming of the Holy Spirit. While the disciples waited, they replaced Judas with Matthias. The primary qualification for Matthias was that he was acquainted with the life and death of Jesus and that he had seen the Risen Jesus with his own eyes.

Jerusalem

Pentecost: The Coming of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit gave birth to the Church in Jerusalem 50 days after Jesus was raised from the dead and 10 days after he ascended into Heaven. The signs of the presence of the Holy Spirit were three: (1) the rushing wind, (2) tongues of fire, and (3) speaking in other languages. Since there were Jews in Jerusalem from all over the world, the disciples spoke *unknowingly* in other languages, enabling Jews from other parts of the world to understand their message. This was in fulfillment of Joel 2:28, which says, "...your sons and your daughters will prophesy." The response of the crowd to what was happening

was to accuse the disciples of being drunk. Peter replied, saying that it was only 9:00 a.m., too early for them to be drunk with wine; but he admitted that they were intoxicated with the Holy Spirit.

Peter preached the first sermon. He told the crowd that they were observing the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy and that the Holy Spirit was for all who would receive it (Joel 2:28-32). In the main part of the sermon, Peter referred to four events in Jesus' life, which have become known as the *Kerygma* (proclamation): (1) the miracles, (2) the cross, (3) the fulfillment of prophecy, and (4) the Resurrection. At the end of the sermon, Peter concluded that God had made Jesus both King (Messiah) and LORD. Both titles had political implications, which would have been understood by everyone present. Calling Jesus *King* referred back to the Jewish expectation of a King in the lineage of King David, and calling Jesus *LORD* was an act of political defiance to Rome. Only Caesar was to be called LORD. When Peter finished preaching, the crowd cried, "Brothers, what should we do...." Peter answered them, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:37-38)

Three thousand people joined the Church on the first day of its existence. They did four things together. (1) They studied together. The Apostles taught them about Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. (2) They worshipped daily. Worship took place daily at the temple and in their homes. Sharing in the fellowship meals and prayers was their way of observing the Lord's Supper, which became part of their daily worship. Later on the Lord's Supper was observed once a week on Sunday. Sunday became their regular day of worship because Jesus was raised from the dead on a Sunday. (3) They witnessed through miracles. The miracles brought others into the Church, causing it to grow day by day. (4) They shared their wealth. Giving up their possessions, they shared with one another according to their needs. (Acts 2:42-47)

The First Leader: Peter

Peter emerges as the first leader. At the conclusion of his first sermon, 3,000 people joined the new Church. Accompanied by John, Peter entered the Temple area for prayer. A lame man, who was sitting at the Gate called Beautiful, begged Peter and John for some money. "I have no silver or gold," replied Peter in Acts 3:6, "but what I have I give you; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk." The man sprang to his feet and entered the Temple leaping and praising God. The first miracle had been performed. This led to Peter's second sermon, which was delivered from Solomon's Porch. He made the following five points: (1) The Crucifixion was and is a great sin, (2) the Resurrection gives us faith, (3) you acted in Ignorance, (4), repent of your sins, and (5) God came first to the Jews. The Sanhedrin liked neither the miracle performed nor the sermon preached. As a result both Peter and John were arrested. Even though they were arrested, another 5,000 people believed and joined the Church. In just a few days the numbers had swelled from 120 to more than 8,000. Having preached the first two sermons, Peter emerged as the clear leader, even though he and John had been arrested.

The Sanhedrin was the highest court among the Jews and it had the power to judge any Jew, just as it had judged Jesus. There were 71 members, and one of them, the High Priest was their leader. That man's name was Caiaphas, the same man who had

condemned Jesus. When Peter and John appeared before the Sanhedrin, the first question they were asked was, “By what power or by what name did you do this?” Peter replied, “...by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead.” The response of the Sanhedrin was that they should cease preaching. Peter and John were quick to reply: “...we cannot keep from speaking about what we have seen and heard.” Because they knew that Jesus was alive, they refused to heed the warning of the Sanhedrin; nevertheless, upon being released, they returned home to the others, where they gathered together to pray. The first written prayer of the Church can be found in Acts 4:24-30, but the most important verses are 29-30:

And now, Lord, look at their threats, and grant to your servants to speak your word with all boldness, while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus.

The Church knew that it would have to suffer and that it would be persecuted. It responded by praying for power. The Holy Spirit was given a second time. The Holy Spirit was not given so that the Church could avoid suffering, but so that its members might be empowered to endure it.

The First Philanthropist: Barnabas

Barnabas was not the only one who shared his possessions with the Church, but he did become one of the best known. He sold a field and gave the money to the Apostles. The money was used to help those in need and was at this time distributed personally by the Apostles.

The name *Barnabas* means “son of encouragement.” We know the following about Barnabas. He came from the Island of Cyprus and was a Levite. In the future we will see him introducing Paul to the Apostles, working with Paul in Antioch, and taking the first missionary journey to Asia Minor with Paul, and then going to the famous Jerusalem Conference. After the Jerusalem Conference there will be an argument and separation between Paul, Barnabas, and Barnabas’ cousin John Mark. Barnabas and John Mark may have taken a missionary journey together, but we have no record of it.

Having seen the good example of Barnabas, let us look briefly at the bad example of Ananias and Sapphira. Like Barnabas, they sold their property and gave the money to the Church; only, they withheld some of what they said that they gave. They lied about what they were doing. For this they were both struck dead. While this incident is difficult to understand, there are other Biblical stories like this, such as the striking dead of Aaron’s sons, Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 10:2), Achan (Joshua 7:25), and Uzzah (2 Samuel 6:7). The point being made here is that it does not pay to lie to God’s Holy Spirit.

The First Martyr: Stephen

As the Church began to expand, conflict arose between it and the Sanhedrin, the Jewish High Court. The Apostles were arrested a second time and told to stop their preaching of Jesus and the Resurrection. Since the Sadducees considered the idea of Resurrection a false teaching, it is clear that they were responsible for both arrests. They may have felt accused by Peter and the Apostles of crucifying Jesus. After all, they did play the major role in the religious trial, which condemned Jesus and sent him on to

Pilate for the political trial. Peter and the Apostles could not stop preaching. They viewed Jesus as the King of God's Spiritual Kingdom, who must be given primary allegiance. Earthly kings could only expect secondary allegiance. The conflict could only get worse. Gamaliel, a well-respected Pharisee, interceded, warning the Sanhedrin that they might be fighting against God himself. He mentioned two other Jewish leaders, Theudas and Judas, whose movement simply died out. The same will happen to the followers of Jesus if he is not the long-expected King. If he is, then no one can stop his followers, for the movement would be of God. No one can fight God and hope to succeed.

Preaching played such an important role in the Jerusalem Church that a plan was put in place to free the Apostles to devote full time to preaching. Seven men, full of the Holy Spirit, were chosen to oversee the distribution of food and money to those in need. Their names were Stephen, Philip, Prochoros, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus. The seven have been called *Deacons*, but the word is not used in the Book of Acts. It is clear that they did more than distribute food and money. Some of them, like Stephen preached sermons that incited opposition.

We do not know who Stephen was. Was he a Greek-speaking Jew, a Samaritan, or a Gentile? Who Stephen was might have been as important as what he said. One could expect the Sanhedrin to react negatively to a Samaritan or Gentile. At any rate, Stephen was arrested for the following three reasons: (1) blasphemy against Moses and God; (2) teaching against the Temple and the Law; and (3) claiming that Jesus would destroy the Temple and change the customs of Moses. Luke, the author of the Book of Acts, says that the accusations against Stephen were false, but then Luke was taking Stephen's side. The accusations were indeed serious and called for stern punishment. Stephen did not help matters when he brought his sermon to a close, accusing the Sanhedrin of persecuting the prophets, resisting the Holy Spirit, and murdering Jesus.

The Sanhedrin responded with great hostility. Its members did not have the authority to condemn Stephen to death, but in anger they took him out, threw him into a pit and dropped stones on him until he was dead. Stephen's last words were similar to those of Jesus on the cross. "Lord," he cried, "do not hold this sin against them." (Acts 7:60) The year was about 32 C.E., or two years after Jesus' crucifixion. The same Sanhedrin that condemned Jesus, killed Stephen, but there was a new member present on this day. His name was Saul and he was a Pharisee. Following Stephen's death, Saul attacked the Christian Church with vigor. He searched for Christians from house to house and took both men and women to jail. This began the first wave of persecution, causing many Christians to flee from Jerusalem.

Judea and Samaria

Philip

After Saul gave his approval to the stoning of Steven, many Christians in Jerusalem had to flee to other places for safety. One of those places was Samaria, where Philip went to preach. Acts 8:5-8 describes Philip's ministry there:

Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Christ there. When the crowds heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs he did, they all paid close attention to what he said. With shrieks, evil spirits came out of many, and many paralytics and cripples were healed. So there was great joy in that city.

There was one difficulty with Philip's ministry. Although people were healed, they were not receiving the Holy Spirit. This caused Peter and John to go to Samaria to help Philip. When a man named Simon saw how the Holy Spirit was given through the ministry of Peter and John, he tried to buy this power from them. This story is very important in the history of the Church. In later years, whenever someone tried to buy status or power in the Church, it was called the sin of Simony. This was done frequently in the early Church and is probably still being done today.

Philip is most known for his conversion of the Ethiopian Eunuch, who was a minister of the Queen (*Candace* means "Queen") of Ethiopia. We do not know whether this unnamed Eunuch was a proselyte Jew or simply a God-Fearer. What is known is that he went to Jerusalem to worship. While he was returning home, he was also reading from Isaiah 53, a passage that puzzled him greatly. Noticing his problem with the Isaiah passage, Philip began to explain that it was talking about Jesus. The response of the Eunuch was swift. He wanted to be baptized immediately and Philip baptized him. It seems as if the practice of baptism was not restricted to the Apostles, nor did it have to follow any lengthy teaching. After Philip baptized the Eunuch, he went home to Ethiopia and Philip continued preaching around Azotus and Caesarea. The latter city was Philip's home.

Saul (Paul)

Saul, whose name was later changed to Paul, pursued Christians wherever they went. On the way to Damascus, Syria, he had a tremendous religious experience, which is described three times in the New Testament. While the three accounts come up with different details, it must be said that the details are not as important as the complete transformation that took place as a result of Saul's encounter with Jesus. Saul had been greatly feared by the Church and when he arrived in Damascus, God called a man named Ananias to visit him. Ananias resisted at first because he was afraid of Saul, but he finally gave in, visited him and baptized him. This is the second time that a layperson baptized someone. The first was Philip's baptism of the Ethiopian Eunuch. Saul was baptized both with water and the Holy Spirit. Three things are important about Saul's conversion. First, he believed in the resurrection, secondly, he believed that this Good News was to be shared with all persons, and thirdly, he accepted the task of preaching this Good News to the Gentiles.

Before entering missionary service in Judea, Samaria, and eventually to the world, Saul went to Arabia. Where did he go? No one knows. A guess would be that he went to the capital city of Petra. What did he do? Perhaps he prayed and studied about what God wanted him to do. He stayed in Arabia for approximately three years. When he returned to Damascus he began preaching about Jesus as the long-expected King and Son of God. He preached mainly to Jews in the Synagogues, who were angered by his preaching. When they tried to kill him, Christian friends lowered him down from the city wall, using a basket to help him escape.

Saul fled from Damascus to Jerusalem, where he wanted to visit the Apostles, who were still afraid of him. Barnabas interceded for him, gaining him some acceptance. His time in Jerusalem was short, approximately 15 days. Greek speaking Jews were angered by his preaching, and believers thought it best to send him to Tarsus, which was Saul's home town. With a brief stopover in Caesarea, Saul returned to Tarsus, where he lived for the next 10 to 14 years. What he did there is not known, but during this time the Church enjoyed a time of peace and growth.

Peter

Saul was not the only one who reached out beyond Judaism. Peter preached to Jews and Gentiles in Lydda, Joppa, and Caesarea. After he healed a man in Lydda, who had been paralyzed for eight years, Christians in Joppa sent two men to get him. A woman named Tabitha had died. When Peter arrived, he knelt down beside her body and prayed. She got up, and news of her healing spread all over Joppa. Many people believed in the Lord, who could heal the paralyzed and raise the dead. While in Joppa, Peter lived in the house of Simon the Tanner, whose vocation was considered unclean.

Meanwhile, in Caesarea, the Roman capital for all of Judea, there lived a Roman army officer named Cornelius, who was a "God-Fearer." This means that he was neither baptized nor circumcised. He just believed in one God and supported the Jewish people. At 3:00 p.m. he had a vision in which he was told to send for Peter. Two of his servants and a soldier were sent to Joppa to fetch him. Peter also had a vision in which he saw a large sheet filled with unclean animals. He refused to eat them, but a voice said to him, "What God has made clean, you must not call profane." (Acts 10:15) This verse does not mean that Christians can now eat any kind of meat, but that God loves the Gentiles and considers them as clean as the Jews. Peter was being prepared for the three men who had come to take him back to Cornelius in Caesarea. When Peter arrived, Cornelius began to worship him, as if Peter himself were a god. Peter clarified his own vision to Cornelius, saying, "...God has shown me that I should not call anyone profane or unclean." (Acts 10:28) Six men accompanied Peter to the house of Cornelius, where Peter then preached the Good News to Cornelius and his many relatives and close friends. When Peter finished preaching, to his amazement, the Holy Spirit fell on all these Gentiles. Peter ordered that they be baptized with water as a symbol of what had just happened. This incident has been called the Day of Pentecost for the Gentiles. When Peter returned to Jerusalem, he had some explaining to do, for many questions were raised concerning the inclusion of Gentiles into the Church. Peter returned with six men and showed them what God was doing among the Gentiles.

Barnabas and Saul

Meanwhile, the Christians in Jerusalem sent Barnabas to lead the growing Christian community in Antioch, a large city with a terrible reputation for immorality. Antioch was the third city in the Roman Empire, following Rome and Alexandria in importance. It was in this city that the followers of Jesus were first called Christians. The Church in Antioch rapidly accepted both Jews and Greeks. Knowing that he would need help, Barnabas went to Tarsus to ask Saul to assist him. Both of them knew Greek and so they could teach Greeks as well as Jews. Barnabas and Saul worked together in Antioch for about one year.

Agabus, a New Testament prophet, went to Antioch and told them that there would be a large famine. The famine hit in about 46 C.E., when Claudius was the Roman Emperor. The Antioch Church responded with an offering for the Christians in Jerusalem; and Barnabas, Saul, and Titus were chosen to deliver it (Galatians 2:1). When they arrived, they discovered that King Herod Agrippa I had initiated a persecution of the Church, killing James, one of Jesus' inner circle, and imprisoning Peter in the Tower of Antonia, also known as the Barracks. Peter had been chained between two soldiers and guarded by another sixteen. An angel interceded, set him free, led him out of the jail, and left him alone in the street. Peter went directly to the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark. Rhoda answered the door, not believing what she saw, and ran to tell the others, leaving Peter standing in front of the locked door. After they let Peter in, he told the group to inform James, the brother of Jesus, who eventually became the most important leader in the Jerusalem Church.

