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Unit One: Background

How to Use These Notes

These notes on the New Testament are divided into units. Each unit begins with a statement of its OBJECTIVE. This statement will give the basic idea with which the unit will deal. It is important, in studying each unit, to keep this central idea in mind. It will provide a focus for all that is treated in any given unit.

After the Objective is stated, there will be a list of significant vocabulary that will be developed in the unit. The definitions of each of the vocabulary words will be given in the course of the unit. Normally, when the word is introduced and its meaning is defined, it will appear in all capital letters. The vocabulary list will consist of key words and ideas that are important for understanding the content of the unit.

The notes themselves will present background for portions of the New Testament text. This background will consist of historical notes, describing what was happening in Israel when the part of the New Testament under consideration was taking shape. The notes will also discuss the stages the text went through to get into its final form. In addition, there will be a discussion of the main literary themes to be encountered in the text and, at the end, some commentary notes on specific passages.

To make the most of our study of the New Testament, it will be useful to become familiar with the OBJECTIVE
of each unit. In preparation for discussing specific biblical texts it will be helpful to read through the notes, paying attention to historical background, significant vocabulary, and special themes which the biblical texts will develop. An understanding of the historical background and specific literary themes will help us to read the Bible intelligently and to more fully appreciate the faith statements the biblical texts try to impart.

In short, these notes are meant to be an aid to our study of the New Testament and its themes. They are meant to direct our attention to special features of the text and help us to appreciate the artful expressions of the biblical writers. No notes, however, no matter how complete and thorough, can substitute for reading and interacting with the biblical text itself. These notes are intended to help us read and interact with the text. They are not meant to be a substitute for such a reading and study of the Bible. Nothing we read about the Bible can substitute for reading the Bible itself.

In the end, our study of the Bible must begin and end with the biblical text. But we can't read that text in a vacuum. We bring to our study of the text our lives, our backgrounds, our educations, everything that goes into making us who we are. And we approach the biblical text not as individuals only, but as members of a believing community, a community of faith that has spent much time and effort in reading and taking in the message of the Bible. These notes, then, are an attempt to pull together some of the things the believing community has discovered about the text to help us keep away from interpretations which are too individualistic and to check our understandings of the text against the insights of the current work of biblical scholars.
THE WRITINGS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

Pater hmwn o en toIYouranoiV, agiasqht wto onoma sou,
elqetw h basileia sou, genhqht wto qelhma sou,
wVen ouranw kai epi ghV.
Ton arton hmwn ton epiiousion doVhmin shmeron:
kaiafeVhmin ta ofeilhma hmwn, wVkai hmieIV
afhkamen toiVof eiletaIVhmwn:
kaimheiseneckhVhmaVeIVpeirasmon, alla rusai hmaVapotouponhrou. (Mt 6:9-13)

Objective: The aim of this unit is to present the types of writing to be found in the New Testament and the world view which stands behind them. All of the writings of the New Testament deal with Christ and who he is for us.

Vocabulary List:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BIBLE</th>
<th>OLD TESTAMENT</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NEW TESTAMENT</td>
<td>GOSPEL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EPISTLE</td>
<td>APOCALYPSE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MESSIAH</td>
<td>CHRISTOLOGY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INCARNATION</td>
<td>FUNCTIONAL CHRISTOLOGY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HISTORY</td>
<td>ONE-STAGE CHRISTOLOGY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>TWO-STAGE CHRISTOLOGY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INSPIRATION</td>
<td>THREE-STAGE CHRISTOLOGY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REVELATION</td>
<td>PREACHING</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SYNOPTIC GOSPELS</td>
<td>&quot;Q&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The word **BIBLE** comes from the Greek word **biblos**, which simply means "THE BOOKS." For believers, **The Bible** means the collection of books which the believing community considers to be its sacred writings. The Church teaches that the books of the Bible are God's **INSPIRED REVELATION**. **INSPIRATION** means that God AND the human writers both had a real role in the production of the sacred text. Human writers, under the inspiration of God, were led to write down in words God's revelation. In the end, **INSPIRATION** is God's gift to the believing community through which it recognizes that certain writings and not others are God's true self-revelation. **REVELATION**, then, refers to God's giving of himself to us in WORDS. In the words of the Bible we do not come to know ABOUT God, but really meet him as he is. In all our dealings with others, we can know ABOUT others, or we can KNOW THEM. We know about them from what we hear or read about them; but we come to know others through relationships, through what they reveal of themselves to us as we relate to them. Through the words of the Bible, God reveals himself to us and by meeting him in the text we enter into a relationship with him. That is what is meant by the revelation of Scripture.

Everything in the Bible can be said to answer two questions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who Are We?</th>
<th>What Should We Do?</th>
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</tbody>
</table>

The biblical writers considered what they believed about God, what they understood about the purpose and meaning of their lives as people of God in the concrete situations of their daily lives, and what they should do in response to what they believed. Out of their faith statements – the stories they told and the lessons they taught – the Bible took shape. The communities for whom they wrote were able to see that some writings indeed did represent God’s revelation to them while others did not. In practical terms, this is the meaning of **INSPIRATION**.

The writings of the Christian Bible are divided into the Old and New Testaments. The **OLD TESTAMENT**, or **HEBREW SCRIPTURES**, refers to God's inspired revelation in the writings of the ancient community of Israel. At a decisive turning point in time, however, God chose to reveal himself, not in the written word, but in the **INCARNATION**. The **INCARNATION** refers to the fact that God chose to become a human being, like us, to reveal himself to us and relate to us as one like us. The **INCARNATION**, then, refers to the mystery of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the second person of the Blessed Trinity, taking on flesh and becoming a human being to
reveal to us the mystery of the Father. The writings of the NEW TESTAMENT capture the mystery of the Incarnation in words, inspired words of revelation, and complete God's revelation, his giving of himself to us, that was begun in the writings of ancient Israel.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The NEW TESTAMENT contains three types of writing:</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. NARRATIVES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. EPISTLES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. THE BOOK OF REVELATION</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The STARTING POINT for the writers of the New Testament was their faith in the RESURRECTION. The basic belief of all Christians is that Jesus Christ rose from the dead and the difference this belief makes for all Christians is the conviction that Jesus' resurrection opens for us the way to salvation. It offers to us the hope of eternal life with God. We too will rise.

All of the writings of the New Testament are concerned with CHRISTOLOGY. Like all 'ologies,' CHRISTOLOGY is concerned with the STUDY OF CHRIST. "Christos" is a Greek word (Cřіstоs) which translates the Hebrew word "``Messiah.'" CHRIST or MESSIAH means "ANointed." The CHRIST is anointed by God the Father to bring salvation. Now, the Christology of the New Testament is basically a FUNCTIONAL CHRISTOLOGY. That is, the writers of the New Testament were not so much interested in asking "Who is Jesus Christ in himself?" - the Son of God and the Second Person of the Trinity - as they were with asking "Who is Jesus Christ FOR ME?" The treatment of who Jesus Christ is in himself is called ESSENTIAL CHRISTOLOGY. The stories and letters of the New Testament attempt to show what difference Jesus Christ makes to us, how this difference makes us who we are, and what we are called to do in response to this difference. As REVELATION, the writings of the New Testament are concerned with the relationship God enters into with us through his word, and that relationship is two-sided. It always calls for a response from us.
THE LETTERS OF PAUL represent the earliest Christian writings. Paul was a Jew who had been trained as a Rabbi (a Pharisee). He had opposed the Christian faith, trying to crush the early Christian movement. But he had an experience of the Risen Lord and not only became a Christian, but the FATHER OF CHRISTIANITY AS A WORLD-WIDE RELIGION. After his conversion, Paul dedicated himself to spreading the faith throughout the Roman world.

It was Paul's practice to travel to major cities in the Roman Empire and to preach first in the Jewish SYNAGOGUE – a Jewish house of study and prayer. When the Jews rejected his message, he would turn to the GENTILES, the non-Jews of the city and offer his message of hope and salvation. In this way, Paul established Christian communities everywhere he went.

Paul's letters, then, were written to address concerns, problems and questions in the communities he had established. The questions and concerns centered on what Christians should believe about Jesus Christ and what demands this belief made on them.

Paul's CHRISTOLOGY was a ONE-STAGE CHRISTOLOGY. He preached belief in the Risen Lord. Now, to rise, one first has to die. In his death, Jesus becomes the ultimate sacrifice for sin (as Old Testament sacrifices were understood), and in is being raised from the dead, Jesus overcame sin once and for all. That is, for Paul, Jesus is the Christ, the anointed Messiah, in his death and resurrection. In this Jesus is God's son and he opens the way to God for all who believe.

The GOSPELS were written after Paul's letters, but like Paul's letters, they were written to address the needs and concerns of specific communities of faith. The GOSPELS were not meant to present the story of Jesus in order to make new converts to the faith, but to strengthen the faith of the believing community and spell out for the believers what they needed to do in response to the difference Jesus Christ made in their lives. By the time the Gospels were written, enough time had passed since the death and resurrection of Jesus that many, if not most, people in the community of faith had never seen nor heard Jesus in person. Most had probably also never met the Apostles, the original witnesses to what Jesus said and did, in person. That is, the believing communities for whom the Gospels were written were most likely SECOND GENERATION CHRISTIANS. Because of this, there was a keen interest in who the man Jesus had been and what he had taught. Therefore, the Gospel writers, in answering the question, "Who is Jesus Christ FOR ME?" adopted a TWO-STAGE CHRISTOLOGY. They asked, "If Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, in his death and resurrection, was he also the Messiah during his lifetime?"
MARK began his story of Jesus, the first Written Gospel, with the
baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist and then told of Jesus’ public
ministry, leading up to his passion, death and resurrection.
MATTHEW and LUKE extend the story even farther back and begin
their Gospels with stories of Jesus' birth.
For MARK, MATTHEW, and LUKE, Jesus is the Christ, the anointed
Messiah, throughout his whole life. They stress that in his life on earth,
Jesus brought the presence of God into the world. This idea gets
expressed in the basic proclamation that THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS
NEAR.

MARK was the first written Gospel. Mark used stories about what
Jesus said and did, stories which had circulated independently,
along with a collection of sayings attributed to Jesus which were
popular in the believing community. Out of these materials Mark
CREATED a new form of WRITING - the GOSPEL. The word
"GOSPEL" means "Good News." In writing his Gospel, Mark
MADE UP an outline or framework for the stories about Jesus. He
created a chronological order and basic story-line in which he
inserted the traditional teachings and stories about Jesus. By
making up settings for Jesus deeds and sayings, Mark provided the
traditional material with new meaning. He created a framework for
interpretation. He created a setting in which the question of "Who
is Jesus Christ FOR ME?" could be understood and answered. In
telling his story, Mark wanted to get his readers to understand themselves in relation to
Jesus Christ and respond to the difference he made to them. That, in itself, is what a
GOSPEL is – PREACHING IN STORY FORM.

The new form of writing which Mark created, the GOSPEL

1. was NOT a HISTORY - an accurate record of events showing cause and
effect.
2. was NOT a BIOGRAPHY - an accurate portrayal of the life of an impor-
tant person, presented for its own sake.
3. but WAS PREACHING IN STORY FORM.

PREACHING is a way of writing or speaking intended to get others to respond, to do
something. Defining a GOSPEL as PREACHING IN STORY FORM, means that the
Gospels are narratives, stories designed to get the readers to respond, to do something
because of the revelation contained in the narrative.
Mark was followed by Matthew and Luke. They copied Mark's literary form and wrote Gospels for specific communities from whom they hoped to get a response. Like Mark, Matthew and Luke wrote Gospels. **THEY PREACHED IN STORY FORM.** Both Matthew and Luke used Mark's basic outline, his basic story, but added other stories and sayings that fit their particular needs. The common sayings used by both Matthew and Luke lead us to believe that there existed at one time a collection of sayings of Jesus which had no particular order, but was simply a listing of things the Lord may have said. This source is called "Q" from the German word "quelle," which means "Source."

Since Mark, Matthew, and Luke all follow the same basic outline, they have been called the **SYNOPTIC GOSPELS.** A synopsis is a summary or basic outline of a piece of writing. Since Matthew and Luke adopted the basic outline of Mark, a 'synopsis' of all three Gospels would be roughly the same. Together, then, Mark, Matthew and Luke are called the **SYNOPTICS** of **THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS** – three gospels which tell basically the same incidents in roughly the same order.

The **GOSPEL OF JOHN** was probably the last Gospel to be written. Like the Synoptic Gospels, John's Gospel is **PREACHING IN STORY FORM.** But John's Gospel does not follow the same outline as the Synoptics. It is likely that John drew his material from different sources than the Synoptics, from different collections of sayings and stories of Jesus which may have circulated in different communities of faith. John's Gospel represents a further development in the Christology of the New Testament. John has a **THREE-STAGE-CHRISTOLOGY.** For John, Jesus is the **Word Made Flesh.** This word is the Word of God, which existed with God from all eternity. Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, before his birth, was the Christ throughout his life on earth, and remains the Christ in his resurrection and return to his father.
IN SUM, the writings of the New Testament are concerned with **CHRISTOLOGY**, with the proper understanding of faith in Jesus Christ. The **CHRISTOLOGY** of the New Testament is a **FUNCTIONAL CHRISTOLOGY**, that is, it considers what difference faith in Jesus Christ makes in our lives and what that faith demands of us. The Christology of the New Testament is one of three types:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ONE-STAGE CHRISTOLOGY</td>
<td>asserts that in his death and resurrection, Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, who forgives sin and opens the way of salvation to all who believe. This type of Christology is represented in the writings of Paul.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TWO-STAGE CHRISTOLOGY</td>
<td>asserts that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, during his whole earthly life, that in his life on earth he announced the nearness of the Kingdom of God and made God's presence a reality in the world. This is the outlook of the Synoptic Gospels, Mark, Matthew and Luke.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THREE-STAGE CHRISTOLOGY</td>
<td>asserts that Jesus was the Christ and Son of God from the before the beginning of time. He is the eternal Word of God which became a human being at a specific point in time and by his death and resurrection effected a reconciliation between God and the whole created world. This type of Christology is represented in the Gospel of John.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The rest of the New Testament writings are the Catholic Epistles – letters probably written after the Gospels and addressed to all Christians throughout the world, the Letters of John, and the Book of Revelation – a special kind of writing called **APOCALYPTIC**. All of these writings will display one or another of these three types of Christologies. But the bottom line is, all the writings of the New Testament are concerned with what makes for proper belief in Jesus Christ and what does that faith demand of us.

*Pilgrims in Modern Jerusalem*

Making the Way of the Cross. Local Christians and Tourists Celebrate the Stations of the Cross Every Friday.
The Historical Background of the New Testament

Objective: The aim of this unit is to present an understanding of the events within the life of the people that spurred the writing of the New Testament books. The early Christians responsible for the production of the New Testament Writings were caught between two worlds - the Roman political scene and their Jewish heritage. At this time, Judaism was not a unified world, but was made up of factions fighting for the loyalty of the common people. The critical date to remember is 70 AD. At this time, Rome destroyed Jerusalem and Judaism and Christianity went their separate ways.