When news of Peter's escape reached King Herod, he had all the guards killed, returned to Caesarea, where according to the historian Josephus, he died on his birthday, having been struck down by God and eaten by worms.

Barnabas and Saul finished their work in Jerusalem, which consisted of delivering a monetary gift to the Christians in Jerusalem to sustain them through the famine. They arrived after James' death and Peter's imprisonment and probably heard the above stories from the members of the Jerusalem Church. When Barnabas and Saul returned to Antioch, they took with them a young man named John Mark, who would eventually write *The Gospel According to Mark*.

14. SEEKING MORE CITIZENS FOR THE KING

To the Ends of the Earth

Including Paul and Barnabas, the Church in Antioch of Syria was blessed with five good leaders, Simeon, who may have been the man who carried Jesus' cross, Lucius, a teacher and prophet from Cyrene, and Manaen, a former member of King Herod's Court. It seemed good to the Holy Spirit to set apart two of those leaders, Paul and Barnabas, to set out on a missionary journey to Galatia. This would be the first of three missionary journeys, which would be followed by Paul's arrest, imprisonment, and eventual transfer to Rome.

The Mission to Galatia

Cyprus. Saul, Barnabas, and Barnabas' cousin, John Mark, set out on a missionary journey to Galatia in about 47 C.E. They went first to the Island of Cyprus, where they preached in the cities of Salamis and Paphos. In Paphos, the Governor, Sergius Paulus, was converted to Christianity. A magician, Bar-Jesus or Elymas tried to prevent the Governor from becoming a Christian, but his efforts failed. While on the Island, Saul changed his name to Paul. No reason is given. Perhaps it was because he was moving into a world with greater Roman influence. Paul was the Latin or Roman word for Saul.

Perga. When they arrived in Perga, John Mark decided to return home to Jerusalem. No reason is given, but we know that Paul was angered by John Mark's decision. At least two reasons have been suggested. The first has to do with Paul taking over leadership from Barnabas and the second with Paul's decision to take the mountainous route to Antioch.

Antioch. When Paul and Barnabas arrived in Antioch of Phrygia, they attended worship in the local Synagogue. The order of worship in Jewish Synagogues had six parts, which were: (1) the Shema, which was repeated in unison, (2) the Prayer, which was given by the leader, (3) the reading from the Law, (4) the reading from the Prophets, (5) the Sermon, and (6) the Benediction. Visitors were invited to speak following the reading from the Prophets. Paul took advantage of this custom and preached about Jesus, who had been raised from the dead. This would have divided the Synagogue because there would have been Jews following the belief of the Sadducees who opposed any such idea. Paul's message was not only aimed at the Jews, however, for Gentiles were present. The two missionaries were invited back to speak on the next Sabbath to a much larger crowd. This time they encountered intense opposition and were driven out of town by the devout women and the leading men of Antioch. They left, shaking the dust off their feet, leaving a small group of believers behind.

Other Cities. Paul and Barnabas visited Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe, before retracing their steps back to Antioch of Syria. They repeated their practice of preaching in the Synagogue service, meeting stiff opposition, but always leaving behind a small group of believers. Because they healed a crippled man in Lystra, the people thought they were two gods, Hermes and Zeus, and so they began to worship them. Paul and Barnabas replied, "We are mortals just like you...." (Acts 14:15) Troublemakers showed up from

Antioch and Iconium, leading the crowd to stone Paul and Barnabas. They were dragged to the edge of town and left for dead, but they picked themselves up and visited the small group of believers in every city where they had preached the Gospel. Elders were appointed from within the congregations to lead their people. Paul later wrote a letter to the Christians in Galatia. The letter was either written from Antioch in 49 C.E., or from Corinth in 55 to 56 C.E. At any rate, Galatians became the first New Testament book, written prior to any of the Gospels.

The Jerusalem Conference

The Church in Antioch of Syria was a mixture of Jews and Gentiles. Christians visiting there from Judea were horrified, especially those who had been Pharisees. They believed that the Gentiles could only become Christians by first obeying the Law of Moses. This meant that they would have to be circumcised. The issue became so heated in Antioch that the Church finally decided to send Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem to resolve the issue with the leadership there. The issue was: “Must Gentiles obey the Law of Moses, which is to ask, must they first become Jews before they can become Christians?” The primary symbol of obeying the Moasic Law was circumcision.

The meeting may have taken place in 49 C.E. at the home of John Mark. This was where the Church usually met in Jerusalem. James, the brother of Jesus, was the current leader, and so he led the meeting. Peter was the first to speak. He told the others how the Holy Spirit had come to Cornelius and his friends. None of these Gentiles had been circumcised. Peter also told the members of the Church how hard it was for the Jews to keep the Law of Moses. Barnabas and Paul shared with everyone how they had preached to Gentiles in Galatia and how they had responded to the Good News. When everyone had a chance to speak, James agreed with Peter, Barnabas, and Paul. He said that their teachings were also consistent with prophets such as Amos, Jeremiah, and Isaiah. The final decision was that Gentiles could become Christians without literal adherence to the Law of Moses, but that they had to abstain from three things: (1) food offered to idols, (2) immorality, and (3) drinking blood. In addition to these negatives, Paul tells us in Galatians 2:10 that “...they would have us remember the poor, which very thing I was eager to do.” This was certainly in line with the message of the prophets.

The Mission to Greece

When Paul and Barnabas decided to make a second missionary journey to Galatia (49-51 C.E.), they had a disagreement over John Mark. Barnabas wanted to take him with them, but Paul resisted, mainly because John Mark went home in the middle of the last trip. No resolution to the conflict could be reached and so Paul and Silas went to Galatia and on to Greece, and Barnabas and John Mark went to Cyprus. Both trips began around 49 C.E., but we are only able to follow Paul and Silas. Nothing is known about the journey of Barnabas and John Mark. We do know from the letters of Paul that the rift between Paul and John Mark was eventually healed.

Paul and Silas delivered a letter from the Jerusalem Conference to the Churches of Galatia. In Lystra, they picked up a young man named Timothy. Timothy was the son of a Greek father and a Jewish mother. His mother was Eunice and his grandmother was Lois (2 Timothy 1:5). Although the circumcision of Timothy was not required, Paul

circumcised Timothy. He probably figured that there would be less trouble with the Jews if Timothy bore their mark of faith. Setting out from Galatia, the three hoped to proclaim the Good News in Asia Minor, but the Holy Spirit seemed to be urging them to go elsewhere. While in Troas, the gateway to Europe, Paul had a vision in which he saw a man from Macedonia (northern Greece), begging him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” (Acts 16:9) They decided to go. In Acts 16:10, Luke, the author of Acts, begins to use the word “WE.” This means that Luke joined Paul, Silas, and Timothy in their mission to Greece.

Philippi. It was in Philippi where they established the first European Church. Although the usual strategy had been to preach in the Synagogue, in Philippi they went to the riverside, where several women gathered for prayer. A woman named Lydia listened to their message, believed, and was baptized. After she was baptized, she invited them into her home, which became the first meeting place of the European Church. Lydia’s home was large, for she was a seller of purple goods from Thyatira.

While in Philippi they encountered a troublesome slave girl, who was owned by some men who profited from her prophecies. Paul cast out her evil spirit, making these men very angry. The conflict ended with the arrest of Paul and Silas. The authorities did not know that they were Roman citizens. While in jail Paul and Silas prayed and sang hymns. An earthquake opened all the doors of the prison, making it possible for all the prisoners to escape. When the jailer discovered what had happened, he was afraid and tried to take his own life. He knew that he would be executed if his prisoners escaped. Paul and Silas prevented him from committing suicide by telling him that no one had escaped. This so impressed the jailer that he asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” They answered, “Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.” He and his whole family were then baptized. From this story we discern the basic essentials for salvation—belief in Jesus Christ as Lord. Baptism follows faith. We are not saved through the Sacrament of Baptism. Baptism is only a symbol of our faith. The next morning the Roman officials decided to free Paul and Silas, but they refused to leave the jail without an apology. Knowing that they had violated the Law, the officials apologized and set them free to return to Lydia’s house. When Paul, Silas, and Timothy left Philippi, Luke remained behind.

Athens. As Paul, Silas, and Timothy continued on to Thessalonica, the capital city of Macedonia and Beroea, starting small communities of believers, they also faced stiff opposition. Leaving Silas and Timothy behind in Beroea to strengthen the new Church, Paul went on to Athens, a much smaller city than Thessalonica, but an important city of learning and culture. People loved to discuss all forms of new philosophy there, where a building, the Areopagus (Mar’s Hill), had been dedicated for such discussions. Even though Paul was called a babbler, he was invited to present his new teaching, where it could be disputed.

Most of the people in Athens had great difficulty with Paul’s teaching on the resurrection. They believed in a soul, which separated from the body at death, but they found great difficulty in believing in the resurrection of the body after death. The body was to them a prison and the aim of life was to escape from it. In trying to communicate such a strange message, Paul quoted two of their own poets, the Cretan poet Epimenides,

who said, “In him we live and move and have our being,” and the Cilician poet Aratus, who said, “For we too are his offspring.” Paul was trying to present the Gospel in ways that the Greeks might understand it, but one might say, they understood him all too well. Only a few people believed Paul’s message in Athens. Paul was not very successful in Athens, but he did leave behind him a few believers, who eventually established a congregation.

Corinth. If Athens was the city of learning, Corinth was the city of sin. More than 1,000 prostitutes roamed the streets of Corinth. The main god in this city was Aphrodite (Venus) and she was known as the goddess of love. Paul met two Christians in Corinth, who had just been driven out of Rome. They were Aquila and Priscilla, who were husband and wife. They shared the tent-making trade with Paul, and so they all went into business together, supporting themselves. In the local Synagogue, they began teaching both Jews and Greeks that Jesus is the anointed King (Messiah).

Silas and Timothy joined them from Beroea, bringing with them a gift of money from the Philippian Church. Paul describes this gift in 2 Corinthians 11:8-9 and Philippians 4:15. It was about this time that Paul wrote his two letters to the Church in Thessalonica. The first letter may have been written in Athens, and the second in Corinth.

The Jews would not accept Paul’s teaching and argued constantly with him. It was for this reason that Paul went to live with Titius Justus, a Gentile, who lived next door to the Synagogue. Paul made it clear that he intended to preach mainly to the Gentiles (Acts 18:6). Crispus, the leader of the Synagogue, believed Paul’s message and was baptized. The result was a great deal of conflict, but the Church grew rapidly. Paul devoted more time to this congregation than any other. He ministered in Corinth for more than a year and a half, before leaving for Jerusalem and Antioch. On the way home, the group passed through Ephesus, leaving Priscilla and Aquila there to help nurture a new congregation. Silas and Timothy accompanied Paul to Jerusalem and then to Antioch.

The Mission to Ephesus

The third missionary journey was primarily to Ephesus (52-57 C.E.), although many other places were included in the journey. Paul, Timothy, and Titus began by visiting the Churches in Galatia and Phrygia. In the second missionary journey, the Holy Spirit had prevented them from going to Ephesus, the capital of Asia, but in this third journey, Ephesus became the primary object of their mission. Ephesus was one of the four largest cities in the Roman Empire. The other three cities were Rome, Antioch of Syria, and Alexandria of Egypt.

Paul was not the first Christian to work in Ephesus. At the end of his second missionary journey, he left Priscilla and Aquila in Ephesus, who worked together with a Christian missionary, Apollos, who came from Alexandria. Nothing is known about where and how Apollos was converted to Jesus Christ. Being very familiar with the Jewish Scriptures, Apollos began teaching that Jesus was the anointed King that the Jews had been expecting. Although he was a very skillful teacher, he lacked the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. Priscilla and Aquila taught Apollos the truth about the Holy Spirit, which he accepted gracefully. When Apollos desired to visit the Church in Greece,

they wrote a letter of introduction for him. In Greece, Apollos was a skillful debater, who taught everyone that Jesus really is the anointed King.

When Paul arrived in Ephesus he asked 12 new Christians if they had received the Holy Spirit since they believed. None of them knew anything about the Holy Spirit. These men may have been converted to Christianity under the ministry of Apollos. After he taught them about the Holy Spirit, Paul baptized them in the name of the Lord. What does this mean? The baptism of John meant repentance and water was a symbol of having been cleansed of sin. The baptism of Jesus meant that one received a new spirit. This new spirit gave people power to witness (Acts 1:8) and love (Romans 5:5b). When these men received this new spirit, they were so happy that they expressed their joy in ecstatic speech. They spoke in tongues, but not the same kind of tongues described at Pentecost in Jerusalem. In Jerusalem everyone understood what was being said. In Ephesus, no one understood.

Paul began preaching in the Synagogue to the Jews, but this lasted for only three months. They rejected his teaching. This caused him to turn to the Gentiles. There was a public place for such teaching in Ephesus. It was the Hall of Tyrannus, where anyone could teach from 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Paul taught in the Hall of Tyrannus for two years. Both Jews and Greeks became Christians as a result of his labor. God was so at work in Paul's ministry, that people took handkerchiefs and aprons from Paul, and all who touched them were healed from their diseases. Evil spirits were also cast out. This so impressed the seven sons of the Jewish Priest, Sceva that they tried to imitate Paul's ministry by casting out evil spirits in the name of Jesus. They were not successful. The evil spirits turned on them. What was the difference? Paul healed the sick and cast out demons through his faith in God, but the sons of Sceva tried to do these things through magic. They tried to make God obey their will; while Paul submitted himself to the will of God. When the people saw this difference, they brought all their magic books together and burned them. The value of these books was enormous. The Bible states their value in terms of 50,000 silver coins, each coin being valued at a day's wages for a common laborer.

Such success is not accomplished without opposition. That opposition came from a man named Demetrius, who feared the economic impact of Paul's success. The people of Ephesus, he feared, might stop worshipping Artemis (Diana), the fertility goddess of Ephesus. The Temple of Artemis was 340 feet long and 160 feet wide. It contained 100 marble pillars, which were 60 feet high and less than four feet apart. Inside the Temple was a stone image of Artemis, which had been made from a large meteorite. The meteorite had fallen from the sky and was about five feet long. Demetrius and his friends made silver models of the Temple and of the goddess Artemis. They feared that as people became Christians, they would no longer purchase these silver models. They were right. That is why Demetrius and the silversmiths were so against Paul. Their lucrative business of making silver images was about to decline. Trying to prevent an economic collapse, Demetrius and the other silversmiths led a crowd, opposing Paul. The economy of Ephesus was at stake.

The conflict took place at the theater in Ephesus, which could hold more than 25,000 people. Two friends of Paul's, Gaius and Aristarchus, were taken forcibly to the theater.

Paul was not taken to the theater at the same time because they could not find him. When Paul heard of what had happened to his friends, he wanted to immediately go to their side, but members of the congregation would not allow it. They feared that Paul would be killed. Two attempts were made to disperse the gathering crowd. A man named Alexander made the first attempt, but he was not successful because the crowd recognized him as a Jew. That is why they cried out for more than two hours: “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!” The city clerk made the second attempt. He simply wanted to prevent a riot. He instructed Demetrius to take his problem to the proper authorities. The city clerk must have been a very powerful man in Ephesus, for when he told the crowd to go home, everyone went home. He must have been of the same race and faith as the crowd.

Luke did not write about all of Paul’s experiences in Ephesus. We know that Paul was imprisoned for a brief time in Ephesus and that Priscilla and Aquila risked their lives for him (Romans 16:3-4 and 7). Paul also wrote about having to fight with beasts in Ephesus (1 Corinthians 15:32). The Letters to Philippi, Colossae, and Philemon may have been written from an Ephesian prison, but of this we cannot be certain. They might also have been written from Rome. One letter that was certainly written from Ephesus was the letter to the Corinthian Church. The Corinthian letter was inspired by Apollos, who returned to Ephesus to inform Paul of the immorality of the Corinthian Church. Paul responded with a blistering letter, delivered in person by Titus. This letter can be read in 2 Corinthians 6:14—7:1.

Paul visited the Corinthian church on his way to Jerusalem. After visiting with them for three months, Paul wanted to go straight to Antioch of Syria, but having learned of a plot against his life, decided to go first to Macedonia and Troas. In Troas he preached his famous sermon, which lasted so long, that a young man named Eutychus fell asleep and fell three stories to the ground. Everyone thought he was dead. When they discovered that he was not dead, they all returned to the room to continue worship and the Lord’s Supper. From this incident we know that the worship of the early Church included two parts: the sermon and the Lord’s Supper.

Not wanting to stop at Ephesus, Paul made a brief stop at Miletus. He was in a hurry to get to Jerusalem to observe the Day of Pentecost. Going to Ephesus would have involved changing ships in Miletus and the possibility of more riots over his presence. Both of these things would have delayed his departure for Jerusalem, where he wanted to deliver an offering to the poor (Romans 15:25-32). There, on the seashore, Paul told the Ephesian elders that he would never see them again. He closed his sermon with the only words of Jesus recorded outside of the four Gospels: “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” (Acts 20:35) Paul and the Ephesian elders knelt down and prayed together, then, they hugged and kissed one another.

The Holy Spirit warned Paul that something would happen to him in Jerusalem. Paul was ready for prison or any other hardship. This is what made his separation from the Ephesian elders so painful. This does not mean the end of correspondence, for Paul did write a letter to the Ephesians. There might have been other correspondence as well, but we have no record of it. As far as we know, this was Paul’s last personal contact with the Ephesian congregation. As Paul continued on his journey to Jerusalem he was warned not to go there by Christians in Tyre and by the prophet Agabus in Caesarea. Paul’s response

to Agabus was, "...I am ready not only to be bound but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." (Acts 20:13) After having stayed with Philip, one of the seven deacons, who had been chosen along with Stephen, Paul went to Jerusalem, where he was taken to the home of Mnason. Mnason came from Cyprus and was now living in Jerusalem. Perhaps the two had met in Cyprus, when Paul preached there, but we have no record of this. All we know is that Mnason offered a room to Paul and his companions in Jerusalem. With Paul's arrival in Jerusalem, the journey to Ephesus ends.

Imprisonment in Jerusalem and Caesarea

Imprisonment in Jerusalem

When Paul arrived in Jerusalem, James, the brother of Jesus, received him. James, who had become the head of the Jerusalem Church, informed Paul that the Jewish Christians were deeply troubled by him. They feared that Paul was rejecting the Law. For this reason James advised Paul to take the Nazirite Vow along with four others. Paul was to pay all expenses. Having done this before, it did not seem to trouble Paul and so he, along with four others, took the vow. For the next 30 days they could not eat meat, drink wine, or cut their hair. After the month was over, Paul had to pay for the sacrifices, which included a lamb, a ram, bread, cakes, oil, meat, and a cereal offering. When they finally cut their hair, the hair was to be burned on the altar, together with the other sacrifices.

Trophimus, an Ephesian Gentile, was not one of the four men, but some Asian Jews saw Trophimus with Paul. They assumed that Paul had taken Trophimus into the Temple, which was forbidden. The Asian Jews immediately accused Paul of defaming Judaism, the Law, and the Temple. These were serious charges. The people of Jerusalem were so stirred up by these charges that they wanted to carry out the death penalty against Paul. Claudius Lysias, the commander of the Roman army, stopped them by arresting Paul.

When Paul asked for permission to speak, the Roman Military Commander, Claudius Lysias, was surprised to hear him speak in Greek. He thought Paul was an Egyptian. The name of the Egyptian, for whom Paul was mistaken, was Sicarii, which means "dagger men." Sicarii and his companions stabbed their victims, which gave rise to the movement's reputation as violent assassins. When the commander gave Paul permission to speak to the crowd, Paul told them that he was a Jew from Tarsus and that he had studied in Jerusalem under the famous Gamaliel. After finishing his Pharisaic studies, he defended the Jewish Faith against the first Christians. He even persecuted them and asked permission from the Sanhedrin to pursue and arrest those who fled to Damascus. On the way to Damascus, he encountered Jesus and was converted to the faith he had set out to destroy. Finally, Paul admitted that in addition to preaching to the Jews, he had also preached to the Gentiles. This, he said, was the will of God.

When the crowd rejected Paul's defense of himself, Claudius had Paul taken into the Fort to be beaten to find out why the Jews desired to kill him. After they tied him up, Paul asked, "Is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen who is uncondemned?" (Acts 22:25) When the officer heard this, he went straight to Claudius. While Paul was a citizen by birth, Claudius had to purchase his citizenship. Because it was unlawful to beat a Roman citizen, Paul was not beaten, but Claudius was still anxious to know why the Jews wanted him dead.

Paul was then taken before the Sanhedrin, where he began to speak, but the High Priest ordered that he be struck on the mouth. Paul responded with very coarse words. When they reminded Paul that he was speaking to the High Priest, he immediately apologized. Knowing that both Phraisees and Sadducees made up the Sanhedrin, Paul set out to divide them. He claimed that they opposed him because he preached about the resurrection of the dead. The Pharisees refused to accuse him, while the Sadducees continued their opposition. The argument became so vehement that Claudius had to take Paul away from them.

As Paul sat in prison on the following night, the Lord informed him in a dream that he would bear witness for his faith in Rome, the capital of the Empire. Meanwhile, 40 Jews made a vow that they would neither eat nor drink until they had killed Paul. Paul's nephew, who lived in Jerusalem, heard of the plot against Paul's life. When he told Paul about the plot, Paul sent him to Claudius, who decided to send Paul to Felix in Caesarea. In order to protect Paul, Claudius selected 200 soldiers, 70 horsemen, and two spearmen to accompany him. Paul was taken directly to Antonius Felix, who was known as a very cruel leader, but was kind enough to Paul. The soldiers informed Felix that Paul was a Roman citizen and that his accusers were on the way from Jerusalem.

Imprisonment in Caesarea

Ananias, the High Priest, went to Caesarea with some elders and a Lawyer named Tertullus, who formally accused Paul of being a troublemaker, a leader of the Nazarenes, and a defiler of the Temple. For these three things, they wanted Paul punished. In defending himself, Paul denied that he was a troublemaker opposed to the Law; indeed, he was a Christian who believed both in the Law and the Prophets. The Jews, Paul claimed, opposed him because of his belief in the Resurrection of the dead.

Felix and his Jewish wife Drusilla called Paul in to listen to him for a second time. He told Paul that he was waiting for Claudius Lysias to come from Jerusalem before passing judgment on him. Two years passed and Lysias never appeared. Felix really wanted Paul to pay him a bribe, but Paul refused. During these two years many of Paul's friends, such as Luke, Timothy, Aristarchus, and Philip visited him, taking care of his personal needs.

The Jews were as frustrated with Felix as was Paul. When they informed Nero of the corruption of Felix's administration, Nero ordered Felix out of Caesarea, replacing him with Porcius Festus. This happened in 59 C.E., while Paul was still imprisoned in Caesarea. Festus was a man who loved justice, but he found it difficult to govern the Jews. Three days after becoming the new Governor, he went to Jerusalem to discuss Paul's situation with the Jews. The Jews continued to accuse Paul of being against their Law, their Temple, and against Caesar himself. They wanted him tried in Jerusalem. Festus recommended a trial in Jerusalem, and even offered to be the judge to make it fair, but Paul knew that he could never obtain a fair trial in Jerusalem. Not knowing what else to do, Paul made his famous statement, "...I appeal to the emperor." (Acts 25:11) This meant that Festus was under obligation to send Paul directly to Rome. As a Roman citizen, Paul had a right to be heard by Nero himself. The appeal seems to be irreversible. Paul had to go to Rome, which is precisely what Paul dreamed of doing.

Before he could send Paul to Rome, Herod Agrippa II, the great grandson of Herod the Great, and Bernice went to Caesarea to welcome Porcius Festus. Festus asked Agrippa II for help. Festus was a Roman citizen, who found it difficult to understand the accusations made against Paul. Since Agrippa II was Jewish, perhaps he could clarify the issues. Agrippa II replied, "I would like to hear the man myself." (Acts 25:22) Festus arranged for such a meeting. Many important people attended the meeting. They were Festus, Agrippa II, Bernice, the military chiefs, and all the leading men of Caesarea. Paul made a remarkable defense, telling of his life as a Jew, his conversion to Christ, and his ministry to both Jews and Gentiles. In the midst of Paul's defense, Festus shouted at him, "You are out of your mind, Paul! Too much learning is driving you insane!" (Acts 26:24) Paul then tried to explain his story to Agrippa II, and invited everyone present to become a Christian. No one accepted the invitation, but they all agreed that he had done nothing for which he should be condemned. They would have set him free, but because Paul appealed to the Emperor, Festus had no choice but to send him to Rome. Thus the saying of Jesus was to be fulfilled. In Matthew 10:18, Jesus said, "...and you will be dragged before governors and kings because of me, as a testimony to them and the Gentiles."

The Journey to Rome

The Journey

Paul was sent to Rome in August of 59 C.E. Julius, a centurion in the Augustan Cohort, was chosen to guard Paul and a few other prisoners. Aristachus and Luke accompanied Paul, but they were not prisoners. Because of the rough winds, they hugged the shoreline, sailing around the northern side of the Island of Cyprus. They changed ships in Myra. Aristarchus might have gone on to Rome with the original ship, which would explain why members of the Roman Church knew that Paul was coming. This however is only conjecture, for the Scripture does not say this. Aristarchus is not mentioned again in this journey, but we do hear from him again in Rome. The new ship, on which we find Paul and Luke, had come from Alexandria and was carrying wheat to Rome. When they reached Cnidus, they decided to go around the southern side of the Island of Crete. They believed that they could avoid the bad winds on the southern side, but they still encountered a great deal of difficulty. Finally, they arrived in Fair Havens (Crete).

Because they spent too much time in Fair Havens, it became too late for them to make the journey to Rome safely. Everyone agreed, but Paul warned the group to spend the winter in Fair Havens. The captain and owner of the ship wanted to get to Phoenix, which was a much nicer port; hence, they left for Phoenix in October of 59 C.E. They never made it. A storm arrived, forcing them southward. When they passed the small Island of Cauda, they tried to strengthen their ship by tying it with ropes so that it would not break apart. This was a very difficult task, for their ship was about 140 feet long, 36 feet wide, and 33 feet deep. The storm continued, forcing them to throw their cargo and tackle overboard. Everyone expected that they would sink and be killed. An angel appeared to Paul and told him that although the ship would be destroyed, not one person would die. It was God's will that Paul stand before Caesar to witness to his faith.

As the ship drifted towards the Syrtis, great fear gripped the crew. There were 276 men on board, who had not eaten for 14 days. Some of the sailors feared that the ship was going to sink and so they tried to escape in a small boat. Julius and some soldiers prevented this by cutting the small boat free and setting it adrift. After eating a final meal, they dumped the rest of the wheat into the sea. When they came close to the small Island of Malta, they tried to guide the boat to shore. The soldiers recognized that the boat was going to fall apart and so they prepared to kill all the prisoners. Julius prevented this and gave instructions on how to get to shore safely. Those who could swim were to go first. Those who could not swim were to hang on to a piece of the ship. All of them reached shore safely.

The natives were friendly and so they lived on the Island of Malta for three months. During that time two important events took place. First, a snake bit Paul's hand. The natives believed that this happened because Paul was a murderer, but when he did not die, they thought he was a god. Paul did not discourage their deification of him like he did in Lystra, but this does not mean that he encouraged it. Secondly, Paul healed the father of Publius, the chief of the Island. After that many others came to Paul for healing. Luke probably helped, for he was a physician. Paul and Luke so endeared themselves to the natives that when they got ready to leave, the natives gave them whatever they needed for their journey to Rome.

They departed from Malta in a ship from Alexandria, which was named the *Twin Gods* (or brothers). The names of these twin gods were *Castor* and *Pollux*, two gods thought to be sons of Zeus. Sailors revered these gods. That is why the ship was named for them. On the way to Rome they stopped at Syracuse, Rhegium, Puteoli, the Market of Appius, and Three Inns. Christians in Rome heard of Paul's coming and met him in the Market of Appius and Three Inns. When Paul arrived in Rome, he was allowed to live in his own apartment, a kind of house arrest. One soldier was appointed to guard him.

Imprisonment and Death

While in Rome, Paul experienced two imprisonments. In the first one, which was the house arrest, he called Jewish leaders together in order to explain why he was a prisoner. He told them how he had been arrested in Jerusalem and imprisoned in Caesarea for preaching about Jesus. The Jews were interested in what Paul had to say, for many Jews had become Christians. Some of the Jews accepted Paul's message; many others did not. When they left Paul they were all arguing among themselves. The message about Jesus as the long expected anointed King was dividing Judaism, which resulted in much criticism of the growing group of Christians. This first imprisonment lasted for approximately two years, during which time Paul had many visitors, including Luke, Aristarchus, Timothy, Tychicus, Epaphroditus, John Mark, and Onesimus. It was during this imprisonment that Paul wrote four of his famous letters from prison—Philippians, Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon. Epaphroditus carried his letter to Philippi. Tychicus carried the letters to Ephesus, Colossae, and Philemon. Onesimus, a runaway slave, helped Tychicus carry the letters to Colossae and Philemon. Philemon was Onesimus' master. Paul sent Onesimus home, but not without reminding Philemon how much he was indebted to Paul. Paul did not attack the institution of slavery head on, but he planted the seeds that undermined it.