Vocabulary List: PALESTINE MESSIANIC HOPE
PHARISEES SYNAGOGUE
ORAL LAW TRADITION OF THE ELDERS
SADDUCEES ESSENES
ZEALOTS JEWISH REVOLT
COUNCIL OF JAMNIA

The New Testament contains the early Christian community's proclamation of faith in Jesus Christ and spells out the demands that faith makes upon believers. The reason for collecting and writing down the stories of faith was the desire to preserve that faith in the
face of crisis. The crisis faced by the early Christian community that produced the New Testament was its perilous position in a hostile world. To understand the sense of urgency that is expressed in the New Testament, we need to have a sense of the way the early Christians lived and the problems they faced.

Christianity has its roots in the land of Palestine. Palestine refers to the ancient area of Canaan where the Jewish people had had their kingdom. This area was called Palestine by Rome, taking its name from the Philistines who had at one time fought with the Hebrews for control of the land. That Rome named the land for Israel's rivals shows the hostility which existed between Jews and their Roman masters throughout the New Testament period.

Again, Christianity has its roots in the thought patterns and beliefs of the Jewish people and the Jewish religion. Christianity's understanding of Jesus as the Messiah depends on the Messianic Hopes of the Jewish people, and those hopes were shaped and determined by the historical experiences of the Jewish people.

The forces which shaped the beliefs of the Jewish people date back to Old Testament times. The critical event shaping the religion of the Jews was the Babylonian Exile, which had occurred about 500 years before the birth of Jesus Christ. The Jewish people had experienced the loss of their kingdom and the destruction of their Holy City and its temple. They had been led away to exile in Babylon and out of this experience the first beginnings of Messianic Hopes were born. The Jews came to believe that when they were able to return to their homeland a Messiah would arise. The Messiah was the anointed one, one chosen by God to do something for His people. However, there was no single idea about what kind of a leader this Messiah would be. Some thought he would be a priestly or prophetic figure who would lead the people to a holy way of life, some thought he would be a warrior king, like David, who would restore the kingdom of Israel. All, however, agreed that the Messiah would be sent by God, specially anointed by him, to bring God's blessings to his chosen people.

Eventually the Jews were able to return home, but they were to remain under Persian and then Greek rule for the next 350 years. When Greek rule became particularly oppressive and the Greek ruler defiled the Temple, the Jews, under the Macabees, revolted and won their independence. The Jews were to maintain that independence for the next century. It was this revolt and the events leading to a brief period of Jewish independence which gave rise to the Jewish feast of Hanukkah.

Over this time span, the Greek world ultimately fell under the control of Rome. Roman policy was generally less harsh than that of their Greek predecessors. The Romans allowed their subjects a great deal of freedom so long as they paid their taxes and kept the peace. It was this policy of Rome that allowed the independent Jewish kingdom to keep its relative independence - at least for a while. However, after nearly 100 years of independence, the Jewish kings in Jerusalem became corrupt and the palace plots and murders that resulted caused disorder throughout the kingdom. This was something
Rome would not stand and the threats to peace finally forced Rome's hand. The Roman general, Pompey, conquered the land in the year 63 BC, restored order, incorporated Palestine into the Roman Imperial system, and established Roman governors to keep things in control. This Roman domination of the land was to continue throughout the New Testament Period. The Jewish kingdom was maintained in name only. Rome appointed an Idumean, Herod the Great, as King of Judea. He was a puppet of Rome and a belonged to a traditional enemy of Israel. Because of the Jews' hatred of Herod and their fierce drive for independence, there was constant trouble between the people and their Roman overlords.

During this period of history, the Jewish people, for all their national and religious pride and professed unity, were not a unified people. There were four major factions which fought for power and vied for the loyalty of the common people:

1. The **PHARISEES** were the Teachers of the Law. They were the founders of **SYNAGOGUES** - houses of prayer and study. The Pharisees were religious innovators. Besides stressing observance of the written Law, the Torah, or Law of Moses as it is expressed in the the Pentateuch - they taught that there was a continuing **ORAL LAW** which allowed them to adapt the laws to particular situations. The thought was that Moses had not written down everything but had taught the next generation of leaders orally. This oral tradition was handed down through the generations as **THE TRADITION OF THE ELDERS**. The Pharisees were not nearly as rigid as the New Testament portrays them. The Pharisees also believed in the resurrection of the dead, the coming of a Messiah, and the ultimate restoration of Israel in God's plan of salvation. In the New Testament, the Pharisees are pictured as the main enemies of Jesus and his teachings, but this picture really represents the situation of the early Church in which the New Testament was taking shape since the Pharisees became the dominant party in Judaism only after the destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple by Rome in 70 AD. In Jesus' day, the Sadducees would have been the dominant Jewish party.
2. The **SADDUCEES** were the priestly and aristocratic party within Judaism. Their name suggests that they were descended from Zadok, David's priest. The Sadducees denied the resurrection and any type of after-life and did not believe in an Oral Law. They were highly conservative and rigid in their interpretation of the Law of Moses - at least as they applied it to the common people. They fostered compromise with Rome in order to protect their own high position. The New Testament regularly depicts the Sadducees and Pharisees as opponents - except in their hostility to Jesus.

3. A third group that was prominent at this time was the **ESSENES**. The Essenes were a highly religious group who shunned all who did not live up to their religious standards. The desert community of Qumran was most likely an Essene community. The Essenes spiritualized messianic hopes, holding that a "Teacher of Righteousness" would come who would restore proper observance of the Law (against the Pharisees) and proper religious sacrifice and worship (against what they saw as the corruptions of the Sadducees). This group claimed to be "The Holy Remnant of Israel" and thus the core of God's people who would be restored at the End-Time triumph of God. As the outsiders of mainstream Judaism, the Essenes adopted an Apocalyptic world-view which asserted that God would act once and for all to overthrow the present order of things and establish something completely new - an order in which their community would have the upper hand.

4. The final group is the **ZEALOTS**. "Zealot" is a term which Jewish resistance fighters used of themselves in their struggle against Roman domination. Zealots opposed the payment of taxes to the Emperor, which for them amounted to idolatry, and expected the Messiah to be a mighty warrior, a king like David, who would lead the people in casting out foreign rule.

This situation of division and in-fighting forms the background for the life and times of Jesus. Over the period of his life and after his death, the fighting within the people, combined with growing resistance to Rome and its increasing oppressiveness led to a Jewish revolt against Rome. This revolt ended with Rome's destruction of Jerusalem and the burning of the Temple in the year **70 AD**. This is the critical date for the formation of the New Testament. Until this time, the early Christians had been viewed as another party within the Jewish religion. However, the Jewish rebellion caused Rome to oppress Jews. Christians were forced to divorce themselves from Jews in order to survive and the Jewish leaders looked on this as high treason. With the **Ruins of the Qumran Community – home of the Essenes**
destruction of the Temple and the death of the Temple's sacrificial system, the party of
the Sadducees passed out of existence. The survival of Judaism to this day is due to the
Pharisees. In 70 AD, after the destruction of Jerusalem, a council of Pharisees met in the
city of JAMNIA and expelled Christians from Judaism. From this point on, Christianity
would turn its preaching to the Gentile world. To their credit, the body of Pharisees who
met at Jamnia defined the books that would form the Hebrew Scriptures and set the
course that would allow Judaism to survive as a world-wide religion.

Expelled from Judaism and looked on suspiciously by Roman authorities, the Christian
movement was in a fight for its very life. Under these circumstances it became important
to write down and preserve the testimony of the faith, the stories of Jesus and what faith
in him meant for the believer. Out of this crisis the New Testament was born.

In response to this historical situation, the Gospels were written, Paul's letters were
collected and preserved for their message to all Christians and not merely the particular
communities for which they were written, and the later letters and the Book of Revelation
were composed to meet continuing crises and persecutions. In the end, we have a set of
writings which bear witness to the faith of the early Church, a set of documents which
spell out what it means to believe in Jesus Christ and what that faith demands of us in all
circumstances.
ON READING NEW TESTAMENT STORIES

Objective: The writers of the stories of the New Testament were real authors who used their creative talents to produce memorable stories. The stories they told follow the pattern of *Folk Stories* which are common to all people. The aim of this unit is to present the basic plot outline used in most New Testament stories, the special features of story telling in the Bible, and to define some special classes of stories which are met often in the New Testament. Paying attention to the special features of ancient stories and how stories were told will aid in understanding the lessons the biblical writers wanted to teach.

Vocabulary List:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NARRATOR</th>
<th>POINT OF VIEW</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NARRATIVE</td>
<td>PLOT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUBJECT</td>
<td>THEME</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PARABLE</td>
<td>MIRACLE STORY</td>
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<tr>
<td>LEGEND</td>
<td>CONTROVERSY STORY</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Much of the material in the Old Testament is **NARRATIVE**; it is composed of **STORY**.

**STORY** refers to "what" a narrative is about.

**RHETORIC** refers to "how" a story is told.

Paying attention to "HOW" a story is told gives important clues to "WHAT" a story is about.

**RHETORIC** refers to special features writers use to give meaning. By paying attention to the following elements of rhetoric we get a path into what a story is trying to say, into what the biblical writers are trying to teach us.
1. **THE NARRATOR:**
The NARRATOR is the VOICE we hear telling the story. Biblical narrators or storytellers are all-knowing (omniscient). That is, they know everything about the story - even what is in the secret thoughts of the characters and of God. Most often the storyteller does not make his or her presence felt, so it is important to pay attention to 'asides' (those times when the narrator speaks directly to us).  
In understanding the voice of the narrator, we have to ask
A. How does the narrator present the story?  
B. How does the narrator present the characters?  
C. What values does the narrator hold? 

2. **POINT OF VIEW:**
Each character in the story has a point of view - A WAY OF LOOKING AT THINGS. These are revealed in what the characters do and say. A point of view may be sympathetic or judgmental, approving or disapproving, friendly or hostile, or the like. In understanding point of view, we have to ask
A. How does a character look at God's actions and plans? At Moses or Abraham, etc.? At the people of Israel? At the events in the story?  
B. How does the narrator look at the characters in the story? At what is happening in the story?  

3. **STYLE:**
STYLE refers to the feeling or tone conveyed by the story. In understanding style we have to ask
A. Is the way of telling the story descriptive or suggestive? What effect does this have?  
B. Are there frequent scene changes? What effect does this have?  
C. Is the story fast-paced or slow-paced? Does the pace vary? What effect does this have?  

4. **NARRATIVE PATTERNS:**
NARRATIVE PATTERNS refer to the way a narrative is arranged. Narratives include the following:
A. **Repetition** of words, phrases, even episodes gives clues to what is important to the storyteller.  
B. **Speech** or dialogue slows the story down and points out what is important. In biblical writing, speech is an indication of an important point within the story. In understanding speech we have to ask
   i. How do the people in the story speak? (foolishly, with authority, with anger, or the like?)  
   ii. What does their speech reveal about them?  
   iii. How does their speech compare or contrast them with other characters in the story?  
C. **Irony** consists in presenting something from one point of view and evaluating it from another point of view. (For example, in the
Gospels, the Roman soldiers call Jesus "King of the Jews" in order to mock him; but from the story's point of view, what they say is true and they are revealing their blindness in what they say). In understanding irony we have to ask

i. Is irony present?

ii. If it is, at whose expense is it used?

iii. How does it contribute to our understanding of the people and events in the story?

5. SETTINGS AND PATTERNS OF MOVEMENT:

 SETTINGS AND PATTERNS OF MOVEMENT give flavor and texture to a story. In understanding settings we have to ask

A. What difference does it make that something happens in a given setting, in a given time and place?

B. Does the setting recall other stories?

C. Does recalling other stories with similar settings help us understand the present story better?

A STORY is made up of CHARACTERS and PLOT. PLOT refers to what happens in a story and the CHARACTERS are those who experience and take part in what happens.

There are three types of CHARACTERS in biblical stories:

1. FULL CHARACTERS who either show change or development in the course of the story, or, while remaining consistent, display a full range of emotional responses and motivations.

2. FLAT CHARACTERS are representatives of a class of people - the good, the bad, fools, sinners, or the like.

3. FOILS are people necessary for the plot. They are not so much important in themselves as in the role they fill.

In general, the PLOTS of biblical stories are simple:

1. THE PROBLEM is what injects tension into a story. It causes a disturbance in a stable situation which needs to be resolved.

2. THE COMPLICATION is the 'stuff' of the story, what happens in moving from the problem to its resolution.

3. THE RESOLUTION is the point at which the problem is solved. Identifying the point of resolution often gives an important clue as to what the whole story is about.

4. THE DENOUEMENT or WRAP-UP ties up all loose ends and returns things to a stable situation.

Sometimes a story will also include an EVALUATION, an indication of how we are to view the action of the story, or an ABSTRACT, which is a kind of summary statement telling what the story is to deal with.

This general plot outline fits just about all of the small, independent stories in the Bible. The basic outline also unifies larger cycles of stories, such as the Abraham cycle in the Old Testament and even the Gospels in the New Testament.
In the end, after looking at how a story is told in the Bible and how it moves, we should be able to define the story's **SUBJECT** and **THEME**.

The **SUBJECT** refers to a simple statement saying what the story is about.

The **THEME** describes what the story has to say about its subject.

Once we have defined a story's subject and theme, we are in a position to determine what it is that the biblical storyteller wants us to learn from his story, to see what he wants us to understand about WHO WE ARE and WHAT WE SHOULD DO.

We will see that all four of the Gospels are extended **NARRATIVES**, or stories. They all follow the basic plot outline:

**PROBLEM:** Jesus' words and ministry produce conflict between him and those who hear and see him.

**COMPLICATION:**
1. Jesus' continuing activity
2. the hostility of authorities towards him
3. his own followers' lack of understanding

**RESOLUTION:** Jesus' death by crucifixion

**WRAP-UP:** Jesus' resurrection and the post-resurrection appearances.

Like the Old Testament **CYCLES OF STORIES**, however, the Gospels are made up of shorter stories, episodes and incidents which the Gospel writers wove together into the longer whole. At least three types of stories are important components of the larger Gospel narratives:

1. **PARABLES.** Parables are short stories or sayings used by Jesus in his teaching activity in the Gospels to illustrate a point. As such, parables have double meanings. There is the surface level meaning of the story or parable and the deeper meaning or the comparison which the parable makes.

2. **MIRACLE STORIES.** Miracle stories in the New Testament follow the pattern of Miracle stories in the Old Testament. In fact, the Old Testament stories provided the Gospel Writers with the models they used in telling their stories about Jesus. In a Miracle Story
   
   A. A person or people face a problem situation - usually of critical dimensions - which they are helpless to handle.
   
   B. That person or those people present the problem to one who can help (in the Old Testament, to a leader like Moses or a prophet like Elijah; in the New Testament, to Jesus himself).
   
   C. The Helper, with the power and authority of God, acts to relieve the problem.

   As was the case with Miracle Stories in the Old Testament, most Miracle
Stories in the New Testament are **LEGENDS**. Legends are stories which are told to give us an example we can imitate. The example contained in most Miracle Stories is the **FAITH** of the person with the problem which allows God's saving action to take place.