Paul was released from his first imprisonment around 62 C.E. No one came from Jerusalem to accuse him; therefore, he was released. Although we have no record of additional missionary journeys, Paul probably made two more journeys. First, he may have gone to Spain, for this was his overwhelming desire. Secondly, he may have returned to visit the churches in Ephesus and Colossae. We know that he intended to go there, and some of the early Church leaders imply that he did show up again in these places.

Following a large fire in Rome, the Christians were accused of starting it. Nero had accidentally started the fire, but he blamed the Christians. This resulted in the arrest of Christian leaders, including Peter and Paul. This would have been Paul's second arrest and imprisonment in Rome, which also resulted in his martyrdom. Peter, however, was the first to be executed. According to one story, Peter tried to run away. As he was leaving Rome, he saw Jesus going towards Rome. Peter said, "Where are you going Lord?" Jesus replied, "To Rome, to be crucified again." After Peter heard that, he returned to Rome, where he was arrested. When they condemned him to die on a cross, he asked them to crucify him upside down because he was not worthy of dying like Jesus. Paul was also condemned to die, but his death came much more quickly. Because he was a Roman citizen, he was beheaded, a much more humane kind of execution. Paul did not have to suffer the slow and painful death of crucifixion, which could take up to three days. Death for Paul was instant.

15. FINAL ESTABLISHMENT OF THE KINGDOM

The Background

With most of the Apostles dead, the Church faced an uncertain future. Paul had tried to prepare the Church for the coming persecution by writing letters to them. If Christians were going to be imprisoned, stoned to death, crucified, or beheaded, then they needed to be clear about what they believed and why. This was the purpose for most of the letters in the New Testament, some written by Paul, the rest by some of the other Apostles or by unknown persons. Two conclusions were clearly drawn. The first was that Jesus is the long expected King (Messiah) and that he is unique. He is not simply one Jewish leader, among many, nor is he an angel from God. He is Lord of earth, heaven, and all creation; hence, he is Lord of the Church and of every individual in it. His teachings are to be followed. The second conclusion was that Jesus was fully human. He was not a man pretending to be God, nor was he God pretending to be a man. The affirmation was that Jesus is both fully divine and fully human. Colossians 1:15-16 sums up what was believed about Jesus:

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him.

One of the earliest confessions of the Christian faith can be found in Roman 10:9, where Paul concluded: "...if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."

After the deaths of Peter and Paul, the world for Jews and Christians became more difficult. In 70 C.E. the Romans, under Titus, captured and destroyed Jerusalem. Revolt against the Romans proved to be futile. A group of Zealots held out for another three years in the rock fortress called Masada, but in 73 C.E., the Romans built a ramp up the side of Masada and broke through the walls. Upon entering they found that of the 960 occupants all but 7 women and children had been killed in a suicide pact. They preferred death to Roman enslavement. Masada marks the end of Jewish opposition to Rome.

Christians were not any better off than Jews. Both expected persecution, enslavement, and death in a Roman world. The Book of Revelation was written to comfort Christians in this most difficult period of history. Portions of the Book were written around 70 C.E., but the book was not completed until approximately 90 C.E. By this time the Apostle John had been exiled to the Island of Patmos, off the coast of Asia Minor. The Romans used this Island for political banishment. On this Island John described his famous vision of the end of history and the final establishment of the Kingdom of God. His purpose was to give hope to those Christians facing persecution and death. His message was that through Jesus Christ, God would defeat all his enemies, including Satan himself, and reward his faithful people with the blessings of a new heaven and a new earth.

The Message to the Churches

The Book of Revelation begins with the message that Jesus, who is the only King and Lord, is coming; and when he comes, he will make everything right. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the “beginning” and the “end;” the one, who is, who was, and who is to come. This is an expansion of God’s name as it was given in Exodus 3:14, where God said to Moses, “I am Who I Am.”

The first vision of John is that of Jesus, the King standing in the midst of seven churches, symbolized as lamp stands. Two questions come to mind as one visualizes Jesus standing there. First, these Churches are highly valued, for the lamp stands which symbolize them are as priceless as gold. Their function is to give off light (Matthew 5:14-16). Secondly, these churches are connected not by Apostolic Succession or Government or Polity, but by the living presence of the Risen Jesus in their midst. Jesus is dressed as a King to remind the Churches who he is. He is the King of the coming Kingdom, which will ultimately be established.

Only seven churches are named, but they represent the strengths and weaknesses of all churches. We can see our own church in one or more of these churches. Let us examine those strengths and weaknesses.

Ephesus

Ephesus had a rich tradition of Christian leadership, beginning with the Apostle Paul and continuing with Timothy, Priscilla and Aquila, Apollos, and ending with John himself. The church is commended for sound teaching and resistance to false teachers. Christians in Ephesus resisted such false teachers like the Nicolaitans, who felt free to eat food offered to idols and practice immorality in the name of religion. In spite of the church’s strong faith, it suffered from the absence of love. It had abandoned its first love, a serious charge indeed, for without love, faith amounts to nothing (1 Corinthians 13:1-3). There is only one thing for this church to do and that is to repent and to restore love or lose its lamp stand—its status as a church.

Smyrna

Two churches were not condemned for anything. The first church was in Smyrna and the other one was in Philadelphia. Christians in Smyrna lived in poverty and faced intense suffering for their faith. They were persecuted not only by the Romans; but, by misguided Jews. Their suffering will only last ten days, not a lengthy time. Those who persevere will be given a Crown of Life more glorious than the Crown of Smyrna, a reference to the pagan Temples in Smyrna.

Pergamum

A major center for emperor worship was Pergamum, where there were shrines to Zeus, Athena, Dionysus, and Asclepius. Some of the pagan temples demanded that Christians worship the Roman Emperor, but there was great resistance in the Pergamum church, led by a man named Antipas. Tertullian says that Antipas was slowly roasted to death in a bronze kettle during the reign of Domitian. They were trying to force him to profess Caesar as Lord, but he refused to deny Jesus, his Lord and King. Most Christians in Pergamum held fast to the Lord’s name and their faith; although, there were some who

held to the teachings of Balaam and the Nicolaitans. Both groups were accused of “idolatry” and “immorality.” Because of these two groups, there was a great deal of immorality in the church. Only the church in Corinth rivaled Pergamum in its immorality. The only solution is to repent and imitate those Christians who have remained faithful. Most congregations have some people who are faithful.

Thyatira

Thyatira was a city of trade guilds and the home of Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. Since the various pagan temples in Thyatira were related to the trade guilds, we become aware of the fact that an economic price had to be paid for faithfulness. The real challenge to faith originates in the places where people earn the money they need to live. The people of this congregation were known for their love, faith, service and patient endurance. Their latter works exceeded their former. In spite of all these good things, they were too tolerant, putting up with the likes of a Jezebel and the Nicolaitans. Idolatry and immorality need to be eliminated, not tolerated.

Sardis

Nothing good is said of the congregation in Sardis, except that there exists within this “dead” congregation a “faithful few.” There are a few who have not “soiled their garments.” While this church had a reputation for being alive, it is accused of being dead. Its main problems were apathy and indifference. It had fallen asleep. The congregation is warned that the Lord will come like a thief in the night. Since they will not know when he will come, they better prepare themselves for his coming.

Philadelphia

Like the congregation in Smyrna, Philadelphia is not condemned. Everything said about this congregation is positive. Christians in Philadelphia have “kept the word” and “not denied the Lord’s name.” They live up to the meaning of their city, “brotherly love.” Their faithful witness will bear much fruit.

Laodicea

The city of Laodicea was known for its black wool and carpets, banking, and its famous medical center. Although it lacked an adequate water supply, a stone aqueduct brought water from Hierapolis, some six miles away. Laodicea was the most affluent of the seven cities. One might have expected the most from the Christians of Laodicea, but instead, they offered the least. Nothing good is said about this congregation. Like its water, after it has traveled six miles from Hierapolis, the congregation is good for nothing, but to be spit out. The congregation was neither hot nor cold; and although it lived in prosperity, it was spiritually poor. The decline of this church may well be related to its affluence.

Judgment on The Earth

In the second major section of the Book of Revelation, the churches are warned and prepared for the impending judgment on earth, which will come in the form of seven seals, seven trumpets, and seven plagues. With each series of seven, judgment intensifies.

Vision of God as Creator

Before judgment on earth is described, a vision of God as Creator and God as Redeemer is given. In the first vision we are taken into the throne room of God, where God is surrounded, by precious gems and a rainbow. The precious gems symbolize the glory of God's presence and the rainbow reminds us of God's covenant with Noah (Genesis 9:16) and Ezekiel's bow (Ezekiel 1:28). This vision is a reminder to faithful Christians that as mighty as the Emperor of Rome is, his throne room cannot be compared to God's.

The vision then focuses on 24 elders and the four living creatures that surround the throne. The 24 elders represent the 12 sons of Jacob and the 12 disciples of Jesus, that is, all of God's faithful. They are dressed in white and wear golden crowns, which they cast before God.

The four living creatures are angelic beings, which represent humanity and the beasts—all of living creation; hence, they bear the faces of a lion (mightiest of the wild beasts), an ox (mightiest of the domestic animals), a man (mightiest of all living beings) and an eagle (mightiest of the birds). They are similar to the four winged cherubim of Ezekiel (Ezekiel 10:20) and the six winged Seraphim of Isaiah (Isaiah 6:2-3). The Cherubim were responsible for guarding the tree of life and the Seraphim were responsible for praising God.

The four living creatures sing the great Sanctus of Isaiah 6:3 and the Alpha and Omega affirmation of Revelation 1:8 and 4:8). They never cease to sing it. This overshadows the title, "Our Lord and God" claimed by the Roman Emperor, Domitian, for himself. The 24 elders join them by casting their golden crowns before God, worshipping and exalting him as creator and king of the universe.

Vision of Jesus as Redeemer

In God's right hand was a scroll with writing on both sides, which contained the whole sweeping history and destiny of creation, but it was sealed with seven seals. Who is worthy enough to open them? The worthy one is neither the Lion of Judah (Genesis 49:9), nor the Root of David (Isaiah 11:1), but the Sacrificial Lamb (Isaiah 53:7). This is no ordinary lamb, for it possesses seven horns (all powerful) and seven eyes (all seeing). This image stands at the center of the Book of Revelation. This little Lamb has the scroll! Neither the Emperor nor the Devil can make sense of the scroll, nor can they control history. Jesus as the Sacrificial Lamb of God holds history in his hands. He alone can open the seals on the scroll of destiny, for he alone is worthy.

As the Sacrificial Lamb moves before the throne to take the scroll, the four living creatures and the 24 elders bow down before him and sing a new song. This new song has deep roots in the Old Testament Psalms. This song identifies those who have been redeemed, those who come from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. The songs of praise sung previously were sung about God the Creator, but this new song is about Jesus the Redeemer. The response to both is universal praise and worship. This Sacrificial Lamb is worthy of complete adoration. Millions and millions of angels worship him, as do every creature in heaven and on earth. The four living creatures cried, "Amen" and the

24 elders fell down and worshipped. The seals are about to be opened by the Sacrificial Lamb of God, the Redeemer, who has taken away the sins of the world.

Three Sequences of Seven

Following the visions of God as Creator and Jesus as Redeemer, John has a vision of three sequences of seven. The purpose of these three sequences of seven is to soften the evil persons and nations that make up society in order to prepare them for the end of history. They concern seals, trumpets, and bowls, all of which merge into one another. The opening of the seventh seal, for example, is the beginning of the blowing of the first trumpet. We are looking at one major period of judgment, approached from three different viewpoints, each one increasing the intensity of judgment. All three accounts cover the same climactic event. They all close with the end of this world and the beginning of the reign of God. Each series has its own theme and describes the final days from its own point of view. It is like looking down at a lobby from three different staircases. The views are similar, but different. The lobby is the same. Below is a list of the three sequences of seven:

Seven Seals Seven Trumpets Seven Bowls of Wrath

White Horse	Hail and Fire	On the Earth
Red Horse	Burning Mountain	On the Sea
Black Horse	Falling Star	Into the River
Pale Horse	Sun, Moon, and Stars	On the Sun
Faithful Martyrs	Locusts	On the Beast
Day of Wrath	Four Angels and Horses	On the Euphrates
Interlude	Interlude	No Interlude
Silence in Heaven	Messiah on the Throne	Into the Air

The intensity of judgment increases in each sequence of seven. In the first sequence, for example, the pale horse symbolizes the killing of one-fourth of the earth's population. Its destructive power is limited. In the second sequence of seven, natural and demonic forces destroy one-third of nature and humanity. While the devastation is extensive, it is not total. In the final sequence of seven, the destruction is complete, preparing the way for the Kingdom of Heaven.

The First Interlude

Following the first two sequences of seven are interludes. Prior to the opening of the seventh seal, Christians are comforted with a vision of the 144,000 and the Great Multitude. The purpose of this interlude is to assure God's people that they will be properly marked and protected from the coming judgment. The marking of the 144,000 refers to the sum of 12,000 from each of the tribes of Israel. Twelve is a perfect number and the twelve tribes together refer to completeness. It refers to the total number of the faithful who respond to Christ rather than some literal number. Those being marked are not promised freedom from suffering and death; they are only assured that they belong to God and will be protected in the final judgment. The vision of the great multitude is similar to the 144,000. They are the ones who will endure the great tribulation, which lies just ahead. This multitude of the faithful will be made up of people from every nation, race, and language. They will have to endure persecution in the most critical period of

human history. Their white robes symbolize “righteousness” and their palm branches “victory.” They will not be forgotten. The Lamb will “wipe away every tear from their eyes.” (Revelation 7:17 and 21:4)

The Second Interlude

In the interlude following the sixth trumpet, we have visions of the little scroll and two witnesses. These visions prepare us for a description of the characters that will be in the final conflict and the beginning of the seven bowls of wrath. When these bowls are poured out, there will be no more interludes. In the first vision the emphasis is clearly on the little scroll in the angel’s hand, which is a prophecy of doom. The angel, however, is an angel of glory and light. His feet are planted over land and sea, symbolizing his power over and relationship to the earth. The angel commands John to eat the little scroll. It tastes sweet in the mouth because it is God’s Word, and those who respond positively will be part of God’s Kingdom; but it leaves a bitter taste in the stomach because one cannot find joy in proclaiming terrible judgments on those who resist and reject God. One ought not to find joy in having to make such pronouncements, necessary as they are.

In the second vision John is given the task of measuring the Temple and the altar. Measuring symbolizes the judgment of God in both the positive and the negative senses. Judgment includes reward as well as punishment. Everything is measured but the outside court, which is given over to the nations, who will trample over the holy city for 42 months or three and one-half years (a brief time). At the same time, two witnesses, two lamp stands, and two olive trees will be given power to prophesy during this brief time of intense persecution. The two witnesses represent Moses, who prophesied against slavery, and Elijah, who prophesied against idolatry. The beast or the antichrist kills them, but God raises them up. The two lamp stands symbolize the churches and the two olive trees symbolize the people of God. God’s people, especially their leaders, would read these words and think of themselves and their own fate. They would identify themselves with these two witnesses. Is this to be their tragic end? No! After three and one-half days, a breath of life from God would enter into them and they would stand upon their feet. At the same time a great earthquake will destroy a tenth of the city and 7,000 people.

The Characters

As the last trumpet blows, signaling the beginning of the pouring out of God’s bowls of wrath, we are introduced to the characters, the woman and the dragon, the two beasts, and the followers of the lamb and the seven angels.

The Woman and the Dragon. The woman has twelve stars on her head, which represent the twelve tribes of Israel. The point being made is that Israel has given birth to the anointed King, who in turn has given birth to the Church. The offspring of the woman is the Church, which finds itself pursued by the dragon, which Michael and his angels threw out of heaven. The dragon has seven heads crowned with diadems and ten horns, which symbolize his power on earth. The Church can expect to be persecuted by the dragon, but God promises that the time of suffering will be brief, three and one-half years or 1,260 days. In spite of the dragon’s immense power, he still operates under limitations. His tail, for example, was only able to sweep down one-third of the stars from heaven. The dragon is clearly Satan or the Devil.

The Two Beasts. The dragon gave his power to two beasts, the first of which comes out of the sea, which was an evil place to the Jews. This beast has ten horns and seven heads and represents the evil power of Rome. The ten horns refer to the ten Roman emperors who had ruled in the first century. The seven heads represent the seven outstanding ones. Three of them ruled for only a short period of time. In describing the beast, John notes that one of the heads has a mortal wound, but that the wound has been healed. This is a reference to Nero who had died, but was thought to have returned in Domitian. This first beast clearly symbolizes Roman Power.

The second beast is the cult of emperor worship, which was a political move to unify the nation and require loyalty to the emperor. After engaging in an emperor worship ritual, which consisted of throwing a pinch of incense on the altar and declaring Caesar as Lord, one was free to worship other gods. Refusing to perform this act of worship was the same as committing an act of treason. Christians could only confess Jesus as Lord, and so they refused to worship the emperor.

John identified this second beast with the number 666 or 616. Since Latin and Hebrew letters also had numerical values, one could identify this beast by adding up the value of the letters in his name. There were several ways this could be done to identify Nero as the beast, but since Nero was dead, Domitian was identified as Nero incarnate. Throughout history many attempts have been made to identify contemporary beasts with some kind of numbering system. Favorite objects of these attempts have been the pope, Kaiser Wilhelm, and Adolph Hitler. It is too easy to manipulate numbers to reach a preconceived conclusion. The beast from the sea is Roman power and the beast from the earth is Emperor worship. Naming the beast is not as important as identifying the way in which he works.

The Followers of the Lamb. The 144,000 are the faithful, who refuse to worship the beast. This is a number that symbolizes all of those who refused to turn to idolatry. Angelic announcements are made to them in the midst of their suffering that "Rome," represented by the word "Babylon," will fall. At the same time, those who worship the beast are warned of their fate, which is destruction. The Son of Man, Jesus, will come with a golden crown on his head and a sickle in his hand to begin the harvest. Angels appear to assist in the harvest of the grain (in-gathering of the saints) and the burning of the chaff (destruction of the wicked). The awfulness of the impending judgment is illustrated by a wine press, which symbolizes the flowing of blood five feet deep for 200 miles long.

The Redeemed in Heaven and the Seven Angels. The redeemed in Heaven are compared to the children of Israel, who were delivered from slavery in Egypt by Moses. As the children of Israel crossed the Red Sea, so will the Redeemed follow the Lamb across their own sea. The only difference is that the Redeemed in Heaven have had to die to taste the victory. That victory takes place as the seven archangels pour out seven bowls of wrath. The Lamb opened the seals. The angels blew the trumpets and emptied the bowls of wrath. The names of these seven archangels are Michael, Raphael, Gabriel, Uriel, Raguel, Sariel, and Remiel. They are not named in the book of Revelation, but they are known from the Apocryphal Books and from Jewish tradition.

The pouring out of the seven bowls of the wrath of God symbolizes the judgment of God, which is more serious and extensive than previously experienced. Some of the same plagues used against Egypt in Moses' time are used here, but they do not follow the same order, nor are all of them present. The final battle against the dragon (Satan), its two beasts (Roman power and emperor worship), and all who have joined forces with them, is called the Battle of Armageddon. Armageddon refers to the Hill of Megiddo on the Plain of Jezreel, which is located about 60 miles north of Jerusalem. It is the place where Babylon defeated the last remnants of the Assyrian Empire. King Josiah of Judah was killed in that battle. Where the old Babylon was victorious, the New Babylon (Rome) will be defeated. Armageddon, then, is not simply a place. It symbolizes the final battle between God and evil and precedes the millennium and the final judgment. With all the warnings, one would think that there would have been a massive repentance and turning back to God, but nothing of the sort happens. Thus we have the final convulsions of nature and the fall of Babylon (Rome). The delay up to this climactic moment has symbolized the patience and mercy of God.

Victory in Heaven

Before the Kingdom of God can finally be established, there are two enemies to be defeated—Babylon and Satan.

The Fall of Babylon

The first enemy to fall was Rome itself. Rome is referred to as the great harlot, or Babylon, and the Empire as the scarlet beast. John had to refer to Rome in code in order to get his message out. Jews and Christians would have understood, but Romans would not, unless of course they were familiar with Jewish history.

Rome fell within one hour, taking all her provinces with her. The death of this city meant the death of a great civilization, which had become corrupt. Many great cultures have had their day and then ceased to be. Sodom and Gomorrah lie in ruins beneath the Dead Sea; Babylon was destroyed in the time of Alexander the Great; Jerusalem was destroyed by Titus in 70 C.E.; now it is Rome's turn. This ought to sober us into becoming a responsible, God-fearing nation. We have absolutely no guarantee that our civilization will last. If we were to summarize the reasons for Rome's demise, they would be three:

- The Propagation of the Imperial Cult
- The Oppressing power of Rome's economy
- The Martyrdom of the Christians

John believed that Rome's behavior would lead to its demise even though Rome was at its height when he wrote about it. Its immoral behavior would act like a poison eating away at the integrity of the nation until everything collapsed. When the end came, the fall would be swift, as it was in that fateful week of August, 410 C.E. when Alaric pillaged Rome, laying it waste. It fell quickly, like an overripe plumb.

With the fall of Rome there is a shift from earth to heaven. The great multitude begins to sing, "Hallelujah." While the word "Hallelujah" appears in the Old Testament, this is the only place where it appears in the New Testament. The multitude praises God for the

demise of Rome. Everyone praises God for acting decisively, including the 24 elders and the four living creatures, which now prostrate themselves before the throne.

The climax of the celebration in heaven is the announcement of the coming marriage of the lamb (Jesus), whose bride is the Church. The multitude lets out such a burst of praise, that Handel was inspired by it to write the “Hallelujah Chorus” in his *Messiah*. The Kingdom of God begins with the marriage of the lamb and the marriage feast, which follows. Jesus talked about this Messianic Age beginning with a banquet in Matthew 22:1-14; 25:1-13; and in Revelation 3:20. First, however, Satan must be defeated forever.

The Defeat of Satan

The rider of the white horse is Jesus, who leads in the final conflict—the Battle of Armageddon. Where will this battle be fought? Although the place has been identified as Mount Megiddo (Hill of Victory), the place is not as important as what this battle symbolizes. It is the final victory over human and spiritual evil. The battle will be short and the victory decisive. In it the two beasts, Roman power and Emperor Worship, will be cast into the lake of fire, putting an end to human evil. Armageddon continues however until Satan (the dragon) has been cast into the lake of fire with the two beasts.

With human evil eliminated, Jesus is able to rule for a thousand years (a millennium). This is possible because Satan has been bound for a thousand years and cast into the bottomless pit. Why was he not cast into the lake of fire along with the two beasts? No explanation is given. Perhaps supernatural evil is more difficult to destroy than human evil. At any rate, the thousand-year-reign symbolizes a brief interruption in Satan’s work. With human evil destroyed and Satan in the bottomless pit, Jesus can reign. Is his reign to be on earth or in heaven? The only thing that is clear is that John expected Satan to be bound soon, enabling Jesus to reign with the martyrs.

The uncertainties of where and when Jesus would reign left room for at least three interpretations of the thousand-year-reign that is the millennium. Premillennialism is the most common view. It says that Jesus will return before the thousand years. He will reign along with the saints. Following the thousand-year-reign, there will be a general resurrection and final judgment. In the second view, postmillennialism, Jesus returns after a thousand year reign of God on earth. Following a short conflict between good and evil, Jesus will return and resurrect all of the dead. The final judgment will follow this general resurrection. The third view is amillennialism, which denies any thousand year reign of Jesus on earth and suggests that Jesus’ second coming will usher in the new heaven and the new earth. Augustine was the first major theologian to allegorize or spiritualize the millennium. He said that there would be no coming of Jesus before the final judgment. His coming occurs continually in the Church and its members. The thousand-year-reign began with Jesus himself, for it is in the Church that the saints reign. This does not explain the idea of the martyrs being raised up to share in Jesus’ millennial reign, which is called the first resurrection.

While it is difficult to get a consensus on the meaning of the millennium, all three positions point to the common truth that Jesus will come again to destroy all the forces of evil and establish the Kingdom of God. The final conflict will come when Satan is set free from the bottomless pit. Notice that he does not escape. He is set free. He will only

be free for a short period of time; however, for evil can never be fully overcome while earthly conditions remain. In a last ditch effort, Satan will gather together all the forces of evil, symbolized by the terms *gog* and *magog*, in a final conflict against God. Satan will lose this battle and be cast into the Lake of Fire. This final conflict seems to be a rephrasing of the Battle of Armageddon, symbolizing now the final destruction of supernatural evil.

Who are *gog* and *magog*? Gog was the prince of Magog (a country), the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal (Ezekiel 38). He marched into the mountains of Israel, but his attack failed and he was destroyed. When *gog* and *magog* are mentioned, it is like saying *Hitler* and his *Germany*. The words symbolize the attack that the forces of evil make upon God; and in this case, it is their final attack. John takes the imagery of *gog* and *magog* much farther than Ezekiel. John expands the idea into cosmic proportions. It is not only the defeat of Satan; but, his final destruction. The *final* battle has been fought and won.

One thing remains—the final judgment. The martyrs had been raised in the first resurrection to reign with Jesus for a thousand years; now, there will be a general resurrection in which everyone, righteous and wicked, will be raised in order to appear before the Great White Throne for judgment. This judgment will be final. There will be no second chances. While the first death was physical, the second death will be spiritual. Judgment consists of both punishment and reward. Those cast into the Lake of Fire will suffer in eternal and unquenchable fire. Those persons, whose names have been written in the book of life, will experience eternal bliss. The book of life will determine who goes where. This book, however, does not list our good and bad deeds, weighing one against the other; rather, it lists the names of all those who have responded to God’s grace by faith. It is the record of the faithful.

The Kingdom of God

In the Kingdom of God everything is new. “See,” says God in Revelation 21:5, “I am making all things new.” All the old things, including sinful relationships, are gone. In the last two chapters of the Book of Revelation a number of things disappear. They include the sea, death and suffering, the Temple, the sun and moon, the night, and sin. It is God’s presence that makes all things new, and according to Revelation 21:7, “those who conquer will inherit these things.” This was the phrase used in the letters to the seven churches. Two choices have always been available to us, from Genesis to Revelation. They are symbolized in Genesis by two trees. Here they are symbolized by the “fountain of the water of life” and the “lake that burns with fire and sulfur.” The choice between life and death, heaven and hell, has always been ours.

One of the seven angels showed the New Jerusalem to John from a high mountain. The main purpose of this vision was to demonstrate that the Christian Church is an expansion of the people of Israel. This vision illustrates the connection between Israel’s history and all who believe in Israel’s long-expected King. The city shone like a precious jewel, and was surrounded by a high wall with twelve gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. The wall was built on twelve foundation stones, on which were written the names of the twelve apostles. While one might expect to see the names of the twelve tribes of Israel on the foundation stones, we discover the reverse.

The names of the twelve apostles are written there. The New Jerusalem is not only an expansion of the Old Jerusalem; it is built on an entirely new order.

The measurements of the city are given, but they are to be taken symbolically. The city was a perfect cube, which symbolizes perfection. The city is 1,500 miles long. That is a large city, even in this day of jet travel; yet, we must still consider even this dimension as symbolic. The beauty of the city is symbolized by precious stones, many of which are the same stones as those placed on Aaron's breastplate. In addition to beauty, they may also symbolize a new authority.

At the center of the New Jerusalem is the Light given off by God. Where God is present, there is no need for any sun and moon. God's glory will make all other sources of illumination unnecessary. Although the Temple has been mentioned on several occasions in the Book of Revelation, God's presence also makes that unnecessary. As there is no need for a hospital when everyone is healthy, there is no need for a Temple when everyone is with God. The secular is absent. The sacred is everywhere. In the beginning of the Book of Genesis, fallen humanity was denied access to the tree of life; at the end of the Book of Revelation, redeemed humanity is given eternal access to the sacred river flowing from the throne of God, with a tree of life on both sides, bearing twelve different kinds of fruit and leaves that heal. The water and trees will be available at any time and human freedom will never again be abused. The Garden of Eden has become the New Jerusalem. The New Jerusalem and the Kingdom of Heaven have been established for eternity.

The Coming of Jesus

The final epilogue to the New Testament is somewhat disjointed, but informs us about the imminent coming of Jesus, his invitation to all, and the Church's prayer that he come soon.

There is no hint of universal salvation. We are not to hide the prophetic warnings contained in this vision. There are still "evildoers" around, but they will not be able to enter the New Jerusalem. Only those who "wash their robes" will gain entry. Those who "wash their robes" are the faithful, who are to be distinguished from "evildoers." An invitation is given to all to drink the "water of life," without paying money. One responds to this invitation not by *works* or the ability to obey the law, but by simple faith. The invitation itself is clear: "COME!" The word is repeated three times. There is no excuse for misunderstanding this invitation. Every reader had better heed the warning. Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his *Letters and Papers from Prison* offers some good advice: "We live each day as if it were our last, and each day as if there were to be a great future." With this kind of an attitude, we are ready to offer our final prayer.

The final prayer of the Bible contains three words: "Come, Lord Jesus!" This prayer is also found in 1 Corinthians 16:22 and in the *Didache* (10:16):

May grace come and may this world pass away.

Hosanna to the God of David,
If any man is holy, let him come;
If any man is not, let him repent;
Maranatha. Amen.

The Greek word Maranatha simply means, “Our Lord has come,” or “Our Lord, come!” It can be either a statement or a prayer. At the close of the Book of Revelation it is a prayer, which indicates that we are ready for his coming.