3. **CONTROVERSY STORIES.** Controversy stories are a special class of stories which provide the major moving force behind the plot of the Gospels. In a controversy story
   
   A. Someone brings a question to Jesus - often in an attempt to trap him in his words or deeds.
   B. Jesus answers his opponent in such a way as to silence him.
   C. Controversy stories usually end, then, with a statement from Jesus about **WHO HE REALLY IS**.
   D. But, most often, that statement only serves to increase the anger of the opponent.

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I. An Overview of Mark's Gospel.


Objective: Mark's Gospel aims at strengthening the faith of his community by stressing that the Kingdom of God is hidden all around us, that we are empowered to continue to do what Jesus did, and that, as Jesus' disciples, we must be willing to suffer as Jesus did.

Vocabulary List:

Parousia  Suffering Servant
Kingdom of God  Eschatology
Messianic Secret  Disciple
Apostle  Exorcism
Repentance  Son of Man
Motif  Exorcism
From very early times, the tradition of the Church identified the writer of the first Gospel as a Gentile Christian. From lists of disciples and from mention of a certain John Mark in the letters of St. Paul, early tradition focused on this Mark as the Gospel’s author. It was even thought that this Mark may have written his Gospel in Rome where he had heard the story of Jesus from St. Peter shortly before Peter died. Modern study of the New Testament, however, shows that the early tradition is most likely wrong. We do not know who wrote the Gospel of Mark – or any of the Gospels, for that matter. We do know that Mark was written by a Gentile Christian and that his audience was made up of Gentile Christians. The members of Mark’s community were SECOND GENERATION CHRISTIANS, believers who had never heard or seen Jesus or the original apostles, but received their faith through the preaching of others. It is most likely that this group lived in Palestine, not in Rome, and that they lived in a time of great turmoil and unrest. Again, it is most likely that Mark’s Gospel was written around 70 AD, when Rome destroyed Jerusalem and the Jewish and Christian faiths were parting company and going their separate ways. The poor picture that this Gospel paints of the original apostles makes it likely that Mark, whoever he may have been, was writing for a community that was trying to identify itself and maintain its identity in the face of disagreements with the Jerusalem Church with its strong Jewish background.

The GOSPEL OF MARK is the first written Gospel. In writing his Gospel, Mark created a new Literary Form - the GOSPEL FORM:

**A GOSPEL IS PREACHING IN STORY FORM.**

The PREACHING of Mark's Gospel is not designed to get people to believe in Jesus, but to get those in Mark’s community, those who already believed, to respond to the faith in a proper way.

MARK was probably written around 70 AD, after Rome had conquered Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple. At that time, Rome barred Jews from entering the Holy City and Jews did not regain open access to Jerusalem until after the Second World War. Mark's readers were most likely GENTILE CHRISTIANS, that is NON-JEWS who had come to faith in Jesus Christ as the Messiah and savior of all people. Mark's readers shared a set of expectations and beliefs common to the early Christian communities:
1. They expected the **PAROUSIA**, or the **SECOND COMING** of Christ to establish in power the reign of God to be near at hand, any day. So they were puzzled and disappointed by the delay in Christ's coming.

2. Because Jerusalem was the site of Jesus' death and resurrection, they expected that his return would be there, in the Temple which symbolized God's presence with his people. But they were also hurt and puzzled by the lack of acceptance they, as Gentile Christians, were receiving at the hands of the Christians in Jerusalem.

3. They expected that, when Christ returned and finally established his kingdom, that they would be "winners"
   A. against the political power of Rome with its pagan worship
   B. against non-believing Jews who had expelled Christians from fellowship with them.
   C. against Christians with a Jewish background who were opposing them and their beliefs.

 WHAT HAPPENED IN 70 AD SHATTERED ALL THESE HOPES.

MARK'S PREACHING, THEN, IS AIMED AT GETTING PEOPLE TO RESPOND TO JESUS AND THE DEMANDS HE MAKES ON US WHEN OUR EXPECTATIONS HAVE BEEN OVERTURNED. THAT IS, **MARK WROTE FOR PEOPLE FOR WHOM THE PRESENCE AND POWER OF GOD IN THE WORLD WAS NOT OBVIOUS. THAT PRESENCE AND POWER OF GOD IS WHAT MARK MEANT BY THE "KINGDOM OF GOD."**

Mark's Gospel is **PREACHING IN STORY FORM.** The **STORY** centers on **Jesus** and **what he means to us**, what faith in him demands. Every good story has a **SUBJECT** and a **THEME**. The **SUBJECT** of the story focuses on the central idea with which the story deals, and the **THEME** refers to what the writer has to say about his subject.

THE SUBJECT OF MARK'S STORY IS DISCIPLESHIP.

Mark's story explores what it means to be a **DISCIPLE**, a **FOLLOWER** of Jesus; his theme centers on the demands that being a disciple makes on us.

THE THEME OF MARK'S GOSPEL IS THAT DISCIPLES MUST BE WILLING TO SUFFER AS JESUS DID.
Mark's story is made up of CHARACTERS and a PLOT. The story, as a whole, has a simple structure:

1. **INTRODUCTION** - which introduces the major ideas and themes of the whole story (Mark 1:1-13).
2. **GALILEAN MINISTRY** - the story of Jesus words and deeds in and about the region of Galilee and the opposition he faced (Mark 1:14-7:37).
3. **THE MEANING OF DISCIPLESHP** - the whole section, which includes Jesus' journey to Jerusalem with his disciples, stresses the urgency of responding to Jesus NOW, which carries with it a willingness to SUFFER as Jesus will suffer at the end of the story (Mark, chapters 8-10).
4. **THE JERUSALEM MINISTRY** - which is primarily the account of the final opposition Jesus faces, leading to his passion and death (Mark chapters 11-16).

Notice how the two ministry sections surround the section on the MEANING OF DISCIPLESHP. By arranging his story in this way, Mark focuses on our response to what Jesus said and did. This arrangement, then, supports the claim that Mark's subject is DISCIPLESHP. The idea of discipleship is at the heart of his story. The technique of “sandwiching” a central idea between two similar ideas or themes is called a CHIASM or CONCENTRIC STRUCTURE. This is one of Mark’s favorite structuring devices and will be used repeatedly throughout the story that he tells.

Mark's story also displays a simple PLOT OUTLINE, in which tension is injected that the story, in its development, must resolve.

**PROBLEM:** Jesus announces that the Kingdom of God is near and that people must repent and have faith in the Good News. Jesus' call to REPENTANCE is a call to CHANGE - to change how we look at things and how we live.

**COMPLICATION:** What Jesus says and does is met with

A. anger, hostility, and disbelief on the part of the religious leaders of the Jews
B. lack of understanding and lack of faith on the part of his disciples.

**RESOLUTION:** The Crucifixion. (Note that in all four Gospels, Jesus' death dominates the story. In the Synoptics - Mark, Matthew, and Luke - Jesus predicts his death three times and is met with misunderstanding on each occasion. In all three, Jesus is a successful preacher, teacher, and miracle worker, but his popularity is with the common people. He meets with opposition from the religious leaders and their hostility to him grows throughout the story until it reaches a high point in Jesus' arrest and trial. Still, the story of the Passion is told on two levels: on the surface, it looks like a
failure - and the test and proof of the Messiah is that he should have success; but the Messiah is the one who takes on the suffering of his people and overcomes it. So, on another level, it is in the crucifixion that Jesus is proclaimed as KING.)

WRAP-UP:
The Resurrection and its aftermath provide a return to stability. Jesus has been proven right. However, Mark tells of no resurrection appearances. His story, in its original form, ends with the women at the empty tomb. His story ends in MYSTERY. The solution to this mystery lies outside the story - with us. Will we respond? Will we realize that the story isn't over - or not? With faith in Jesus as risen, will we be willing to accept suffering in our lives?

Within Mark's story there are four main characters or character-groups. These are

| JESUS |
| THE AUTHORITIES |
| THE DISCIPLES |
| THE COMMON PEOPLE |

1. JESUS:
Primarily, Mark pictures Jesus as the SECRET MESSIAH. What "reveals" the Secret Messiah is what Jesus says and does as
A. A PREACHER
B. A TEACHER
C. A MIRACLE-WORKER
Remembering that Mark's Gospel is PREACHING IN STORY FORM, what Mark PREACHES is what Jesus PREACHES - as Mark understands it. In his story, TEACHING serves to explain what the preaching means. The MIRACLES serve, then, to demonstrate that Jesus' message is true, that the Kingdom of God, the presence and power of God in the world, really is near. Since Mark wrote his Gospel at a time when the presence and power of God were not obvious to his readers and when the community's expectations about what God would do were not coming true, Mark presents Jesus as PREACHING THE GOOD NEWS.

**THE GOOD NEWS IS THAT**
**THE KINGDOM OF GOD HAS COME NEAR**

In response to this PREACHING, people are to REPENT, **to change their ways of acting and looking at things.** In Mark's Gospel, Jesus stresses:

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<td><strong>A.</strong></td>
<td>THAT THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS REALLY NEAR, RIGHT AT HAND.</td>
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<td><strong>B.</strong></td>
<td>BUT THAT THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS HIDDEN, THAT IT IS A MYSTERY (in the same way that Jesus is the Messiah, but a hidden or secret Messiah).</td>
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<td><strong>C.</strong></td>
<td>THERE IS AN URGENT NEED TO RESPOND TO THE MYSTERY OF GOD'S PRESENCE AROUND US NOW. (The time to turn to God is not unlimited and indefinite).</td>
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In Mark's Gospel, the TEACHING of Jesus explains what the **Hidden Kingdom of God** is all about:

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| **A.** | It stands against evil (Mk 3:24)  
*And if a kingdom be divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand.*  
*He also said,* "The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come."
  
*He also said,* "With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade."
  
**B.** | It starts small and grows in unseen ways (Mk 4:26-32) |

If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life maimed than to have two hands and to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame than to have two feet and to be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to
have two eyes and to be thrown into hell, where their worm never dies, and the fire is never quenched.

D. It must be received simply (Mk 10:13-16)

People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.

E. It is not for the self-reliant (Mk 10:23-27)

Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." They were greatly astounded and said to one another, "Then who can be saved?" Jesus looked at them and said, "For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible."

F. It's about the love of God and the love of other people (Mk 12:28-34)

One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, "Which commandment is the first of all?" Jesus answered, "The first is, '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.' The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." Then the scribe said to him, "You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that 'he is one, and besides him there is no other'; and 'to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength,' and 'to love one's neighbor as oneself,' -- this is much more important than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices." When Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." After that no one dared to ask him any question.

In Mark, the teaching of Jesus is reserved for the disciples, for those who are on the 'inside.' However, that Jesus must teach them serves to paint a dismal picture of them. They should know - as we should know - what the hidden presence of God is all about and respond to it. Because of the sense of urgency in

Mark, Jesus, then, often appears angry and impatient in dealing with his disciples.
In Mark's Gospel, the MIRACLES confirm that the Hidden Kingdom of God is near.

A. Jesus casts out demons, a symbol of defeating the powers of evil
   (Mk 3:22-27)

   And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, "He has Beelzebul, and by
the ruler of the demons he casts out demons." And he called them to him, and
spoke to them in parables, "How can Satan cast out Satan? If a kingdom is divided
against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself,
that house will not be able to stand. And if Satan has risen up against himself and
is divided, he cannot stand, but his end has come. But no one can enter a strong
man's house and plunder his property without first tying up the strong man; then
indeed the house can be plundered.

B. Jesus heals and feeds the crowds, showing that in the Kingdom,
love and care for others is what is most important (Mk 1:40-45)

   A leper came to him begging him, and kneeling he said to him, "If you
choose, you can make me clean." Moved with pity, Jesus stretched out his hand
and touched him, and said to him, "I do choose. Be made clean!" Immediately the
leprosy left him, and he was made clean. After sternly warning him he sent him
away at once, saying to him, "See that you say nothing to anyone; but go, show
yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, as a
testimony to them." But he went out and began to proclaim it freely, and to spread
the word, so that Jesus could no longer go into a town openly, but stayed out in
the country; and people came to him from every quarter.

Mark uses the MIRACLE stories as legends, as stories designed to give us an
example to imitate. Miracle stories make a faith statement that God gets
involved, that he cares when his people face problem situations in which they
cannot help themselves. This is the idea Mark stresses in his use of Miracle
Stories. They do not so much prove that Jesus is the Messiah as prove that what
he says is true, that the KINGDOM OF GOD - which, for the writers of the
Gospels means the presence and power of God with his people - is present, but
hidden, all around us.

Finally, to present his understanding of Jesus as the Messiah, Mark draws heavily
on two Old Testament images:

A. The Son of Man
B. The Suffering Servant.

SON OF MAN, by itself is a neutral title. In the Old Testament, this designation
simply meant "human." However, this title took on special meaning in the
Apocalyptic Book of Daniel (see Daniel 7:13-14). The "seer" of the Book of
Daniel saw "one, like the son of man, coming on the clouds and gathering the
righteous of Israel." This imagery speaks of a figure in human form, coming from
the realms of heaven to establish God's rule. This title, in late Old Testament times, came to express Messianic Hopes. Mark, then, uses the title in two ways:

A. Jesus calls himself "the son of man" - which implies merely human - and thereby avoids confrontation with the authorities.

B. But the title also recalls the imagery of Daniel and suggests, for those on the "inside" the messianic meaning of the term – one in human form coming from the realms of heaven to gather up the good and establish the rule of God.

The SUFFERING SERVANT was a special image in Second Isaiah, the prophet of the Exile. The image, in Isaiah, spoke of someone who took on the guilt of the people and suffered for them. For those experiencing the Exile, this image gave a message of hope. There was salvific value to the suffering they were experiencing, and there was a Servant of God who would take on the people's suffering and reverse it. The image of the Suffering Servant became another image used to describe later Messianic Hopes.

Now, besides creating a new Literary Form, the Gospel, Mark also made an original contribution to the Christology of the New Testament. He did this by combining the two images of the SON OF MAN and the SUFFERING SERVANT. Mark asserted that the SON OF MAN coming in glory to judge the world and gather up the just (an image that was associated with the Resurrected Christ and his Second Coming, the Parousia) IS the SUFFERING SERVANT who begins God's saving rule by giving his life for many (Mark's understanding of the Jesus of History). He brings the Kingdom near. That is, Mark creates Two-Stage Christology and explains it in terms of the Suffering Servant and the Son of Man. Everything Mark has to say about Jesus as the Messiah is governed by these two images.

2. THE AUTHORITIES:

The opponents of Jesus in the story are Jewish and Gentile (non-Jewish) authorities in Israel. What these opponents have in common is that they are in positions of power and leadership. Because Jesus threatens their authority, they oppose him from the beginning.

*Ancient Roman Arch - Jerusalem*

The main function of the authorities in Mark's story is that they progressively plot the destruction of Jesus. The key to Mark's portrayal of Jesus' opponents is that
they are bent on preserving their power, their importance, their wealth and their lives. As such, they stand in marked contrast to Jesus.

In the heart of both ministry sections of his Gospel, Mark uses **CONTROVERSY STORIES** to draw out the character of the authorities who oppose Jesus. **CONTROVERSY STORIES** are a special type of story in which someone usually brings a question to Jesus in the hopes of trapping him up. He bests his opponent and answers the question in such a way that he silences his foe. While each Controversy Story ends favorably for Jesus and adds to the way Mark paints his picture, taken together, they add also to the characterization of the opponents who resent Jesus and his answers and grow more and more hostile as the larger story progresses.

The Controversy stories nearly always end with a statement from Jesus about who he really is - but the statements are obscure. The "insiders" should understand, but to the "outsiders" - his opponents - they are a **MYSTERY**.

It is in this way that Mark develops his theme of the **MESSIANIC SECRET**. The purpose of the Messianic Secret is:

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<td>A.</td>
<td>to make sure that people respond to God's presence in the world around them - not to Jesus or some idea they have about who Jesus is, or what they expect him (as the Messiah) to be.</td>
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<td>B.</td>
<td>to protect Jesus from the hostility of the authorities and give him time to get his message out (adding to the sense of urgency in Mark's story).</td>
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<td>C.</td>
<td>to encourage his readers to spread the GOOD NEWS, but also to assure them that they do not have to engage in open confrontation unless it is absolutely necessary - that is, to provide Mark's readers with a model of how they can make their way in the world.</td>
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3. **THE DISCIPLES:**

In Mark's story, the term "disciple" comes to refer most of all to the special twelve men chosen to follow Jesus. Those special Twelve, the **APOSTLES**, are those
who not only follow Jesus (Disciple), but are empowered by him and SENT (Apostle) to carry out his mission to Israel.

The picture Mark paints of the disciples is both favorable and unfavorable. What these men say and do shows them to be loyal followers of Jesus, yet many of their actions, as well as most everything they say reveals their lack of understanding and faith. In this way, they are portrayed as NEGATIVE EXAMPLES of the response a Christian owes to Jesus. Their failure to understand Jesus and respond properly to him is Mark's main literary device by which he portrays the true meaning of discipleship.

The characteristic way Jesus teaches the disciples in the Gospel of Mark is with PARABLES. In Mark, the parables are not for the general public, but for the disciples alone. This highlights the idea of "insiders" and "outsiders," and again contributes to the idea of the Messianic Secret. The mysteries of the Kingdom are for those on the inside, those who can understand what Jesus has to say in his parables. For those outside, they remain a mystery which clouds their understanding of the kingdom of God.

A special aspect of Mark's use of parables is that, by them, Mark involves the reader directly in the story he tells. WE read the parables and understand what Jesus is trying to say. We can consider ourselves to be "insiders." But, in the development of Mark's story, so too were the disciples. Mark's narrative demands that we consider whether or not we are "insiders" like they are. Are we willing to accept the teaching of Jesus and follow him, even when it means suffering?

4. THE COMMON PEOPLE:

In contrast to both the opponents and the disciples, certain minor characters are introduced into the story who consistently demonstrate that they embrace the values of the Kingdom of God. These members of the common people usually come to Jesus either to ask something of him or to offer to do something for him. They express a simple, child-like, but persistent faith, a disregard for personal power or status, and willingly serve others. In Mark's Gospel, these people serve as stark contrasts to the opponents and the disciples. Their function in the story is to point to and highlight what is lacking in others.
IN SUM, Mark's Gospel, through the development of its plot and the interplay of its characters, unfolds a story of Jesus whose focus is on the response people do make or can make to him as the Hidden or Secret Messiah. The subject of Mark's story is following Jesus, Discipleship. His theme is that being a disciple means being willing to suffer as Jesus did and this requires putting aside fear and embracing faith.

As PREACHING IN STORY FORM, Mark's Gospel is intended to encourage his readers to respond to the difference Jesus makes in our lives by taking on discipleship, by following Jesus and spreading the Good News that the Kingdom of God is Near, even if it means we have to suffer for what we believe and what that belief demands of us.
II. Commentary on Mark's Gospel.

Raphael’s “Baptism of the Lord”

1. **INTRODUCTION - Mark 1:1-13.**
The introduction to a story regularly unfolds the major themes and emphases with which the whole story is to deal. This is the case with the Introduction to Mark's Gospel. The focus of the introduction is on Jesus himself. None of the other major characters in Mark's story are introduced here.

Mark starts off with a **TITLE:**

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The beginning of the Good News of Jesus Christ, Son of God.
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The faith statement that *Jesus is the anointed (Christ) Son of God* colors Mark's whole story. The major conflicts which move the plot of the story have to do with the fact that the opponents of Jesus do not accept that he is God's Son and his disciples do not readily see this or understand who Jesus is and what his ministry is all about. But we, the readers, are given an "insiders" view right from the start. Furthermore, this title makes clear that the story of Jesus that Mark's Gospel will tell is **JUST THE BEGINNING** of the Good News. That is, the Good News begins with the story of Jesus, but **the story continues beyond the pages of the Gospel in the lives of believers today.**

The introduction immediately takes up the career of John the Baptist. The quotation from the Prophet Isaiah indicates that John's ministry is undertaken as part of the plan and will of God. But God's plan is that John be a messenger, preparing the way for one who comes after him. This means that Jesus' ministry is also controlled by the will of God and will surpass that of the messenger. Mark's presentation of John is significant. His
wild dress and appearance recall the Old Testament figure of Elijah. One aspect of Jewish Messianic Hopes was that Elijah, who according to the story in the Second Book of Kings, was taken in a fiery chariot to the heavens, would return to usher in the messianic age. The presentation of John as a figure like Elijah, along with the quotation from Isaiah, suggests that the messianic age is here.

Jesus comes on the scene from out of nowhere and submits to John's baptism. At this point the voice of God confirms what Mark has asserted in his opening sentence: Jesus is, in fact, God's Son.

Baptized and empowered by God, Jesus withdraws to the wilderness, the symbol of the realms of evil. There he engages in conflict with Satan - the representative of all evil. That he is ministered to by angels indicates that this scene represents the conflict between God and his will for good with all that stands against that will. Jesus leads the way in this conflict and is victorious. Only in the next section of the story do the other major characters get introduced and, in the light of the story of his baptism, the conflicts between Jesus and the other characters in the story are now to be seen as a part of the larger conflict between the power and will of God and the power of evil.

Mark's story, then, will concern Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and his conflict with all that is evil in order to establish God's will.

2. THE GALILEAN MINISTRY
Mark 1:14 - 8:21

Only after John's arrest does Jesus take up his active ministry to Israel. John, however, had been baptizing by the Jordan in the region of Judea, near Jerusalem. Jesus had come to him there. John was the messenger who went before Jesus and his fate is closely entwined with that of the Messiah. John preached a baptism of repentance (1:4), and Jesus preaches essentially the same message (1:14).

John's conflict with authorities from Jerusalem led to his death and the same will be true of Jesus. So, after John's arrest, Jesus withdraws to Galilee - away from Jerusalem and the dangers that place holds for him. We can see that this move was calculated to give him time to spread the word, the Good News. It was no part of his ministry to provoke controversy.

The Galilee region of Israel is located in the north central part of the country. It contains some of the richest farming land in all of Palestine and a lively fishing trade continues to this day on its major waterway, the Sea of Galilee – also known as Lake Gennesaret and
the Sea of Tiberias. Because the Jews resisted Herod’s efforts at Hellenization – imposing western ideas and culture on people – especially in and around Jerusalem, the country’s capital and most holy city, Herod concentrated much of his efforts at Hellenizing the nation in this region. The rich farm land and abundant sea also drew Gentile settlers, merchants and tradesmen, who exploited the area’s resources.

Christian tradition and the Gospel stories maintain that Jesus’ boyhood home was in Nazareth of Galilee, a town in the hills on the northwest side of the sea. He called his disciples from among local fishermen. Peter, Andrew and Phillip are said to have been born in Bethsaida, a kind of border town between Jewish and Gentile territory, and Peter was thought to have resided in Capernaum. Some Gospel stories even indicate that Jesus made Capernaum his headquarters for his public ministry. The northeast side of the sea was Gentile territory and Jesus is pictured as often crossing the sea between the Jewish and Gentile regions.

Jesus first activity, in 1:16-20, is to begin to call disciples. There are two significant aspects to these calls. First, we can note the immediate response on the part of those called. This is to their credit. Secondly, in Rabbinic circles, it was customary for followers to seek out a teacher and ask to be taken on. Jesus reverses this. The teacher approaches his followers. In his first action, then, we know that there will be something different about Jesus, something that will set him apart from the usual teachers of his day. This becomes evident in the very next episode. Jesus teaches in Capernaum and the people are amazed because he taught with authority, not like their normal teachers. While this speaks well of Jesus, it also anticipates the later conflicts that will develop. It is within the context of his teaching that Jesus performs his first miracle, the casting out of a demon. What Jesus teaches, then, is associated with his conflict with forces of evil. Here, for the first time, we get the notice that the demon - an other-worldly force - recognizes Jesus for who he is. The reaction of the crowd anticipates what will be common throughout the Gospel: though amazed at his teaching and power, they do not recognize him and question his identity.

Next Jesus cures Simon's mother-in-law. Simon was the original name of Peter. In the Gospels is sometimes referred to as Simon, sometimes as Peter, and sometimes as Simon Peter. This action leads to her service. In Jesus, the Kingdom of God has drawn near to her. This fits with the general purpose of miracles in Mark. The result of experiencing
the power of the Kingdom is to take up service of others. That is the example this miracle story holds up for us to imitate. Finally, Mark ends the first phase of Jesus' active ministry in a summary fashion. Many who were sick or possessed came to Jesus and he healed them - while forbidding the demons to make him known. Already the theme of the Messianic Secret is asserting itself. Jesus needs time to get his message out and, in response to his message, he wants people to change how they look at things and how they live, to accept the nearness of the Kingdom of God.

This first phase of Jesus' active ministry in Capernaum is composed of episodes which Mark has arranged in a significant pattern. In the context of his teaching -

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The first thing to notice about the pattern is that there is a progression from one EXORCISM and one healing to many cures and many exorcisms. This progression indicates that the fact that the Kingdom of God has drawn near to us in Jesus means that there should be growth, there should be an increase in the experience of God's love and care. Secondly, the episodes are arranged in a concentric pattern - the first and last episodes concern exorcisms, while the two middle episodes are healings. In such structures, the focus is always on what comes in the middle. Simon's mother-in-law was cured and that led to her service. That is what can be expected from the many who have been cured. That is how the Kingdom will grow. The fact that these two healing episodes are contained within two episodes about exorcisms demonstrates that the healings brought near by the presence of God's Kingdom in Jesus are part of the larger conflict between God and his will and forces of evil in the world. In standing against evil, the Kingdom brings good things to those who can accept it and demands that those who experience the good take up service to bring good to others.

Mark 1:35-39 functions as a summary statement of Jesus' ministry for this whole section. The particular actions of Jesus, which Mark has just narrated, will characterize his ministry throughout Galilee. In the rest of the section, 1:40-7:37, Mark will give his account of that ministry. Jesus' first act during his Galilean ministry is to cure a leper (1:40-45). This is a typical Miracle Story and it serves to give us a glimpse of Jesus, of the kind of Messiah he is. Mark notes that Jesus felt pity, that he had compassion. Such compassion is to be characteristic of God's Kingdom. The episode ends with Jesus' command to the man to remain silent about his cure. With this, Mark begins to develop his theme of the Messianic Secret. Such commands to silence are intended, according to Mark's story, to allow Jesus to avoid unnecessary confrontation and to give him time to get his message out. In Jesus' Galilean ministry, then, there is a sense of urgency and this urgency will be carried in the rapid pace of the story as Mark jumps from one episode to the next.

So far, Mark's story has introduced Jesus as the main character. Jesus is the Son of God, the Messiah who brings God's presence and power near. As Messiah, Jesus is...
compassionate. The story has also introduced the first disciples and presented them as men willing to respond immediately to Jesus' call. Mark has also suggested that the relationship between Jesus and his disciples is different from that between other teachers and disciples, that Jesus and his call to followers represents something radically different from what one might normally expect. Mark has also given us a glimpse into what Jesus is all about. He preaches the Good News that God's Kingdom has drawn near and demands an immediate response; he teaches what this means; and he works miracles to show that what he says is really true. All of this is the setting for the story that is about to unfold.

The tensions which Mark's Gospel story aims at resolving are Jesus' conflicts with Israel's religious leaders and the lack of faith and understanding of his own disciples. Jesus' relationship with the religious authorities is presented, for the most part, in two unified series of controversy stories. One series is found in each of the major Ministry sections of the Gospel. During Jesus' Galilean ministry, the controversies are found in Mark 2:1-3:6. In this section, there are five episodes arranged in a balanced or concentric pattern.

A. HEALING. (Mk 2:1-12). Jesus heals a paralyzed man and forgives his sins. Jesus' actions suggest that there are worse things than being sick and that he can do something about them. Some of the religious leaders think to themselves that he BLASPHEMES. (Note: Blasphemy, the first accusation against Jesus in the Gospel, will be the charge for which he is condemned at the end.)

B. EATING. (Mk 2:13-17). Jesus calls a tax-collector to be his follower and then eats at his house with other tax-collectors and those known to be sinners. The religious leaders take offense at this and question his disciples about what Jesus is doing.

C. FASTING. (Mk 2:18-22). The religious leaders approach Jesus with a question about his disciples. The question and Jesus' answer show that there is something new and different about Jesus and his message, his teaching.

As we move from one episode to the next, the hostility against Jesus on the part of the religious authorities gets stronger - moving from questioning in their hearts to actually plotting to destroy him. The heart of the whole structure focuses on the fact that there is something new and different about Jesus, something that sets him apart from Israel's religious leaders and challenges their assumptions about God and his will. This idea runs through all of the episodes so that, in the end, the whole section of controversies are intended to challenge our own assumptions about whom God loves, who belong in his Kingdom, whom he seeks out.

The set of controversies begins a pattern in which conflict with the religious authorities is followed immediately by teaching on discipleship. These controversies are followed by
Jesus' naming of the Twelve Apostles (3:7-21); then a controversy with the religious leaders over the authority of Jesus (3:22-30) is followed by Jesus' statement about who are members of his true family (3:31-35). In this pattern, the episodes are meant to shed light on each other and we come to understand the disciples' lack of understanding in terms of the stubborn unbelief of the religious leaders.

Mk 3:7-12 is another summary passage highlighting the fact that Jesus withdrew from the controversy and continued to carry out his work. The round of controversies, however, has increased the tension in the story and heightened the sense of urgency - the need to preach that the Kingdom has drawn near and the demands it makes. Because of the hostility of the religious authorities towards Jesus, the question now arises about whether he will be able to carry out his ministry. To meet this challenge, Jesus withdraws to a mountain with his disciples. There he appoints The Twelve and GIVES THEM AUTHORITY TO DO WHAT HE DOES (Mk 3:13-19). Mark notes that Jesus chose the twelve "to be with him" and "to send them out" to carry on his work. The Twelve represent all disciples. In this section, then, Mark teaches us about the nature of being Jesus' followers. As Jesus' followers we are always with him and he with us, and WE ARE EMPOWERED, are "sent" to do what he did. Unfortunately, the reaction of those "with" Jesus was less than what was desired. In 3:20-21, those with Jesus, those who have been told that they have the power and authority to continue to do what Jesus did, conclude that Jesus is out of his mind. The challenge Mark is laying before us is to realize and accept that we have the power and authority to do what Jesus did, to be a means of healing, to bring God's good things to other people. Will we accept this or think that such an idea is just crazy?