APPENDICES

A. THE NAMES OF GOD

1. **EL SHADDAI:** “God Almighty” or “God, the One of the Mountains”
2. **ADONAI:** “Lord”
3. **YAHWEH:** A Personal Name related to the verb, “To Be”

“Hallelujah” means “Praise Yahweh”

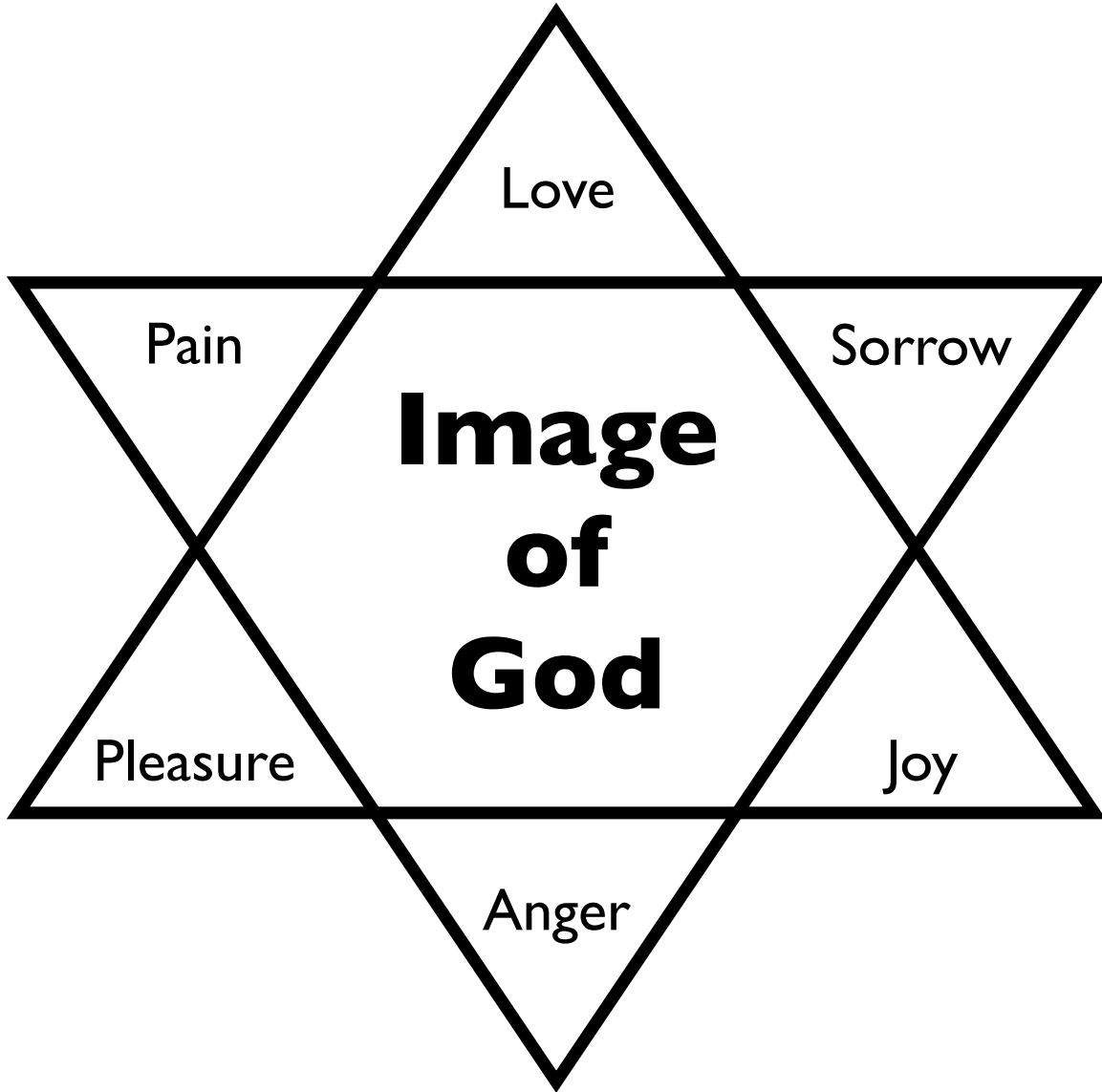
YAHWEH

“To Be” or “To Exist” or “To Be Actively Present”

1. “I am who I am”
2. “I will be what I will be”
3. “I cause to be”
4. “I am here, really present, ready to help”

The name does not refer to God’s “being” but to his “action” and “presence” in history.

B. THE IMAGE OF GOD



C. THE COMMANDMENTS

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS COMPARED

JEWISH	PROTESTANT	CATHOLIC/LUTHERAN
1. One God (20:2)	One God (20:2-3)	One God (20:2-6)
2. No Images (20:3-6)	No Images (20:4-6)	No Blasphemy (20:7)
3. No Blasphemy (20:7)	No Blasphemy (20:7)	Observe the Sabbath (20:8-11)
4. Observe the Sabbath (20:7)	Observe the Sabbath (20:8-11)	Respect Parents (20:12)
5. Respect Parents (20:12)	Respect Parents (20:12)	No Murder (20:13)
6. No Murder (20:13)	No Murder (20:13)	No Adultery (20:14)
7. No Adultery (20:14)	No Adultery (20:14)	No Stealing (20:14)
8. No Stealing (20:15)	No Stealing (20:15)	No False Swearing (20:16)
9. No False Swearing (20:16)	No False Swearing (20:16)	No Coveting a man's wife (20:17a)
10. No Coveting (20:17)	No Coveting (20:17)	No Coveting a man's Property (20:17b)

D. DATES OF THE KINGS

THE UNITED KINGDOM

Saul (1020-1000 B.C.)
David (1000-961 B.C.) or [1000-965 B.C.]
Solomon (961-922 B.C.) or [965-931 B.C.]

THE KINGS OF JUDAH AND ISRAEL

JUDAH	YEARS SERVED	ISRAEL
Rehoboam (922 B.C.) [931]	17	Jeroboam (922 B.C.) [931]
Abijam (915) [913]	3	
Asa (913) [911]	41	
	2	Nadab (901) [910]
	24	Naasha (900) [909]
	2	Elah (877) [886]
		(Assassinated)
	7 Days	Zimri (876) [885]
		(Suicide)
	12	Omri, Tibni (876) [885]
Jehosaphat (873) [870]	25	
	22	Ahab (869) [874]
	2	Ahaziah (850) [853]
	12	Jehoram (849) [852]
Jehoram (849) [848]	8	
Ahaziah (842) [841]	1	Jehu (842) [841]
Athaliah (842) [841]	6	
Jehoash (837) [835]	40	
	17	Jehoahaz (815) [814]
	16	Jehoash (801) [798]
Amaziah (800) [796]	29	
	41	Jeroboam II (786) [782]
Uzziah/Azariah (783) [767]	52	
	6 Months	Zechariah (746) [753]
	1 Month	Shallum (745) [752]
	10	Menahem (745) [752]
Jotham (742) [740]	16	
	2	Pekahiah (738) [742]
	20	Pekah (737) [740]
Ahaz (735) [735]	16	
	9	Hoshea (732) [732]
		THE FALL (721) [723/722]
Hezekiah (715) [715]	29	
Manasseh (687) [686]	55 (45)	
Amon (642) [640]	2	
Josiah (640) [640]	31	
Jehoahaz (609) [609]	3 Months	
Jehoiakim (609) [609]	11	
Jehoiachin (597) [597]	3 Months	
Zedekiah (597) [597]	11	
THE FALL (587) [586]		

Beginning of the Siege: January 15, 588
Burning of the City/Temple: July 19 (August 14), 587/586

E. THE KINGS OF ISRAEL

THE KINGS OF ISRAEL (1 and 2 Kings)						
NAME OF KING	MOTHER OF KING	CAPITAL CITY	LENGTH OF RULE	YEARS OF RULE	ACTIVE PROPHETS	EVALUATION DEATH
Jeroboam	Zeruah	Shechem Tirzah	22 Years	931-910	Ahijah	Evil
Nadab		Tirzah	2 Years	910-909		Evil
Baasha		Tirzah	24 Years	909-886	Jehu	Evil
Elah		Tirzah	2 Years	886-885		Evil Assassinated
Zimri		Tirzah	1 Week	885		Evil Suicide
Omri		Tirzah (6) Samaria (6)	12 Years	885-874		Evil
Ahab and Jezebel		Samaria	22 Years	874-853	Elijah Obadiah Micaiah	Evil Killed in Battle
Ahaziah	Jezebel?	Samaria	2 Years	853-852	Elijah	Evil Killed in Battle
Jehoram		Samaria	12 Years	852-841	Elisha	Evil Assassinated
Jehu		Samaria	28 Years	841-814	Elisha	Evil
Jehoahaz		Samaria	17 Years	814-798	Elisha	Evil
Jehoash		Samaria	16 Years	798-782	Elisha	Evil
Jeroboam II		Samaria	41 Years	782-753	Jonah, Amos, Hosea, Micah	Evil
Zechariah		Samaria	6 Months	753		Evil Assassinated
Shallum		Samaria	1 Month	752		Evil Assassinated
Menahem		Samaria	10 Years	752-742		Evil
Pekahiah		Samaria	2 Years	742-740		Evil Assassinated
Pekah		Samaria	20 Years	740-732		Evil Assassinated
Hoshea		Samaria	9 Years	732-722		Evil
Fall of Samaria				722		

G. THE FESTIVALS OF JUDAISM

1. ROSH HASHANAH/NEW YEAR

The Jewish religious year includes a number of festivals and days of fasting. The first of these is New Year's Day (Rosh Hashanah, "head of the year") and it occurs in September or October. This festival speaks both of God's creation of the world and of the judgement of the world. The Hebrew prayer-book states, "This is the day that the world was called into existence. This day He causeth all creatures to stand in judgement." A ram's horn (shophar) is blown in the synagogue to remind people to return to God, and the next ten days are set aside for self-examination and repentance. It is customary to eat apple dipped in honey and to wish others "a good and sweet year."

2. YOM KIPPUR/THE DAY OF ATONEMENT

The Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) is considered the holiest day in the Jewish religious year. It comes as the conclusion to the period of penitence that began on New Year's Day. The day is characterized by prayer, fasting and the public confession of sin. Traditionally this was the day when the High Priest made sacrifice for the sins of the people of Israel and entered the "holy of holies" in the temple (earlier, in the tabernacle). Today there is no temple and no sacrifice is offered, but atonement is sought through repentance. The devout worshipper fasts for twenty-four hours, spends all day in the synagogue and wears a white robe as a symbol of purity and of the grave. At the conclusion of this day he will consider himself to have been spiritually reborn.

3. SUKKOT/TABERNACLES

Five days after the Day of Atonement comes the Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkot) which lasts for a week. This is one of the three harvest festivals in the Jewish year (the others are Passover and Pentecost), and as such it has served as the model for Christian harvest celebrations. During the festival Jewish people remember how God provided all their needs when they wandered for forty years in the wilderness. They build temporary shelters or "tabernacles" of branches in their gardens or next to their synagogues. They eat their meals in them and may even sleep in them—though this may depend on the climate, as they are left open to the sky.

4. SIMCHAT TORAH/CELEBRATING THE LAW

After the Feast of Tabernacles comes the “Rejoicing of the Law” (Simchat Torah). During the course of a year the whole of the Law, the first five books of the Bible, is read in the synagogue. On this festival day the reading is completed with the last portion of Deuteronomy and begun again with the first verses of Genesis. The service is characterized by great joy and the scrolls of the Law are carried in procession around the synagogue with singing and dancing.

5. HANUKKAH/FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS

At about the time that Christians celebrate Christmas, Jews celebrate Hanukkah, the Festival of Lights. This commemorates the victory of Judas Maccabeus over the Syrians, and the rededication of the temple in Jerusalem in 164 BC. The festival lasts eight days and many Jewish families light an eight-branched candlestick or menorah. (It actually has nine candles; the additional one, called “the servant,” is used to light the others.) One candle is lit on each day of the festival until on the eighth day all are alight.

6. PURIM

In February or March comes Purim, the festival which recalls the story of Esther. Purim means “lots” and refers to the lots cast by Haman to choose the day on which to destroy all the Jews in the Persian Empire. In the synagogue the book of Esther is read and, whenever the name of Haman occurs, the boys present make a noise with rattles or stamp their feet. In the home Purim is a time for parties, often in fancy dress, and for eating special pastries called Hamantaschen.

7. PESACH/PASSOVER

Best-known of all Jewish festivals is Passover (Pesach). It coincides more or less with Christian Easter and recalls the deliverance of the people of Israel from their slavery in Egypt. A special meal or seder (meaning “order”) is held in the home. Traditional dishes are eaten, songs are sung and the story of deliverance from Egypt is recounted. The youngest child asks the question, “Why is this night different from other nights?” and that is the father’s cue to relate the events of the biblical book of Exodus, as they are set out in the special order of service or Haggadah. (Haggadah means “showing forth” or “telling the story.”) Traditionally a place at the table is left vacant and a glass of wine is set aside for the prophet Elijah who is expected to come as the herald of the Messianic Age.