The next controversy with scribes from Jerusalem highlights the nature of the basic controversy between Jesus and the religious leaders. It is a conflict about AUTHORITY. Jesus answers them by noting that a house divided against itself cannot stand. If his authority is from the prince of evil and he fights evil, then the power of evil is broken; if however, his authority is from God, then the saving presence of God has drawn near. In either case, the power of evil is being broken. This is what the Kingdom of God is all about. On the other hand, this controversy story throws light back on the understanding of discipleship presented in 3:7-21. Jesus' words offer disciples a warning. If a house is divided against itself, it cannot stand. If the Christian community is not unified, if disciples do not believe in and accept the authority they have to do what Jesus did, then the Christian movement, the Kingdom of God in this world, is doomed to fail. Finally, in 3:31-35, Jesus reaffirms that the fellowship of his disciples makes up his true family. Being a disciple means doing the will of God.
Mark 4:1-34 has been called the **PARABLE DISCOURSE**. It makes up Mark's extended example of Jesus' teaching activity. The material in this section consists of:

A. The Parable of the Sower (4:3-9)
B. The Explanation of the Parable of the Sower (4:10-20)
C. The Lamp and the Measure (4:21-25)
D. The Hidden Growth of Seed (4:26-29)
E. The Mustard Seed (4:30-32)

In Mark, the parables are reserved for the disciples, for those on the "inside." They are meant to hide the meaning of the Kingdom of God from those "outside." In this, they contribute to Mark's use of the idea of the Messianic Secret. The mysterious sayings of the parables should be understood by Jesus' followers, but should also give those "outside," Jesus' opponents, no reason to condemn him since they cannot understand what he is talking about.

In general, the parables teach us about the nature of God's Kingdom. It starts small but grows large in hidden and unseen ways. The Parable of the Sower provides a key for understanding all the parables about God's Kingdom. In it, Mark begins to use a **MOTIF**. A **MOTIF** is an image or idea that a writer uses repeatedly to help him develop his main themes and ideas. The motif Mark begins to use here is that of **SEED PLANTED**. The planting of seed suggests death and burial. However, from planting seed, new growth happens; a great harvest can occur. This motif helps Mark explain what he means by the Kingdom of God and what he means when he asserts that Jesus is the Messiah.

| **THE KINGDOM OF GOD**, like planted seed, grows in hidden and unseen ways. |
| **THE KINGDOM**, like growing seed, meets with resistance (weeds), faces hostility (birds eating it), and can't survive if it is not firmly rooted and tended. |
| **THE MESSIAH**, like the sower of seed, offers a chance for growth and tends what he has planted. |

Like seed, the **MESSIAH** must suffer and die in order to bring about growth, in order to establish the Kingdom.

By his use of parables, Mark wants us, as followers of Jesus, to look for the presence of God's Kingdom hidden all around us; as followers of Jesus, he wants us to realize that we are charged with spreading the Good News of the Kingdom, and this means that we have to be willing, like Jesus, to suffer.

The Parable Discourse draws to a close with the story of Jesus calming the storm on the sea (4:35-41). In response to Jesus' teaching and his authority over the forces of nature, the disciples ask, "Who, then, is this?" With this question Mark highlights the disciple's lack of understanding. After all Jesus has said and done, they still have no glimpse into who he really is.
A new phase in Jesus' ministry begins with 5:1-20. Jesus crosses to Gentile territory and, just as his ministry in Galilee began with an exorcism, so too here he casts out a demon. By this story, Mark shows that the Kingdom which draws near in Jesus is not just for Israel, but is for ALL people. However, the reaction of the people of this territory also shows that "planting the seeds of faith" in Gentile territory will be no easier than offering the Kingdom to God's people in Israel.

This whole section begins and ends with miracles which Jesus performs for Gentiles. The section is rounded out with the story of a Gentile woman in Mark 7:24-30. This is a typical Miracle Story which holds up the faith of the woman as an example for us to imitate. Again, by enclosing the stories of Jesus' continuing ministry in Israel within these brackets, Mark is emphasizing that Jesus' preaching of the Good News of the Kingdom of God in Israel is only part of the whole picture, that it is God's plan that ALL PEOPLE should hear the Good News and respond to its demands.

In 5:21, Jesus returns to Galilee and immediately performs two miracles that again demonstrate the value of faith, but also further develop Mark's ideas about those to whom God offers his Kingdom. Two stories are woven together in 5:21-43. First, a synagogue leader, one of Israel's religious authorities, approaches Jesus in faith. He pleads with Jesus to heal his daughter. While Jesus is on the way to the synagogue leader's house, a poor woman touches the hem of his cloak and is healed of a long-standing affliction. Finally, Jesus arrives at the synagogue leader's house and raises the little girl to life. In these stories, Mark stresses that the Kingdom is about healing and life and that these gifts from God are intended for the great and small alike.

In 6:1-6a, Mark continues to develop his story by way of contrasts. The faith of the synagogue leader and of the poor woman had been the occasion for them to experience the presence and power of God as it draws near in Jesus. Now, in his home town, Jesus confronts a lack of faith which keeps him from performing many miracles. What Mark demonstrates by this passage is the truth of the saying that "Familiarity Breeds Contempt." The danger against which Mark is warning us is that, in trying to follow Christ and do what he did, we may face rejection by those closest to us, those who assume they know us and all about us and refuse to take us seriously.

Again, facing conflict and rejection, Jesus EMPOWERS his disciples and SENDS THEM OUT to do what he has been doing. He gives them a share in his own Mission. The Mission of the disciples, then, is carried out under the shadow of the previous
passage in which Jesus faced rejection. The sending of the disciples in Mk 6:6b-13 and their return to Jesus in 6:30 enclose Mark's account of the death of John the Baptist. Here, we have to recall that God's purpose in sending John was to send a messenger before his Son. What happens to John foreshadows what happens to Jesus. Both John and Jesus preached essentially the same message. The circumstances of John's arrest and death serve to remind us that Jesus is engaged in a conflict in which the religious leaders are already plotting how they might destroy him. Mark will not let us forget that this conflict is a struggle to the death. In the face of this, Jesus has selected and empowered others, his disciples, to carry on his work. But, in the face of all that has been developing so far, those disciples, and that includes us, have to understand that we are in a struggle and that struggle to spread the Good News of the Kingdom involves suffering.

In the next two incidents, the Feeding of the Five Thousand (Mk 6:30-44) and Jesus' Walking on the Water (Mk 6:47-52), Mark develops his second significant MOTIF. This Motif is that of BROKEN BREAD. In the story of the Feeding of the Five Thousand, what characterizes Jesus is his compassion. He challenges his disciples to do something for the crowd, to make his compassion a reality. They can't do it. Finally, Jesus performs the miracle and what is important to note is how much is left over. Mark's point is that the compassion of Jesus is sufficient to satisfy the needs of people with plenty left over. There is no end to his compassion. But that compassion needs to be expressed through the actions of his disciples - US.

So this story speaks, again, about the benefits of God's Kingdom and about who Jesus is as the Messiah. Mark underscores his teaching by the motif of BROKEN BREAD. "Broken bread" suggests suffering. But, "broken bread" is shared. Many people are satisfied and there is still more left over.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD, like broken bread, can be shared to meet the needs of many people. There is no end to what can be shared for the good of all.

THE MESSIAH, like broken bread, must be broken, must suffer to bring the benefits of the Kingdom to others.

The story of Jesus Walking on the Water, then, immediately focuses on the disciples and their lack of understanding. They see him and do not understand who he is. They think he is a ghost. But the story ends with an explanation for their lack of understanding of who Jesus is: "They did not understand about the bread." The hidden aspect of the Kingdom which the disciples have failed to see and understand is that Jesus has empowered them and given them the authority to do what he does. They could have fed the crowd. WE, TOO, AS JESUS' FOLLOWERS, CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE TO HUNGRY AND SUFFERING PEOPLE.

This section of Mark's Gospel draws to a close with three episodes, all meant to be read in the light of each other, and in the light of the feeding story which has gone before:

A. A Controversy with the Pharisees (7:1-23)
B. The Miracle for the Gentile Woman (7:24-30)
C. The Healing of the Deaf Man (7:31-37).

The controversy with the Pharisees is over the Tradition of the Elders, the oral law. Jesus condemns the Pharisees because they make their traditions, human teaching, more important than the compassion which should characterize God's Kingdom, the compassion which he has just demonstrated. Then, if a major stress in the story of the Feeding of the Five Thousand was how much was left over, the story of the Gentile woman focuses on what this means. The mere crumbs left over from what is offered to Israel are enough to bring the benefits of God's Kingdom to the Gentiles, to those we might think of as "outside" of God's plan. Finally, a deaf man is healed. The man's deafness is a symbol of the spiritual deafness through which people like the Pharisees can miss the point of what God really wants of us. To heal this deafness takes a work of compassion and the compassion of Jesus is consistently held out to us as an example to imitate. Having compassion for those who stand against us is a hard virtue to practice, but it is only through such compassion that we can win them over. To maintain conflicts over who is right and who is wrong is to miss the message of the Kingdom.
3. THE MEANING OF DISCIPLESHIP
Mark 8-10.

In these three chapters Mark deals with the Meaning of Discipleship. These chapters, then, are the very heart of his Gospel. The section begins with a second Feeding Story, the Feeding of the Four Thousand. This story makes, basically, the same points as the earlier feeding story (Mk 8:1-10). It is interesting to note that the first feeding story took place in Jewish territory. The number of baskets collected after the feeding of the crowd was 12 – one for each of the twelve tribes of Israel. This feeding story takes place in Gentile territory and there are seven baskets of fragments left over – one for each of the seven Gentile nations of the world that are envisioned in the Old Testament. This story is followed by a controversy with the Pharisees, who then withdraw from the pages of Mark until the final controversies in the Passion Narrative. In response to this controversy, Jesus teaches his disciples to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees. He is warning disciples not to be like Pharisees, who hang on to their authority, wealth and position when God's real demands are hard and mean compassion and service - what they can offer to others rather than what they can get for themselves. The basic point of Jesus' words, like his teaching on the hidden growth of planted seeds, is that what is at the heart of a person, just as yeast in the heart of dough, is what will grow and expand. It can be either selfishness or compassion. But again, the disciples fail to understand - either the miracle or his teaching about the errors of the Pharisees.

The whole rest of the section is concerned, primarily, with Jesus teaching on the meaning of discipleship. For Mark, a disciple must embrace SERVICE and SUFFERING. A true disciple cannot be attached to wealth, power or prestige, but must be willing to build
the Kingdom by doing good for others, by putting himself or herself at the disposal of others and their needs, and not seeking personal satisfaction and personal benefits.

Once again Mark uses the device of "Framing" to structure this section. Both 8:22-26 and 10:46-52 are stories in which Jesus restores sight to a blind man. These stories shed light on how we are to approach Jesus' instructions about discipleship in the material that is sandwiched in between. Throughout this section, Jesus is attempting to remove the blindness of his disciples, a spiritual blindness symbolized by the physical blindness of the men in the two frame stories.

Throughout this section, Jesus is "on the way." He is on his way to Jerusalem and the fate of suffering and death that awaits him there. The phrase, "on the way," is repeated throughout this section. If Jesus is teaching his followers about the real meaning of discipleship, he is teaching them, and us, how to make our way in this world.

The key to what Jesus has to teach his disciples while they are on their way to Jerusalem, the key to his teaching about how they are to make their way in the world, comes in three passion predictions which punctuate this section - coming roughly at the beginning, middle and end. Through these predictions, Jesus attempts to restore or correct his disciples' sight, and yet the disciples will hold on to their blindness. He attempts to teach them about service and suffering, but they don’t understand and don’t want to embrace his vision of service.

The first passion-prediction comes in the context of Jesus question to his disciples about his true identity and Peter's response (Mk 8:27-9:1). Peter, speaking for all the disciples, confesses that Jesus is the Messiah. His response is correct as far as it goes, but it also not enough. This immediately becomes clear. Jesus proceeds to teach his followers that the Messiah must suffer and die. This is not the image they have of a Messiah and Peter rebukes the Lord. While Peter is correct in stating that Jesus is the Messiah, he still has not seen that the Messiah is the Son of God and he cannot accept that the Messiah must suffer.

The focal scene in this section, and perhaps in the whole Gospel, is the TRANSFIGURATION (Mk 9:2-8). The Transfiguration presents, in advance, the glory that will be Jesus' but the disciples, and especially Peter, cannot see that this glory will be achieved only after Jesus has passed through his suffering. Mistakenly, Peter wants to hang on to the glory of the present moment. He wants the benefits without the work. If faith in the resurrection is the starting point for all the writings of the New Testament, Mark's Gospel wants to correct the misunderstanding that we can have the glory of the resurrection without the hard knocks of life, without the service and suffering disciples must give and endure to live into the glory of the resurrection.

In the aftermath of the Transfiguration, in Mark 9:30-41, Jesus makes his second passion prediction and is again met with misunderstanding. While "on the way" after his second passion prediction, Jesus wants to know what his followers have been arguing about along the way. Sadly, they were arguing about who was the greatest. They still see things in purely human terms. They do not understand the Kingdom which draws near in Jesus. Their idea of greatness involves prestige and power, not service and suffering.
Finally, at the end of the section, Jesus predicts his passion one last time. This time James and John explicitly ask for positions of power and prestige in Jesus' Kingdom. The other ten are angered at this, showing that they all want the same positions, that they have all failed to grasp what Jesus has been trying to teach them and get them to accept.

In the end, this whole section is a meditation on being Christian, on being disciples or followers of Christ, and on leadership roles within the community. The Christian community is not to be an organization based on a power structure. All are called upon to serve the needs of others and those who are leaders are to be great, not through power and authority, but by means of greater SERVICE.
4. THE JERUSALEM MINISTRY:

The last part of Mark's Gospel can be divided into two sections:

A. The Ministry of Jesus in Jerusalem (Mark 11:1-13:37)

B. The Passion Narrative (Mark 14:1-16:8).

The second section, the Passion Narrative, is the direct result of Jesus' ministry, and again his ministry is characterized by conflict with Israel's religious authorities.

The first section is structured around three visits to the temple. On the first visit, Jesus merely looks around and withdraws (Mk 11:11). This visit is preceded by the incident in which Jesus is acclaimed by the crowd (Mk 11:1-10). In Mark, however, Jesus is not welcomed by crowds from Jerusalem, but is hailed as the Son of David by those who had been following him before he even
reaches the city. As was the case when Peter confessed that Jesus was the Messiah, the title, "Son of David," is correct, but incomplete. Again, those around Jesus want to understand him as a Messianic King who will restore political power and glory to Israel, not as the suffering Son of Man who is God's Son. Jesus entry into Jerusalem to begin the final phase of his life and work, then, is again marked by lack of understanding and false expectations.

Jesus' second visit to the temple is narrated in Mark 11:15-19. Now Jesus takes action. He drives out the money-changers and refuses to let anyone carry anything through the temple. In effect, he shuts down the whole system of worship in the temple. His justification for his actions is that the temple is to be "a house of prayer for ALL people." In this incident, Jesus attacks formal religion which is exclusive and set on maintaining itself rather than reaching out to and welcoming all people. This incident is surrounded by the episode in which Jesus curses a fig tree (Mk 11:12-14), and its final outcome (Mk 11:20-22). The story of the fig tree gives the key to understanding Jesus' actions in the temple. Just as the tree did not bear fruit, so too the formal religion of Israel was not achieving its end, but perpetuating and serving itself. As the tree withered and died, so too will the self-serving practices of formalized religion fail. The time was not right for the Kingdom; it could not draw near to the temple and those who supported it.

Jesus' third trip to Jerusalem also ends in the temple (Mk 11:27), and on this occasion Jesus enters one last time into a round of controversies with Israel's religious authorities. This set of controversies, like the earlier one during the Galilean Ministry, is given a concentric structure:

| A. JUDGMENT AGAINST AUTHORITIES (Mk 12:1-9). | The parable of the wicked tenants provides an indirect accusation against the religious authorities of Israel for their misuse of office and foretells the outcome of Jesus' entire struggle with the religious establishment - his death. |
| B. A QUOTE FOLLOWED BY A REACTION (Mk 12:10-12). | The quote makes it clear that Jesus was talking about the authorities and they react by wanting to arrest him, but holding off because they feared the crowds. |
| C. WHAT WE OWE GOD AND WHAT WE OWE PEOPLE. (Mk 12:13-17). | The question about the tax paid to Caesar is a clever trap, but Jesus answers that political and social obligations do not necessarily stand against our obligations to God. |
| D. RESURRECTION (Mk 12:18-27). | The issue of resurrection is the heart of the whole structure. In this controversy, Jesus defeats his opponents by a proof from Scripture, which his opponents are supposed to know so well. |
| C. WHAT WE OWE GOD AND WHAT WE OWE PEOPLE. (Mk 12:28-34). | This incident balances with the previous question about what is owed to God and other people and asserts that the most basic obligation we have is to love God and that the way that we can show that we love God is by loving each other. The effect of |
this answer is to silence Jesus' opponents. Everyone is now afraid to ask him any more questions.

B. A QUOTE FOLLOWED BY A REACTION (Mk 12:35-37). Here Jesus deals with the question about the Messiah's Davidic sonship. He asserts, again with a scriptural argument, that he is something more than and greater than a mere political king in the line of David.

A. JUDGMENT AGAINST AUTHORITIES (Mk 12:38-40). The whole section ends with Jesus' explicit teaching about the specific abuses of the religious establishment of Jerusalem. Now there can be no doubt about the terms of the conflict.

This whole section, then, focuses on the abuses and shortcomings of Jerusalem's religious establishment and gives a strong warning to Christians today about how they practice their faith and religion. Jesus' words claim that what was designed to serve God and the needs of his people in the past, the temple and its whole worship system, was corrupt and would be replaced. God, in his Son, would begin something new - the Kingdom. That Kingdom represents a radical break with the past. This is the basic meaning of the ESCHATOLOGICAL DISCOURSE of chapter 13. (Note: Eschatology refers to "the last things," the final establishment of the Kingdom of God when Jesus, after his death and resurrection will return again). The basic message of Jesus' words in chapter 13 is that the Kingdom will be - and already is - something new, not tied to the old religious institutions and practices, but based on a personal relationship with God which expresses itself in love for others, and that the time of the final establishment of the Kingdom is assured, but cannot be determined. Christians have to be ready, every day, to meet the Kingdom when it presents itself to us in its hidden and mysterious ways.

The Gospel of Mark reaches its climax and conclusion in the Passion Narrative. At the Last Supper Jesus institutes the Eucharist. Here, the motif of BROKEN BREAD achieves its ultimate purpose. JESUS IS THE BROKEN BREAD AND THE CUP POURED OUT FOR MANY. This has been the whole purpose of his life, a purpose he is about to fulfill in his death. Jesus trial is marked by high irony. He is condemned for saying that he is who he is - the Son of God. Again Mark tells this crucial story by using the device of framing. Jesus' trial before the Sanhedrin is framed by Peter's denial of Jesus in the courtyard outside (Mk 14:54-72). Jesus' fate as the Messiah is tied to the disciple's willingness to accept Jesus for who he is and to admit to being a follower. If the purpose of the Messiah is to bring the Kingdom of God - the love, power and presence of God - near to all people, then that purpose can be accomplished only if disciples, WE, are willing to stand by our faith, admit the difference Jesus makes in our lives, and live that difference to the fullest.

The ironies continue in the hearing before Pilate. Here the Roman soldiers mock Jesus as "King of the Jews," but what they say in mockery is, in actuality, the truth. The ironies continue in the charge placed over Jesus' head on the cross, "The King of the Jews," and in the setting of the crucifixion itself. Jesus is crucified with two robbers, one at his right and one at his left - a kingly setting as the requests of John and James to sit at Jesus right and left in Jesus' Kingdom makes clear. It is, then, in the crucifixion, in the moment of abandonment and horrible suffering that Jesus assumes his Kingship. The final irony is

New Testament Notes
that this kingship is recognized in the end and proclaimed, "Truly, this was the Son of God," but that acclamation comes on the lips of a Roman centurion and not from those who had been closest to Jesus. Jesus true glory, then, the glory which comes from his obedience to the will of his Father in carrying out his mission, can only be seen at the cross. The road to messianic glory passes through suffering.

Mark's Gospel ends with the women finding the empty tomb and responding with FEAR. The Gospel ends, then, with an inappropriate response on the part of Jesus' followers. The resurrection confirms all that Jesus has said about himself and his Father's Kingdom. So, the resurrection confirms the urgency to respond NOW. For the women, and for all believers, this can be frightening. Mark's ending says that the story is continuing. His title had said that the story he was about to tell was only the beginning, and his ending confirms this. How the story continues and whether or not it will have a happy ending depends on how Mark's readers respond, on how WE live out the story.

Peter denies Jesus but went off weeping bitterly. The women meet the young man at the tomb and run off in fear. But the Christian movement began and the Church grew. This happened despite the weaknesses of Jesus' followers. This is a message of hope for us. Like Peter we can make mistakes and deny the difference Jesus makes in our lives; like the women at the tomb we can be afraid of the demands Jesus makes on us. But, in the end, Jesus' promise remains, "I will go before you to Galilee." Our failures do not have to be the end of the story. **The story WILL CONTINUE and it WILL HAVE A HAPPY ENDING if we, as followers of Jesus, are willing to do what Jesus did - even if it means suffering.**
Unit Three: The Gospel According to Matthew

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BibloV geneseW lhsou Cristou uiou Dauid uiou Abraam. Abraam egennhsen ton Isaak, Isaak de egennhsen ton lakwb, lakwb de egennhsen ton loudan kai touV adel fouV autou, loudaV de egennhsen ton FareV kai ton Zara ek thV Qamar, FareV de egennhsen ton Esrwm, Esrwm de egennhsen ton Aram, Aram de egennhsen ton Aminadab, Aminadab de egennhsen ton Naasswn, Naasswn de egennhsen ton Salmwn, Salmwn de egennhsen ton BoeVek thV Racab, BoeV de egennhsen ton Iwbhd ek thV Rouq, Iwbhd de egennhsen ton Iessai

Objective: In Matthew’s Gospel, the Gospel writer focuses his attention on the community of faith. For Matthew, the Kingdom of God is to be found in the community of faith. The response Matthew wants his readers to make is to treat each other as we would treat Christ. In fact, Matthew teaches that how we treat each other within the community of faith IS how we treat Christ.

Vocabulary List:

<table>
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<th>Church</th>
<th>Ecclesia</th>
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<tr>
<td>Fulfillment Quotation</td>
<td>Genealogy</td>
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<td>Infancy Narrative</td>
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<td>Scandal</td>
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MATTHEW'S GOSPEL, like Mark's, is PREACHING IN STORY FORM. As in Mark, the story is about Jesus the Messiah, but in Matthew, Jesus is not the Secret Messiah. As the Messiah, Jesus is characteristically portrayed as

1. Preacher
2. Teacher
3. Miracle Worker

However, in Matthew the stress is on Jesus as a TEACHER. Unlike Mark, who used the parables to highlight the mystery of the Hidden Kingdom of God, for Matthew, the parables REVEAL the presence of the Kingdom of God.

Matthew's Gospel is addressed to a COMMUNITY OF BELIEVERS, a CHURCH. Matthew is the only Gospel writer to use this word. The word, in Greek, is ECCLESIA. That word is used to translate the Old Testament Hebrew word for the ASSEMBLY OF ISRAEL. The "Assembly of Israel" was a technical Old Testament term which designated the unity of God's people as a Holy Congregation or gathering. It was as the Holy Assembly or Congregation that Israel was the true PEOPLE OF GOD. The "Church" or "True People of God" Matthew addressed in his Gospel story was not only engaged in spreading the Good News, but was also struggling with the day-to-day business of community life. Matthew's Gospel, then, provides common sense advice to those who served as leaders of the community.

Where Mark was concerned to call people to discipleship - even if that meant suffering - Matthew is constantly looking at the problems of living within the community and presents Jesus' teachings as answers to those problems.

In Matthew, too, the hostility to the Pharisees is much stronger than it was in Mark. This seems to indicate that Matthew's Gospel was written at a time when the Pharisees had become the undisputed leaders of the Jewish religion and were engaged in conflicts with Christians about the proper understanding of being a Jew, that is, the proper understanding of the Law of Moses as the life force behind the Assembly of Israel, the true People of God. That is, Matthew was writing in a time and in circumstances which fit the situation of the early Christian community after the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. For this reason, Matthew pictures Jesus as an INTERPRETER and TEACHER of the Law - a figure much like Moses - which is a special feature of his Gospel.
In writing his Gospel, Matthew used the Gospel of Mark as his basic outline. He follows, then, the same basic story-line as does Mark. But Matthew also used additional stories about Jesus and sayings attributed to Jesus that are not found in Mark. He uses these additional materials (which he most likely derived from "Q" - a special "sayings source"). He rearranged some of Mark's material to write his own version of the Gospel and address the concerns of his own community.

Since Matthew follows Mark's basic story-line, we can expect that Matthew's Gospel will have the same PLOT OUTLINE that we found in Mark.

**PROBLEM:** Jesus announces that the Kingdom of God is near. This preaching means that people must repent, must change the way they look at each other and the way they behave. For Mark, the Kingdom was present, but hidden. For Matthew, however, the Kingdom is ready at hand. It is to be found in the community of believers.

**COMPLICATION:** What Jesus says and does is met with anger, hostility, and disbelief on the part of the religious leaders of the Jews. In Matthew's Gospel, these leaders are primarily identified as Pharisees - the group with whom his own community was experiencing conflict. As in Mark, the hostility of the opponents of Jesus grows stronger as the story progresses, ending in Jesus' arrest and trial. **The basic conflict in Matthew's Gospel is over who constitutes the TRUE PEOPLE OF GOD to whom God offers salvation, who are the TRUE SONS OF ABRAHAM.**

**RESOLUTION:** The resolution of the tension of the story, as in Mark, is the CRUCIFIXION. In Matthew the Pharisees bear the brunt of the blame for the crucifixion of Jesus, demonstrating that they are wrong. Again, ironically, the crucifixion, while appearing to be defeat, is a moment of triumph. In it, Jesus is acclaimed as King of the Jews.

**WRAP-UP:** Matthew's Gospel ends with Jesus' instructions to his disciples and his promise to be with them forever. **Matthew's ending says that the community (the Kingdom) will continue to grow if the disciples continue to do what Jesus did, if they do his will with respect to EACH OTHER. If they do, he will continue to be WITH and IN the community.**

Even though Matthew follows Mark's basic story-line, the story he tells is completely different. Matthew's story is different because of the way he develops his characters within the unfolding plot, even though those characters are essentially the same as those in Mark. Matthew's characters include JESUS, THE OPPONENTS, THE ROMAN AUTHORITIES, THE DISCIPLES, and THE COMMON PEOPLE.
JESUS:

Where Mark presented Jesus as the Secret Messiah, Matthew presents Jesus in a much more public fashion. For Matthew, Jesus is the ROYAL MESSIAH in the line of David and a TEACHER OF THE LAW LIKE MOSES. In Matthew, Jesus teaches publicly; his parables serve to reveal the kingdom to ANYONE who will listen and are not reserved for the special "in crowd." So, in Matthew, Jesus is characterized as a teacher, but even more, as one who teaches with AUTHORITY. Finally Matthew portrays Jesus and his followers as the true nation of Israel, the true Assembly or Church, the TRUE SONS OF ABRAHAM, in contrast to the Pharisees who claim to be the true representatives of the people of God. The opponents of Jesus will be shown to be "Illegitimate sons" because of their lack of belief.

THE OPPONENTS:

In Matthew, the opponents of Jesus are primarily the Pharisees - reflecting the situation of Matthew's Church at the time the Gospel was written. The opponents are painted by Matthew in completely negative light. They are the self-professed teachers of God's will, the Law, but are regularly shown to be
ignorant of God's will by the teaching of Jesus. In Matthew's Gospel, it is the religious leaders of the Jews who are responsible for the death of Jesus, for rejecting the salvation God has to offer. In this, the opponents serve as a contrast for both the faithful disciples and the common people. They are even portrayed negatively in comparison with the Roman Officials.

**ROMAN AUTHORITIES:**
In Matthew's Gospel the Roman Authorities are pictured as sympathetic but uninformed. In this portrayal, Matthew may have been trying to present Christianity to the larger world by showing that Christians were no threat to civil authorities and that Christians harbor no hostility to the Romans for the death of their Lord. Whatever the case, Matthew's portrayal of the Roman authorities serves to lay blame for the rejection of Jesus and his message squarely at the feet of the religious leaders of the Jews - especially the Pharisees. In their rejection of Jesus, again, the religious leaders of the Jews show themselves not to be "Sons of Abraham."

**THE DISCIPLES:**
In contrast to Mark, Matthew presents the disciples in a consistently good light. They are faithful followers of Jesus. Where Mark condemns the disciples for their lack of faith, Matthew shows their failings as examples of "Little Faith," and this is something that Jesus can correct. The disciples, as representatives of the community, are regularly shown to do the same things that Jesus does. In this, they serve as examples for later generations of Christians. Like the disciples, we are called to continue to do what Jesus did.

**THE COMMON PEOPLE:**
Matthew's portrayal of the Common People is largely the same as we saw in Mark. The minor characters who approach Jesus show an under-standing and open-ness to what he says that further serves to cast a negative light on their religious leaders.

Matthew's Gospel also has an elaborate structure and this
structure contributes to both Matthew's characterization of Jesus and the special points he wants to stress.