On the eve of Passover a thorough search is made in each Jewish home to ensure that no leaven (yeast) has been left anywhere. In the place of ordinary bread, flat, unleavened bread (matzah) is eaten. The matzah serves as a reminder of the “bread of affliction” which the Jewish slaves ate in Egypt, and hence the festival is also known as the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

8. SHAVUOT/PENTECOST

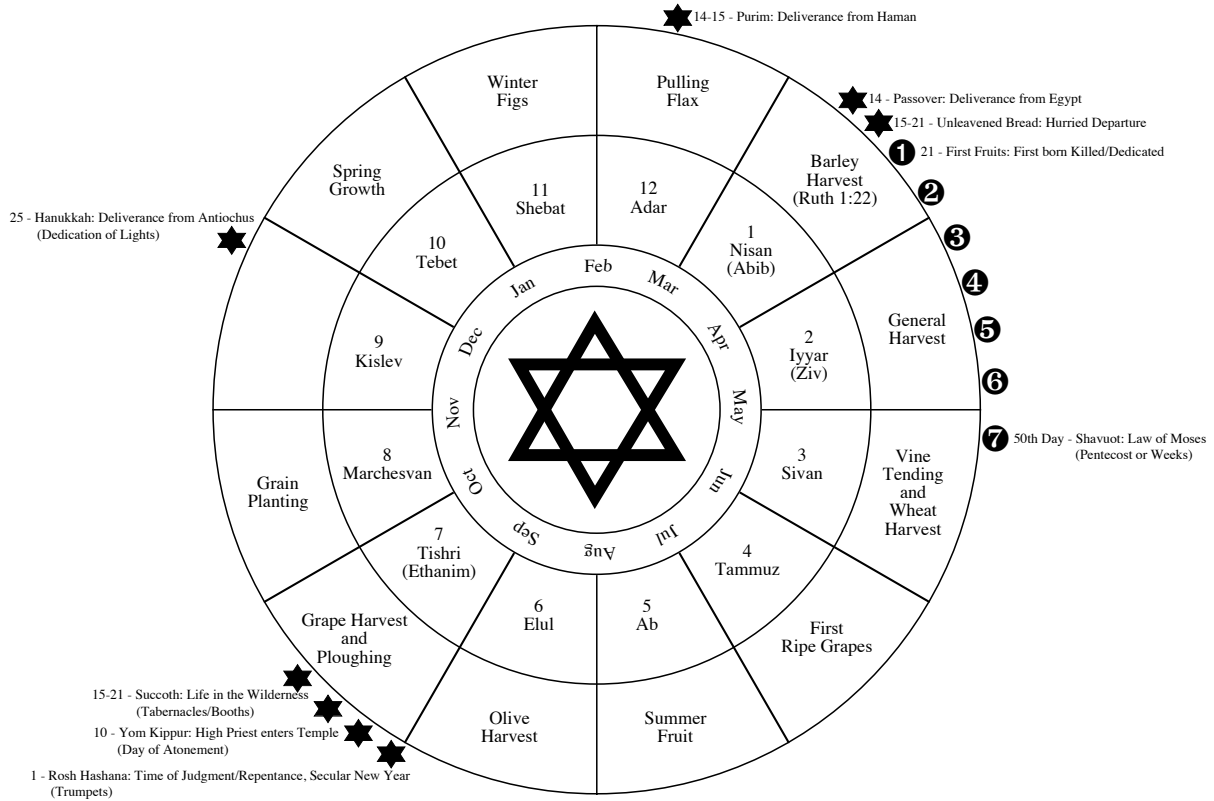
A period of seven weeks of mourning follows Passover. This is associated with the failure of the Jewish revolt against Rome in the second century AD and the loss of many Jewish scholars at about the same time through plague. The Festival of Pentecost (from the Greek word meaning “fiftieth”) or Weeks (Shavuot) is celebrated fifty days after the second day of Passover and commemorates the giving of the Law by God to Moses on Mt. Sinai. In the synagogue service the Ten Commandments are read and some Jews sit up all night meditating on God’s Law. Pentecost is also the “Feast of the First Fruits.” The synagogue is decorated with flowers and plants, and dairy foods are eaten.

9. THE NINTH OF AV/A DAY OF MOURNING

On Tishah B’Av (the ninth day of the Jewish month Av—roughly July/August), the Jewish people remember the destruction of the temple in AD 70 by the Romans. Some also link the same date with the destruction of the first temple by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BC. It is a day of mourning and fasting, and all ornaments are removed from the synagogue.

David Harley, “Chosen People: Judaism,” *The World’s Religions* (Eerdman’s: Grand Rapids), 1982, pp. 274-277.

H. THE JEWISH CALENDAR



THE JEWISH CALENDAR

I. THE SEVEN COVENANTS

1. THE COVENANT THROUGH NOAH (Genesis 9:8-17)

The first Covenant was made with Noah and his descendants. It consists of the unconditional promise made by God never to destroy earthly life with a natural catastrophe. The symbol of this first Covenant is the rainbow.

2. THE COVENANT THROUGH ABRAHAM (Genesis 15:9-21 and 17:1-27)

The second Covenant was made with Abraham and his descendants. God promised in this Covenant to bless Abraham for his faith, shape his descendants into a nation, and give them a land of milk and honey. The Covenant is conditional, that is, it is dependent upon Abraham's faith and the faith of future descendants. The symbol of this second Covenant is circumcision.

3. THE COVENANT THROUGH MOSES (Exodus 19-24)

The third Covenant was made with Moses and the children of Israel (Jacob) at Mount Sinai. God would deliver his people from slavery and take them into the Promised Land if they would consecrate themselves totally to him. The symbol of this third Covenant is the 10 Commandments, which signify both the theological and ethical foundation of God's people.

4. THE COVENANT THROUGH PHINEHAS (Numbers 25:10-13)

The fourth Covenant was made with the zealous priest named Phinehas. It was an unconditional promise made by God to provide his people with a perpetual priesthood. While no specific symbol emerges to designate this Covenant, it has been called the Covenant of Peace. Perhaps a symbol of peace would be appropriate, or some symbol of the priesthood.

5. THE COVENANT THROUGH DAVID (2 Samuel 7:5-16)

The fifth Covenant was made with David. It was an unconditional promise to establish and maintain the Davidic dynasty on the throne of Israel. This means that God would forever provide his people with a godly king like David. The symbol of this Covenant is the Star of David.

6. THE COVENANT THROUGH JEREMIAH (Jeremiah 31:31-34)

The sixth Covenant was made through Jeremiah just as God was expelling his rebellious people from the Promised Land because of their unfaithfulness.

It was an unconditional promise to forgive his people and establish a new relationship with them by writing his law on their hearts. This Covenant was to be based on pure grace.

7. THE NEW COVENANT THROUGH JESUS (Matthew 26:17-30; Mark 14:12-26; and Luke 22:7-23)

The seventh Covenant was made through Jesus on the night before his death on the cross. God made an unconditional promise to forgive sin and offer eternal life to all who would accept his grace, which he revealed through the death of Jesus on the Cross. This is the Covenant of pure grace. Bread, Wine, and the Cross are the symbols of this Covenant.

J. A BRIEF CHRONOLOGY OF JESUS

- A. The Birth And Early Life Of Jesus: (Matthew 1-2 & Luke 1-2)
 - 1. The Birth of Jesus in Bethlehem (4-5 B.C.E.)
 - 2. The Flight to Egypt
 - 3. The Return to Nazareth
- B. The Early Ministry Of Jesus: (Matthew 3-15, Mark 1-7, Luke 3-8, and John 1-3) (27-30 C.E.)
 - 1. The Baptism of Jesus (27 C.E.)
 - 2. Jesus returns to Galilee from his Baptism and Temptation
 - 3. Jesus preaches to the crowds and heals the sick in and around Capernaum
 - 4. Jesus visits Nazareth
 - 5. Jesus returns to Capernaum
- C. The Later Ministry Of Jesus: (Matthew 16-20, Mark 8-13, Luke 9:1—19:27, and John 4-11)
 - 1. Pursued by the police of Herod Antipas, Jesus leaves Galilee for Tyre and Sidon
 - 2. On the road to Caesarea Philippi, Peter confesses that Jesus is the Messiah
 - 3. On Mount Hermon (?) Jesus appears to Peter, James and John “transfigured” accompanied with Moses and Elijah
 - 4. Jesus travels through the Decapolis
 - 5. Jesus begins his journey to Jerusalem
 - 6. Jesus takes the east bank of the Jordan through Perea
 - 7. Jesus travels through Jericho to Jerusalem
- D. The Crucifixion Of Jesus: (Matthew 21-27, Mark 11-15, Luke 19:28—23:56, and John 12-19)
 - 1. The Last Supper
 - 2. The Prayer in Gethsemane
 - 3. The Religious Trial in Caiphas’ House
 - 4. The Secular Trial in the Antonia Fortress under Pilate
 - 5. Taken to Herod’s Palace
 - 6. Crucifixion on Golgotha (Calvary) (30 C.E.)
- E. The Resurrection Of Jesus: (Matthew 28, Mark 16, Luke 24, and John 10-21) (30 C.E.)
 - 1. Mary Magdalene sees Jesus near the Tomb
 - 2. Two disciples experience Jesus on the way to Emmaus
 - 3. Peter and his friends return to Galilee and see Jesus on the Lake
 - 4. Jesus ascends to Heaven from the Mount of Olives

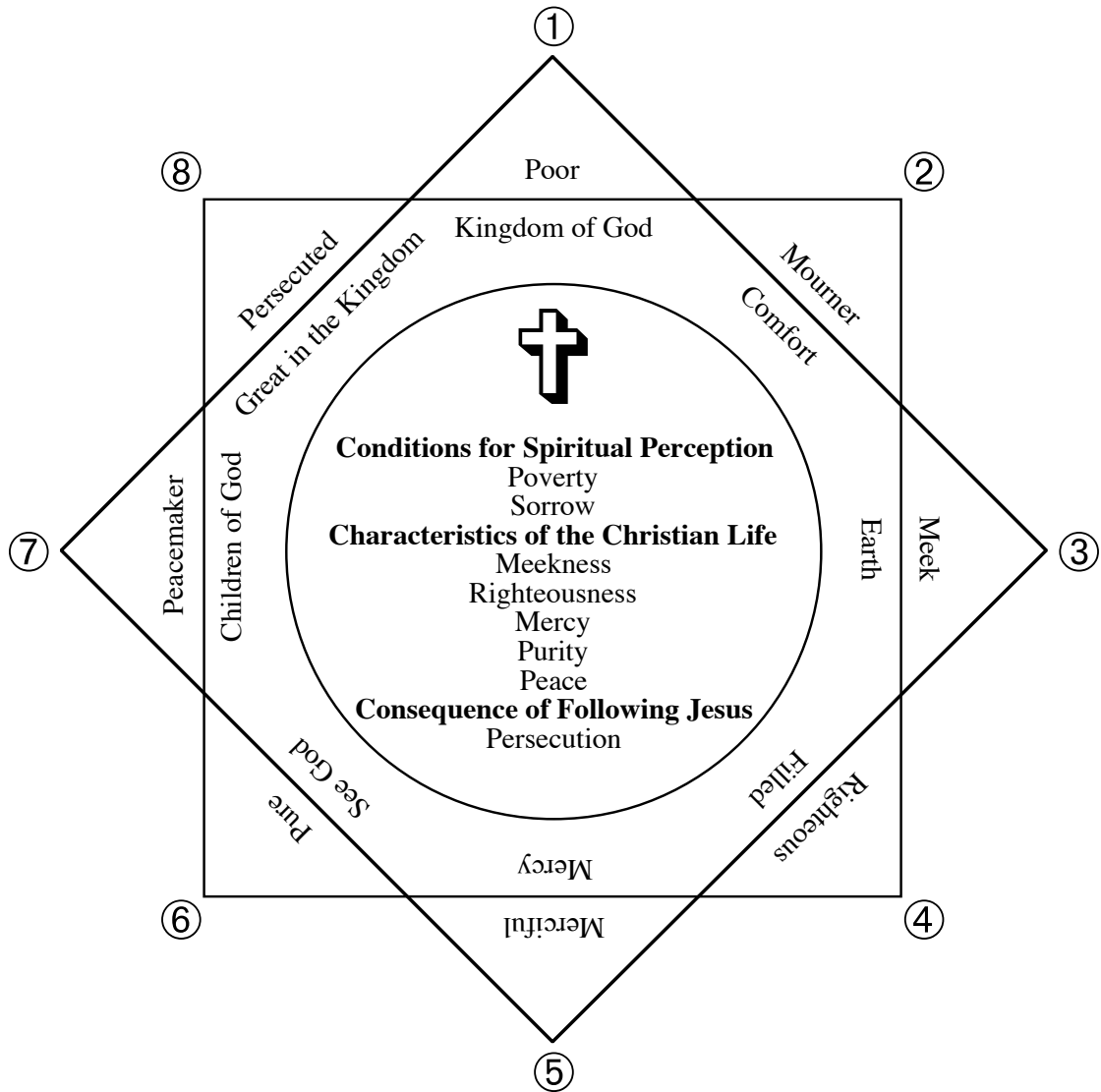
All dates are approximate.

K. THE LIFE OF OUR LORD

Events	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
1. Birth of John the Baptist Foretold			1:5	
2. Birth of Jesus Foretold		1:18		1:26
3. Birth and Naming of John				1:39
4. Birth of Jesus			2:1	1:1ff
5. Genealogies	1:1		3:23	
6. Circumcision and Naming of Jesus	2:21			
7. Presentation of Jesus in the Temple	2:22			
8. Coming of the Wise Men	2:1			
9. Flight to/Return from Egypt	2:19			
10. The Lad Jesus in the Temple	2:41			
11. John the Baptist's Ministry	3:1	1:1	3:1	1:6,15
12. The Baptism of Jesus	3:13	1:9	3:21	
13. The Temptation of Jesus	4:1	1:12	4:1	
14. Jesus Begins His Ministry	4:12	1:14	4:14	
15. John's Witness of Jesus		1:15		
16. Call of the First Disciples	4:18	1:16	5:1	1:35
17. Jesus' Sermon on the Mount		5-7	6:17	
18. Jesus' First Miracle				2:1
19. Jesus at Jerusalem				2:13
20. Nicodemus Visits Jesus				3:1
21. The Twelve	10:2	3:13	6:13	
22. The Twelve Commissioned	10:1	3:13	9:1	
23. The Twelve Return		6:30	9:10	
24. John the Baptist's Death	14:1	6:14	9:7	
25. Peter's Confession of Christ	16:13	8:27	9:18	
26. Jesus Foretells His Own Death	16:21	8:31	9:22	
27. The Transfiguration of Jesus	17:1	9:2	9:28	
28. The Seventy Sent Out Return	10:1			
29. The Raising of Lazarus				11:1
30. Jesus Journeys to Jerusalem	20:17	10:32	18:31	
31. The Council Plots Jesus' Death	26:3	11:47		
32. Jesus' Arrival at Bethany		12:1		
33. Jesus Enters Jerusalem	21:1	11:1	19:29	12:12
34. Jesus Cleanses the Temple	21:12	11:15	19:45	
35. Jesus Teaches in the Temple	21:23	11:27	20:1	
36. Judas' Plot Against Jesus	26:14	14:10	22:3	
37. Preparation for the Passover	26:17	14:12	22:7	
38. The Last Supper	26:20	14:17	22:14	
39. Jesus Washes His Disciples' Feet				13:1

Events	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
40. The Betrayer Revealed				13:10
41. Jesus' Last Discourse on Love				13:31
42. Jesus Institutes the Lord's Supper	26:26	14:22	22:19	
43. Peter's Three Denials Foretold	26:34	14:30	22:34	13:38
44. Jesus' Agony in Gethsemane	26:36	14:32	22:39	18:1
45. The Betrayal and Arrest	26:47	14:43	22:47	18:2
46. Jesus Taken to Annas				18:13
47. Before Caiaphas the High Priest	26:57	14:53	22:54	18:19
48. Peter's Three Denials	26:69	14:66	22:54	18:15
49. Jesus before the Council	27:1	15:1	22:66	
50. Jesus before Pilate	27:2 27:11	15:1	23:1	18:28
51. Pilate Declares Jesus Innocent			23:4	19:4
52. Pilate Sends Jesus to Herod			23:7	
53. The Jews Reject Jesus	27:21 27:25	15:6 19:15	23:18	18:40
54. Pilate Condemns Jesus to Death	27:26	15:15	23:24	19:16
55. Jesus Mocked by the Soldiers	27:27	15:16		19:2
56. Jesus Led Away to be Crucified	27:31	15:20	23:33	19:18
57. The Crucifixion of Jesus	27:35	15:24	23:33	19:18
58. Jesus on the Cross	27:36	15:25	23:34	19:19
59. The Death of Jesus	27:50	15:37	23:46	19:30
60. The Centurion's Witness	27:54	15:39	23:47	
61. The Burial of Jesus	27:57	15:42	23:50	19:38
62. The Resurrection of Jesus	28:1	16:1	24:1	20:1
63. Appearance to Mary Magdalene		16:9		20:11
64. Appearance to the Women	28:1			
65. Appearance to the Eleven		16:14		20:19
66. Appearance to Two going to Emmaus		16:12	24:13	
67. Appearance to the Eleven One Week Later				20:26
68. Appearance to the Apostles in Galilee		16:14		21:1
69. Appearance to Peter (1 Cor. 15:5)		24:34		
70. Appearance to 500 in Galilee (1 Cor. 15:6)				
71. Appearance to James (1 Cor. 15:7)				
72. Appearance to Paul (1 Cor. 15:8)				
73. Jesus' Great Commission	28:19	16:15	24:44	
74. Jesus talks with Peter				21:15
75. The Ascension of Jesus (Acts 1:4-11)		16:19	24:50	

L. THE BEATITUDES



DISCOVERING JOY IN THE MOST UNLIKELY PLACES
 Matthew 5:1-12

M. THE NEW COMMANDMENTS

THE TWO TABLES OF THE LAW

THE FIRST TABLET—Exodus 20:3-11

Deuteronomy 6:4: “The LORD is our God, the LORD alone.”