THE STRUCTURE OF MATTHEW'S GOSPEL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I. THE PROLOGUE (The Infancy Narrative - chapters 1-2).</th>
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<tr>
<td>II. THE MINISTRY OF JESUS (Chapters 3-25, organized in five balanced sections).</td>
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| 1. **Narrative:** The preaching of John the Baptist; Jesus' baptism and temptation; the beginning of Jesus' ministry (3:1-4:25).  
  **Concluding Formula:** "And Jesus went about..." (4:23-25).  
  **Teaching:** The Sermon on the Mount (chapters 5-7)  
  **Concluding Formula:** "And when Jesus finished..." (7:28). |
| 2. **Narrative:** Jesus' Mighty Works (chapters 8-9)  
  **Concluding Formula:** "And Jesus went about..." (9:35-38).  
  **Teaching:** Teaching on Mission (chapter 10).  
  **Concluding Formula:** "And when Jesus finished..." (11:1). |
| 3. **Narrative:** Response to Jesus' Mighty Works and the Opening of Hostilities (11:2-12:50). |
| [NO CONCLUDING FORMULA]  
  **Teaching:** The Parables of the Kingdom (chapter 13).  
  **Concluding Formula:** "And when Jesus finished..." (13:53). |
| 4. **Narrative:** Insiders and Outsiders; Signs of Faith, and Increased Hostility (13:54-17:27). |
| [NO CONCLUDING FORMULA]  
  **Teaching:** Rules for the Common Life (chapter 18).  
  **Concluding Formula:** "And when Jesus finished..." (19:1). |
  [NO CONCLUDING FORMULA]  
  **Teaching:** Instructions about the End of the Age (24:1-25:46).  
  **Concluding Formula:** "And when Jesus finished..." (26:1). |
| III. THE EPILOGUE (The death and resurrection of Jesus; Final commission of the disciples - chapters 26-28). |

Note: the CONCLUDING FORMULA for the narratives drops out once the controversies begin in section 3. This would seem to indicate that, from this point on in the Gospel, things are open-ended, unsettled.
THE PROLOGUE introduces Matthew's major themes:

1. Jesus is the Messiah - the anointed King who brings God's Kingdom near.
2. He is the son of David, a royal, messianic figure.
3. He is a son of Abraham - a true member of the Chosen People, a legitimate son of Israel.
4. While the GENEALOGY (family history) of Jesus stresses the above three points, the mention of women who are associated with scandalous behavior (Tamar tricked her father-in-law, Judah, into sleeping with her to get a son; Rahab was a prostitute in Jericho who hid the spies sent by Joshua; Ruth was a Moabite who spent the night with Boaz and got him to marry her; Bathsheba was the wife of Uriah who had an affair with David) indicates that Jesus will be the cause of SCANDAL (offensiveness which goes against people's sense of what is right and Holy) for many - those who cannot accept his radical new interpretation of the Law (which Law Matthew stresses that Jesus and the community of believers fully accept and follow).
5. The birth of Jesus to Mary who conceived before her marriage to Joseph also indicates that scandal will surround Jesus and his followers.
6. MAGI, kingly figures from the Gentile world, attend to Jesus at his birth, also contributing to the idea of his "Royal Nature."
7. But Herod and others in Jerusalem do not respond with the awe of these foreigners. This suggests that Jesus will be the center of controversy and hostility and will not be accepted - even by his own people. It further suggests that those "outside" the Jewish faith can respond and show themselves to be "True Sons of Abraham."
8. Finally, Jesus birth story and the flight of the family into Egypt suggest a
connection between Jesus and Moses - who had a similar birth story in which his life was threatened. Jesus will somehow be like Moses. Moses saved his people and revealed God's will to them. He interpreted God's will for the people. Jesus will be the savior and the teacher and interpreter of God's Law in much the same fashion as Moses.

THE MINISTRY OF JESUS occupies the large, central portion of Matthew's Gospel. The very structure of this section also highlights Jesus role as a TEACHER OF THE LAW like Moses. The "Law of Moses" or the Torah is contained in the first FIVE books of the Bible. The central portion of Matthew's story is organized in FIVE sections. Like the Law of Moses, which is composed of stories and teaching, Matthew's story of Jesus is composed of narrative (stories) and teaching. Furthermore, Jesus teaching regularly takes place on a mountain, recalling Moses' receiving and passing on of the Law on Mt. Sinai.

THE EPILOGUE presents Jesus death as, again, the moment of his triumph. Matthew's Gospel ends with Jesus' instructions to his disciples and his promise to be "With Them" forever. This rounds out Matthew's portrait of Jesus, who, when his birth was announced to Joseph, was given a name which means "God is with us." Matthew's ending stresses his key idea - his subject - that Jesus is present in the community of believers, that this is where we encounter the Kingdom of God, and that how we treat each other is how we treat Jesus himself. There are some additional, special features in Matthew's Gospel which are important to note:
1. **Direct discourse** (speaking) is much more prominent in Matthew than it was in Mark. Speech reveals people - their characters, who they are, what they are like - much more than actions.

2. In Matthew, **miracles are related in the shortest way possible**. As was the case in Mark, the miracle stories follow the pattern of miracle stories in the Old Testament. But with his use of miracle stories, Matthew draws on a different Old Testament emphasis. Many miracle stories in the Old Testament, especially those of Elijah and Elisha, are used in **LEGENDS**. A legend is a story told to give an example of how people should act. The example is usually the **FAITH** of the person which allows God to work some act of power. Matthew uses the miracles in this Legendary sense. They are examples of faith. No miracle can happen in Matthew if faith is absent. **So, while Mark used miracles to prove that what Jesus proclaimed was true, that the Kingdom was really near at hand, Matthew, who places his emphasis on Jesus as a teacher, most often introduces a miracle story into his larger account to provide an occasion for Jesus to teach a lesson about faith.**

3. Like Mark, Matthew sees the central message of Jesus as the NEARNESS OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD. However, **Matthew understands the Kingdom of God in terms of the CHURCH**, the Community of Believers. The Kingdom of God is present when the members of the community treat each other as they would treat Christ.

4. Controversies are an important part of Matthew's story, but the controversies are not so much about who Jesus is (as they were in Mark, where the stories usually ended with a statement of Jesus about himself), but about the proper way to understand the Law as an expression of God's will for his people, a plan for how his people are to live. (This, again, reflects the actual situation of Matthew's community when Pharisees were challenging Christians over their interpretation of the Law of Moses.)

5. A final important feature of Matthew's Gospel is its use of "**FULFILLMENT QUOTATIONS**." That is, Matthew refers to an Old Testament passage as being fulfilled in something Jesus says or does. In this, he shows that **what happens in Jesus' story is THE COMPLETION OF THE STORY OF GOD'S DEALINGS WITH HIS PEOPLE WHICH BEGAN LONG AGO.**

**IN SUM**, Matthew's story of Jesus, with its plot and use of characterization, and with the special features Matthew uses in telling his story, develops Matthew's special subject and theme:

**THE SUBJECT OF MATTHEW'S GOSPEL IS THE COMMUNITY OF FAITH.**

**THE THEME OF MATTHEW'S GOSPEL IS THAT THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS TO BE FOUND IN THE COMMUNITY OF FAITH AND THAT THE WAY THE MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNITY TREAT EACH OTHER IS THE WAY THEY TREAT CHRIST.**
II. Commentary on Matthew's Gospel.

1. THE PROLOGUE (Matthew 1-2).

Matthew's Gospel begins with the words, "An account of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham." The Greek word of "Genealogy" is GENESIS. Genesis is the first Book of the Bible, so what Matthew seems to be suggesting is that the story of Jesus that he will tell represents a NEW BEGINNING, a new twist in the story of God's dealings with his people. Next Matthew includes two titles for Jesus as the Messiah: 1) Son of David, and 2) Son of Abraham. These titles indicate, for Matthew, what kind of a Messiah Jesus is. First, he is a Son of David. He will be a kingly or ROYAL MESSIAH. Secondly, he is a Son of Abraham. This emphasizes the Jewishness of Jesus. He is to be a JEWISH MESSIAH, a true member of the community of God's chosen people. To be a Son of Abraham means that Jesus belongs to the Jewish people and the idea of "belonging" will be a major theme in Matthew.

The genealogy of Jesus of Jesus is divided into three sections, each listing fourteen names. Again, the listing of ancestors indicates that Jesus belongs to the Jewish people, that he is a son in the long line of God's dealings with his people. The orderly progression, three sections with the same number of names in each section, suggests the hand of God guiding events. Jesus stands at the end of this list as a final point in the direction God gives to the story of his people. The three sections of the genealogy divide Jewish history into three eras:

| 1. FROM ABRAHAM TO DAVID:                      |
| Abraham received the promise that he would be the father of a great nation and under David that nation was established. |
| 2. FROM DAVID TO THE BABYLONIAN EXILE:         |
| After David, the period of kingship in Israel was marked by increasing sinfulness which eventually led to the loss of the Kingdom to the Babylonians. |
| 3. FROM THE BABYLONIAN EXILE TO THE MESSIAH:   |
That the period from the loss of the Kingdom ends with the coming of the Messiah, who has been identified as a Son of David, and whose story represents a New Beginning, suggests that a new era has dawned in the story of God's people.

But the genealogy of Jesus is also jarring. At several points it lists women. This is unexpected in genealogies from the ancient world. By including these women, Matthew indicates that Jesus, the Royal Jewish Messiah, will not be what people might expect him to be. Likewise, the women named in the genealogy are associated with scandal and this indicates that Jesus will be a cause of scandal to many. People are going to find Jesus offensive. From the start, then, we know that conflict and controversy are to be part of Matthew's story of Jesus. Finally, the genealogy ends not by naming Jesus' father, but his mother. To identify someone by his mother suggested that that person was illegitimate. While this, again, was a cause of scandal and not what was to be expected of the Messiah, it also raises the issue of true sonship which will be so important to Matthew.

The story of Matthew begins in 1:18. There are two factors or ideas which control the movement or progression of Matthew's story:

1. **PROPHECY / FULFILLMENT**
2. **ACCEPTANCE / REJECTION**

The most common use of the PREDICTION or PROPHECY / FULFILLMENT pattern in Matthew is the use of FULFILLMENT QUOTATIONS. The narrator or Jesus will quote a passage from the Old Testament and indicate that it is fulfilled in something Jesus says or does. These fulfilment quotations show that the story of Jesus fulfills or brings to completion a story begun long ago - the story of God's dealings with his people. The first of these fulfilment quotations is found in 1:23. The key idea in the quote is found in the name Emmanuel, "God is with us." God repeatedly promised the patriarchs that he would be "with" them and, in Jesus the Messiah, this promise becomes concrete and real. This idea provides a frame around the whole story that Matthew will tell. The promised child to be named "God is with us" at the end of the story commissions his followers to carry on his work and promises to be with them for all time. In this way, then, the whole story of Jesus in Matthew is a fulfillment of God's promise to be with his people.

A major concern of Matthew is the community. He raises the question, "Who are God's people?" That issue is raised in the INFANCY NARRATIVE, the story of Jesus' birth.
Mary was found to be pregnant before her marriage to Joseph. This indicates that Jesus was illegitimate, that he **DID NOT BELONG**. Yet he is presented as the Royal Jewish Messiah. Throughout his story, then, Matthew will be concerned with demonstrating and spelling out just who are the legitimate sons of the Kingdom. The pattern of **ACCEPTANCE / REJECTION** begins with Joseph's acceptance of the angel's message, but the situation certainly couldn't have been what he expected. The Magi, too, bringing gifts fit for a king, represent acceptance. However, Herod and the people of Jerusalem, those who are supposed to be true sons of the Kingdom, represent rejection. This pattern suggests, again, at the very outset of the story, that Jesus will be the cause and center of controversy throughout his life.

The ending of Matthew's Infancy Narrative suggests another important theme. Herod, finding the birth of a child who is acclaimed in a kingly fashion to be a threat to his power and position, kills all the male children born in Bethlehem around the time of Jesus' birth. This story recalls the birth of Moses who likewise was born in a situation which posed a threat to his life. In this, Matthew is suggesting the Jesus will be **LIKE** Moses. For Matthew this will mean that Jesus is a teacher and interpreter of the Law. There is irony in this story. Moses was spared from death in Egypt and led his people to freedom. Jesus must escape death **FROM THE HANDS OF HIS OWN PEOPLE** and flee to Egypt for safety. Egypt symbolizes the realms of death. In advance, then, this story foreshadows the crucifixion. Through death - as in going to Egypt - Jesus will win life and freedom.

**IN SUM**, the PROLOGUE introduces these key ideas:

1. The story of Jesus offers a new beginning
2. Jesus is the Messiah
3. He is a Son of David, a **ROYAL MESSIAH** and ruler of a "new Kingdom"
4. His is a Son of Abraham, a true son of Israel, a true member of God's people
5. He will not be what people expect
6. He will be the cause of scandal
7. He will be the cause and center of controversy
8. He is the New Moses
9. Embracing death leads to life and freedom
2. THE MINISTRY OF JESUS (Matthew 3-25).

The idea of Jesus as a **NEW MOSES** is a key image in Matthew. This image is displayed in the structure of the main portion of the Gospel. **Chapters 3-25 fall into five distinct sections, suggesting a new Pentateuch, a new Torah.**


The main body of Matthew's story begins with the appearance of John the Baptist in 3:1. The two patterns of **PREDICTION / FULFILLMENT** and **ACCEPTANCE / REJECTION** are keys to the story-line. John's appearance is introduced as the fulfillment of prophecy and the message he preaches demands acceptance or rejection from those who hear it. In the story of John's ministry Matthew maintains a distinction between the crowds who accept John's preaching and the religious leaders who do not. The success, and failure, which John experiences in his ministry foreshadow the reactions to Jesus' ministry.

The idea of acceptance and rejection is central in the scene in which Jesus comes to be baptized by John. What the two of them do in the scene is to be understood as acceptance of God's will. This same theme of acceptance/rejection is also at the heart of the expanded story of the Temptation in the Wilderness. This story has to be read against the background of Israel's forty years in the wilderness. In contrast to Israel, the first son, Jesus withstands temptations and accepts a way of humble obedience. In this he serves as a model for his disciples. Jesus is tempted to abuse his power as Messiah to satisfy his own personal hunger, to recklessly endanger his life, and to seek out power and glory for its own sake. The temptations of Jesus represent the temptations all humans face: to satisfy our own desires, to live rashly and recklessly, seeking forbidden thrills, and to want power and control. Jesus resists temptation, but it takes a struggle. With his defeat, Satan withdraws for the time being and Jesus can take up his public ministry.