Mark 12:29b: “The Lord our God, the Lord is one”

Deuteronomy 5:5: “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.”

Mark 12:30: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.”

1. Worship no god but me. (The Only God)
2. Do not make for yourselves images. (The Invisible God)
3. Do not use my name for evil purposes. (God’s Sacred Name)
4. Observe the Sabbath and keep it holy. (God’s Special Day)

THE SECOND TABLET—Exodus 20:12-17

Leviticus 19:18: “...you shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

Mark 12:31: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

5. Respect your father and your mother. (The Sacredness of Parents)
6. Do not commit murder. (The Sacredness of Life)
7. Do not commit adultery. (The Sacredness of Marriage)
8. Do not steal. (The Sacredness of Property)
9. Do not accuse anyone falsely. (The Sacredness of Truth)
10. Do not covet. (The Sacred Desire)

The Golden Rule: “In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets.” —**Matthew 6:12**

N. JESUS AND THE COMMANDMENTS

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

Exodus 20:3-17
Deuteronomy 5:7-21

YE	One God		Our Father (Matthew 6:9)
HAVE	No Images		No forms needed at all (Matthew 6:7)
HEARD	No Blasphemy	BUT	Hallowed be Thy Name (Matthew 6:9)
THAT	Man made for the Sabbath	I	Sabbath made for Man (Mark 2:27)
IT WAS	Honor Your Parents	SAY	And also all good people (Matthew 12:50)
SAID	No Murder	UNTO	No Anger (Matthew 5:22)
BY	No Adultery	YOU	No Lust (Matthew 5:28)
THEM	No Stealing		Give Freely (Matthew 5:42)
OF OLD	No False Swearing		No Swearing (Matthew 5:34)
TIME	No Coveting		Covet Righteousness (Matthew 5:6)

O. THE PARABLES OF JESUS

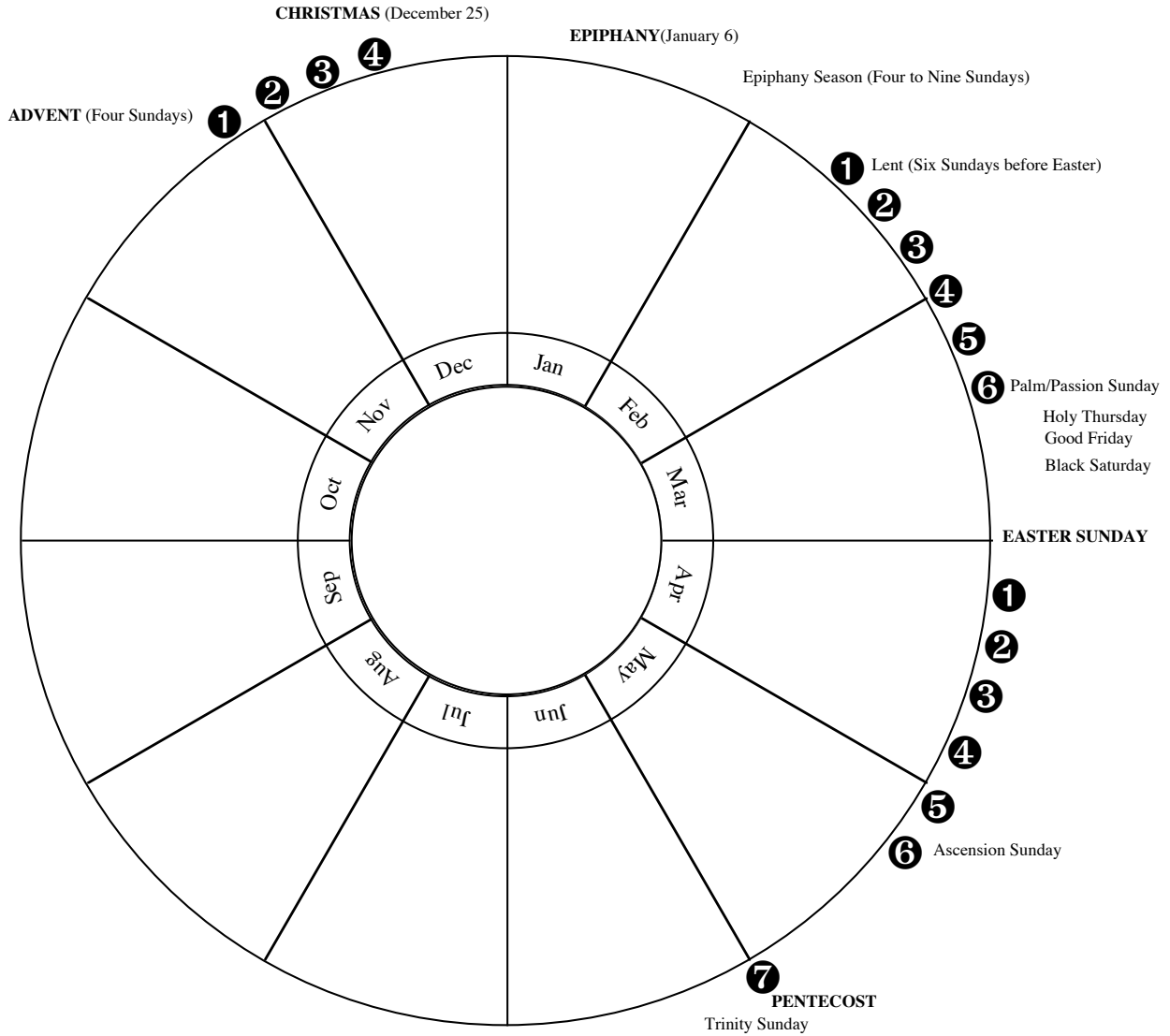
PARABLES IN ONE GOSPEL	MATTHEW	MARK	LUKE
1. Tares (Weeds)	13:24-30		
2. Treasure in the Field	13:44		
3. Pearl of Great Price	13:45-46		
4. Net	13:47-50		
5. Unmerciful Servant	18:23-35		
6. Laborers in the Vineyard	20:1-16		
7. Two Sons	21:28-32		
8. Wedding Feast	22:2-14		
9. Ten Virgins	25:1-13		
10. Talents	25:14-30		
11. Seed Growing Secretly		4:26-29	
12. Absent Householder		13:33-37	
13. Two Debtors			7:41-43
14. Good Samaritan			10:30-37
15. Importunate Friend			11:5-13
16. Rich Fool			12:16-21
17. Servants Watching			12:35-40
18. Faithful Steward			12:42-48
19. Barren Fig Tree			13:6-9
20. Great Feast			14:16-24
21. Building a Tower and a King going to War			14:25-32
22. Lost Coin			15:8-10
23. Prodigal Son			15:11-32
24. Dishonest Steward			16:1-13
25. Rich Man and Lazarus			16:19-31
26. Unprofitable Servant			17:7-10
27. Unrighteous Judge			18:1-8
28. Pharisee and the Tax Collector			18:9-14
29. Pounds			19:11-27
PARABLES IN TWO GOSPELS			
30. Two Builders	7:24-27		6:47-49
31. Leaven	13:33		13:20-21
32. Lost Sheep	18:12-14		15:3-7
PARABLES IN THREE GOSPELS			
33. Lamp under a Bushel	5:14-16	4:21-22	8:16-17 11:33-36
34. New Cloth on an Old Garment	9:16	2:21	5:36
35. New Wine in Old Wineskins	9:17	2:22	5:37-38
36. Sower	13:3-23	4:2-20	8:4-15
37. Mustard Seed	13:31-32	4:30-32	13:18-19
38. Wicked Tenants	21:33-45	12:1-12	20:9-19
39. Fig Tree	24:32-44	13:28-32	21:29-33

P. THE MIRACLES OF JESUS

POWER OVER DISEASE	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
1. A Leper	8:1	1:40	5:12	
2. A Servant of a Roman Soldier	8:15		7:1	
3. A Paralyzed Man	9:1	2:1	5:17	
4. A Woman who touched Jesus	9:20	5:25	8:42b	
5. Two Blind Men	9:27		2:22	
6. A Dumb Man	9:32			
7. A Man with a Crippled Hand	12:9	3:1	6:6	
8. Two Blind Men (Bartimaeus)	20:29	10:46	18:35	
9. A Deaf and Dumb Man		7:31		
10. A Blind Man at Bethsaida		8:22		
11. A Crippled Woman		13:10		
12. A Sick Man			14:1	
13. Ten Lepers			17:11	
14. An Official's Son				4:43
15. A Healing at the Pool				5:1
16. A Man born Blind				9:1
 POWER OVER EVIL				
17. Two Men with Demons	8:28	5:1	8:26	
18. A Boy with a Demon	17:14	9:14	9:37	
19. A Man with an Evil Spirit		1:21	4:31	
 POWER OVER DEATH				
20. An Official's Daughter	9:18	5:21	8:40	
21. A Widow's Son			7:11	
22. The Raising of Lazarus				11:1
 POWER OVER NATURE				
23. Water is changed into Wine				2:1
24. Calming the Storm	8:23	4:35	8:22	
25. The Loaves and Fishes				
5000 Fed	14:15	6:30	9:10	6:1
4000 Fed	15:32	8:1		
26. Jesus walks on the Sea	14:25	6:48		
27. The Cursing of the Fig Tree	21:19	11:14		

Q.

THE CHRISTIAN CALENDAR



THE CHRISTIAN CALENDAR

R. THE BOOK OF REVELATION

1. INTRODUCTION

2. THE MESSAGE TO THE CHURCHES

(Jesus in the midst of the lamp stands (churches))

Ephesus

Smyrna

Pergamum

Thyatira

Sardis

Philadelphia

Laodicea

3. JUDGMENT ON EARTH

(The Vision of God as Creator)

(The Vision of Jesus as Redeemer)

a. The Seven Seals (1/4)

(144,000 and The Great Multitude)

b. The Seven Trumpets (1/3)

(John eats the Little Scroll and measures the Temple and Altar)

The Characters

The Woman and the Dragon

Woman: Israel

Offspring: Church

Dragon: Satan

The Two Beasts

Beast of the Sea: Roman Power

Beast of the Earth: Emperor Worship

(Identity: 666 or 616)

Followers of the Lamb

The Faithful: 144,000

The Redeemed in Heaven and the Seven Angels

c. The Seven Bowls of Wrath

4. VICTORY IN HEAVEN

The Fall of Babylon

Roman Power and Cultus cast into Lake of Fire

Satan bound in the pit for 1,000 years

The Defeat of Satan

The Millennium

Satan freed from the pit

Final battle with gog and magog

Satan cast into the Lake of Fire

The Kingdom of God

The New Jerusalem

(Israel and the Church)

5. THE COMING OF JESUS

Maranatha: "Our Lord, come!"

AFTERWORD

In 1979, right after I finished my Graduate Studies and was awarded my Doctor of Philosophy Degree, I realized that I was Biblically illiterate. I had taken many good courses on Religion and the Bible in College. In Seminary I majored in New Testament and Systematic Theology; and in Graduate School I worked in the fields of Christian Theological and Social Ethics and tried to relate all these things to what the Church was doing in the world. The title of my dissertation was, *Reformulating the Mission of Church*. I thought I had prepared myself for ministry and I didn't know that in spite of all my studies, I was Biblically illiterate. I don't blame my College, Seminary, or Graduate School. They taught me what I needed to know about the Bible, but they could not read the Bible for me. My Biblical illiteracy was my fault. I did a lot of studying about the Bible, but I rarely read the Bible.

On the first Sunday, after I recognized by Biblical illiteracy, I confessed it to the congregation I was serving. I then said that I was going to do something about it, and anyone who wanted to go join me, would be welcome. We would meet every Sunday evening at 6:00 p.m. and we would study the Bible, not books about the Bible, but the Bible itself. More than a dozen people joined me. The Bible was to be our only text book, and we would start in Genesis and move through the Bible, ending in Revelation. With the exception of the Psalms, this worked fairly well. Each year we took on a major portion of the Bible. It took us six years to work through the whole Bible. After we finished with the Bible, we took on the Apocrypha. Our seven year program of Bible Study included the following:

1. The Books of the Law
2. The Books of History
3. The Books of Wisdom
4. The Books of Prophecy
5. The Gospels and Acts
6. The Letters and the Revelation
7. The Apocrypha

I did the above three times. We used a very simple agenda. We took approximately six to ten chapter every week. The first thirty minutes was spent summarizing the content of those six chapters. We divided the task of summarizing among those willing to take it on. In the second thirty minutes, people were encouraged to ask questions about what had been summarized; and in the final thirty minutes, we discussed the relevancy of the material for our daily lives and the mission of the Church.

As we proceeded, I would add to our discussion what I had learned about the Bible, and people began to ask me to put this material into writing so that they could read it ahead of time. I agreed and I created my own commentary of the Bible. At the same time, I suggested that the Bible must still be our primary text book. As the years went by, I added to my commentary. Since people frequently joined us in the middle of our study, I began see the need for a brief overview of the story that runs through the Bible. This is the purpose of this book. It is not a substitute, but a preparation for Bible Study.

I'm always open to including new and better methods to studying the Bible. If you have suggestions on helping people to overcome their Biblical literacy, I would love to hear from you. The Bible continues to be the best selling book in history. Let's make it the most read and studied book in history.

Dr. James T. Reuteler, Ph.D.
Aurora, Colorado
Jim@Reuteler.org
www.Jim.Reuteler.org