Jesus' public ministry begins in 4:14. It is presented as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, completing the story God began long ago. In Jesus, the light promised long ago had finally dawned. The message Jesus begins to preach is exactly the same as the message of John: **"Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven has come near."** 3:3 and 4:17 provide a frame for the whole section. The movement of the section is one of transition.
John prepared the way, but now his ministry is done. Now is the time of Jesus' ministry and it is with this that the rest of Matthew's story will be concerned. Acceptance and rejection is the key idea and this is brought out immediately in the call of the first disciples who leave everything behind to become followers of Jesus. The rest of this section, chapters 5-7, make up what is called "The Sermon on the Mount." The setting recalls the image of Moses who proclaimed God's Law from Mt. Sinai. This is the longest and best known presentation of Jesus' teaching in the Gospel. Here, then, Jesus is seen as a New Moses presenting not so much a New Law as a new and authentic interpretation of the Law. The sermon is composed of the Beatitudes (Mt 5:1-12), short sayings and parables, antitheses (You have heard it said... but I say to you...) which highlight the newness of Jesus' teaching, warnings, commandments, and the like. The sermon itself can be divided into five sections:

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<td>2.</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>Additional Teachings in a Wisdom Style - 6:19-7:12</td>
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In the first section, the Beatitudes reverse normal expectations. It is not the rich, the powerful or the successful who are blessed, but the poor and powerless. Verses 13-16 deal with the identity of Jesus' followers as the salt of the earth and the light of the world. But these verses also sound a warning. The followers of Jesus must live up to their call or they will become useless. Finally, the section ends with Jesus' teaching about the Law. He has come to bring it to fulfillment, but that fulfillment means that it must be understood and interpreted properly, and that is the purpose of the whole sermon. The second section immediately takes up this theme. The six antitheses present what is new and radical in Jesus' interpretation of the Law. The antitheses themselves deal with how we treat others. The concluding phrase, "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect," calls the followers of Jesus to be everything they can be at any given moment. It is a challenge to constantly grow.

The third section, concerning proper religious attitudes and practices, focuses on the right relationship with God which should lead to proper religious practices. The section speaks against the "show of religion" which is done for the sake of a good name or getting attention and promotes a personal relationship with God that needs no further, human, appreciation.

The fourth section, in line with Wisdom teachings in Israel, merely groups random teachings together because of common concerns. The summary of the whole section is the Golden Rule: "In everything do to others as you would have them to do you; for this is the law and the prophets." In short, Jesus' new interpretation of the Law asserts that its purpose is not to give a set of rules to be rigidly followed, but to provide a guide for how we treat each other, a guide that will lead us to justice, mutual respect and love.

The final section of the Sermon, in an almost covenant-like fashion, deals with judgment for not following the Law as Jesus has interpreted it. (Recall how the final element of the
covenant form was blessings and curses determined by whether or not people kept the terms of the agreement). The images of the two men who built their houses on solid ground and on sand, with which the Sermon ends, offers a call to be rooted, to be solidly founded in the teachings of Jesus as the one way to be part of God's people and live into his Kingdom.

2. Matthew 8:1-10:42.
The narrative portion of this section concerns the Mighty Works of Jesus, especially his healings. The miracle stories told in this section highlight the alternative of acceptance and rejection. Matthew's miracle stories are, in general shorter than those in Mark. Matthew is not interested in the details of the miracles. For him, the miracles are examples of faith and occasions for Jesus to teach. The notion of faith highlights the theme of acceptance, while the reaction of some, especially Israel's religious leaders, to these mighty works of Jesus develops the notion of rejection. The idea of prediction and fulfillment also comes into play in this section. The fulfillment quotation of 8:17 presents Jesus' healing ministry as a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, a part of God's plan.

Chapters 8-9 are structured by a pattern of three miracle stories, followed by passages dealing with what it means to be a disciple. In this, Matthew is suggesting that, somehow, the meaning of discipleship is carried in the stories of Jesus' miracles.
In the first set of three miracle stories, the stories of healing for Israel (the leper and Peter's mother-in-law) surround and highlight the story of a Gentile, a centurion. This indicates that Jesus' mission to the Gentiles is caught up in and part of his mission to Israel. This is in line with the Old Testament theme that Israel was chosen to bring God's good things to others. The arrangement of these stories shows that Jesus is fulfilling this promise. Moreover, the faith of the centurion is the high point of the whole section. He puts his faith in and recognizes the authority of Jesus which he believes can heal by a mere word. By his praise of the centurion and his condemnation of the lack of faith he has found in Israel, Jesus is asserting that the true son of Abraham is the person who has trust and confidence in Jesus and his authority. To be a member of the community of faith did not depend on being a blood descendant of Israel. Such a claim would have angered the religious authorities, so here we get the first hint of the conflict and controversies which will develop. Furthermore, while the fulfillment quote in 8:17, "He took our infirmities and bore our diseases," indicates that what Jesus says and does in part of God's will and plan, the quote itself is from one of the Suffering Servant Songs in Second Isaiah, and this, too foreshadows the conflicts and their ultimate resolution in the suffering of Jesus.

8:18-22 next present two people who approach Jesus to become his followers. Jesus' responses to these two men spell out what it means to be with Jesus as his follower and build on the ideas Matthew presented in the three miracle stories. To the first man Jesus says that he has no fixed home. This man was a scribe, a man firmly rooted in the Laws and traditions of Israel. In his reply, Jesus is claiming that he and the community he is
establis hing have no fixed home in any nation or place or religious tradition. God's community is at home throughout the world. Such an answer would have offended the scribe. To the second man, Jesus stresses the urgency of responding NOW and of breaking all ties with past loyalties. To become a member of the community means to become a member of a new family and the true disciple cannot ever look back. What Jesus says to the two would-be followers is a challenge to discipleship which Matthew lays before us.

The second set of miracles again frames a work of power performed for a Gentile with two miracles which benefit Israelites. The overall effect is the same as in the first set. In the first story, the Calming of the Sea, we now focus directly on disciples. If the teaching of Jesus on discipleship in 8:18-22 was hard, this story demonstrates that God, in Jesus, is willing to work with us. Jesus calms the storm, demonstrating his divinity in his control over the forces of nature. He chides his disciples for "little faith" and then performs a work of power on their behalf. Note how this story differs from Mark's version. There Jesus condemned his disciples for lack of faith and the story ended with the disciples misunderstanding, carried in their question, "Who, then, is this?" For Matthew, a disciple has faith, but it may be little. Jesus is willing to work with us to build up what is little. He does not condemn us for our doubts but helps us to overcome them. In the end, the disciples still do not fully understand, but rather than asking about Jesus identity, they ask, "What sort of a man is this?"

The second framing story, 9:1-8, is a controversy story. There is a progression, as we move from one story in this section to the next. First Jesus shows he has power over the forces of nature; then he demonstrates his power over demons who represent the power of evil; and finally he shows his divine authority to forgive sins. Sin, then, is the ultimate evil Jesus has come to combat and forgiveness of sins is the highest benefit of the Kingdom which has come near in him, the highest benefit for the members of the community of believers. Yet what Jesus does provokes controversy and demonstrates again the possibility of rejection. It is this notion of rejection which is the focus of the middle story about the possessed Gentiles. In response to Jesus' work of power, the people of the region beg him to leave their land. In this Matthew indicates that winning the acceptance of the Gentiles will be no easier than winning acceptance from Israel. That is, to be a member of the Kingdom, to be a true son of Abraham, involves choice and commitment.

In the third section of miracle stories, 9:18-34, the emphasis is on faith. Each of the stories gives a clear example of this virtue. These stories, then, represent a contrast to the stories in the previous section and round out the whole section of Jesus' mighty works by attesting to the value of faith, to the fact that faith opens the way for people to experience the healing and saving power of God. These three stories, then, emphasize the idea of acceptance, but rejection is also present. The Pharisees see what Jesus does for the possessed man and claim that he derives his power from the Prince of Demons.

Finally, the narrative section is closed by the summary notice in 9:35-38.

Chapter 10 now makes up an extended teaching on the mission of the disciples. In 10:1, Jesus commissions the disciples do to what he has been doing. The role of disciples, then, is to continue the work of Jesus himself.

In 10:5-15, Jesus gives the disciples instructions for their mission. They are told to go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. This highlights the idea of the roots of the Christian
community. It grows out of God's dealings with his chosen people. Once the Kingdom has been established in Israel, it can grow to embrace the whole world. In his instructions to the Twelve, Jesus tells them to take along no special provisions for their journey and work. These instructions develop two important ideas about being disciples and offering the message of the Kingdom to others. First of all disciples are to be ONE WITH those they serve; they are not to set themselves apart as different or special. Secondly, being a disciple and offering the message of the Kingdom to others does not depend on any special "equipment" or "provisions." That is, it takes no special education, training, position or power to be a disciple and do what Jesus did. Everyone who follows Christ is empowered to spread the Good News of the Kingdom.

10:16-31 are made up a series of warnings:

1. about opponents (10:16-23)
2. about the relationship between master and disciples (10:24-25)
3. about uncovering what is hidden (10:26-31).

The warning about opponents addressed a concern in Matthew's community. To become a disciple often meant turning one's back on family and relations and standing against the power structures of society. For us the challenge is still to stand by what we believe, even when it is not popular. The second warning indicates that if Jesus faces controversy, then his disciples can expect no less. It also serves as a warning for those who, in following Christ, seek the positions of power. No disciple is more important or necessary than Christ, and Christ's Messiahship was one of humble service. Jesus' final warning states that the truth of the Kingdom will finally be revealed. True disciples will be proven right; false disciples will be unmasked.

The final section of the chapter functions as a summary for the whole. The section falls into three parts, with the first and third parts forming a frame about the second. 10:32-33 deal with acknowledging, accepting Jesus. 10:40-42 deal with accepting disciples. These two sections basically assert that accepting disciples of Jesus is the same thing as accepting Jesus. This is a first indication of Matthew's central theme, that how we treat each other is, in fact, how we treat Christ. The middle section again focuses on divisions in families caused by accepting Christ's call to be a disciple. The heart of discipleship, then, is a radical break with past loyalties and ties and a taking on of a new way of life based on the teachings and model of Christ himself.


While the themes of acceptance/rejection were the focus of chapters 8-9, in chapters 11-12 the tone changes drastically and rejection becomes the main response. This negative reaction is not limited to the Jewish leaders, but involves all who hear Jesus. Throughout the section the intensity of the hostility towards Jesus gets progressively stronger. In this atmosphere of rejection, the theme of prediction also comes into play, especially in 12:15-21 in which a fulfillment quote indicates that it is part of God's plan that hope and salvation are to be offered to the Gentiles. This offer to the Gentiles serves to underscore Israel's rejection of its Messiah. The narrative portion of this central section of Matthew's Gospel, a section which is a key turning point in Matthew's story since it deals with the opening of hostility towards Jesus, is arranged in a concentric structure in which scenes are paired in a repeated frame-like structure.
The first scene, 11:2-19, is paired with the last scene, 12:43-50. The first scene begins with a question raised by John the Baptist about the identity of Jesus. The whole section will move from questions about Jesus to open hostility to him. In the first scene, Jesus deals with the reactions of the people to both John and himself. The people have not understood; they have not seen what they expected to see. In the last scene, 12:43-50, the division between Jesus and the people is again the focus. The image of the possessed man whose last state is worse than his first is a symbol of Jesus and his ministry. What he does to overcome evil cannot last if people refuse to really change, to repent. The second incident involving his family also drives home the point about mistaken expectations. The real family of Jesus, the real family of God, are those who do God's will. The end result of pairing those two scenes is to assert that if we see only what we expect to see, we miss opportunities to respond to Jesus and become true members of the Kingdom.

The second scene, 11:20-24 is paired with 12:38-42. In 11:20-24 Jesus reprimands the cities where most his miracles were performed. The people of those cities have seen the mighty works of God, but have refused to repent. In 12:38-42, the Pharisees ask for a sign. Like the people in the condemned cities, what they have seen is not enough for them. That these two scenes are framed by the outer brackets again shows that looking for signs, looking for assurances before we respond, leads to missed opportunities. In 11:25-30, Jesus calls the simple, the straightforward, the childlike. He promises rest and ease, but also lays a responsibility on them. That responsibility is made clear in the contrasting scene which is paired with 11:25-30. In 12:33-37 Jesus condemns those who talk a good line, but don't live up to what they say. He condemns hypocrisy which stands against simplicity. Here Matthew challenges us to produce good works for the Kingdom, not with empty words but by really living out what is in our hearts.

12:1-8 and 12:22-32 are both controversy stories pitting Jesus against the religious leaders. In 12:1-8 the Pharisees question Jesus about his disciples whom they observe breaking the Law of the Sabbath and in 12:22-32 they accuse Jesus of being in a conspiracy with the Prince of Demons. In both cases, Jesus defeats his opponents, showing that he is both master of the religious institutions of Israel - in his role as the
New Moses, the new and authentic interpreter of the Law - and the conqueror of powers of evil - as the Son of Man, the Messiah. Again, in these controversies, Jesus challenges the expectations and assumptions of Israel's religious leaders and challenges them to change.

The two previous scenes show how the hostility to Jesus is progressively getting stronger. These two scenes surround the central two scenes of the section, the controversy over healing on the Sabbath, 12:9-14, and the summary of healings with the fulfillment quotation suggesting that Jesus will now turn his ministry to the Gentiles. These two scenes are the heart of the structure and shed light on the whole. The positive message of these scenes is that rejection of Jesus and his message will never be the end of the story. When the Good News of the nearness of God's Kingdom is rejected in one area, the message must necessarily spread elsewhere. Israel's loss will mean gain for others.

Again, the idea of rejection underscores the notion of missed opportunities.

The theme of rejection also marks the third sermon section of the Gospel, chapter 13. This chapter makes the most extensive use of parables of any "sermon" in the entire Gospel. The theme of acceptance/rejection actually divides this sermon in half. In 13:1-33 Jesus teaches the crowds and they do not understand, while in 13:36-52 he teaches his disciples in private and they do understand. Between these two sections comes a fulfillment quotation in 13:35 which shows that Jesus’ parable teaching is the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy.

In this section Matthew presents in more detail the varied responses to Jesus' ministry. For Israel, the response is primarily negative, with the Jewish religious authorities leading the way. The rejection of Jesus becomes more persistent as the narrative progresses. In the face of this rejection, Jesus turns more and more to his disciples and privately directs more of his attention to them. Despite the progress made in the disciples' understanding of Jesus and his identity, their faith and understanding is still wanting. Against the rejection of Israel's religious leaders and the wavering response of Jesus' disciples, Matthew presents a fully positive response by some of society's marginal characters. This presentation points up by way of contrast the perversity of the religious leaders and the dullness of the disciples.

The fourth of the major sermons appears in chapter 18. In this sermon, the ideas of acceptance and rejection are applied to relationships among members of the community. Jesus uses the example of a child to teach about greatness in the Kingdom, which is defined as childlike humility (18:1-4), and this general standard is applied to specific situations which may arise in the church: the evil of scandal, the care of those going astray, and the reconciliation with a brother who has sinned. The central idea of the whole sermon is that Christians are to avoid being a stumbling block to those outside the community as well as those within the church.

This whole section, narrative and teaching, while showing an increase in hostilities, also deals with who are the "insiders" and who are the "outsiders" in the Kingdom, who are the true sons of Abraham.

The narrative section begins, in 14:1-12, with the account of Herod's misunderstanding of who Jesus is and the story of John the Baptist's death. Matthew has been mentioning John much more than Mark did, and in every case he points to the parallels between John
and Jesus. At the hands of Herod, because of the pressure of others, John is killed. Herod stands for those who will go along with the crowd, who let themselves be backed into a corner. But this story also anticipates the death of Jesus when Herod again goes along with the crowd. This section, then, will begin to look forward to Jesus' suffering and death and that suffering and death is directly traced to people who can't stand up for what they know is right, but bend to the pressure of others.

A favorite device of biblical storytellers is to make their point by using a pattern of three. This technique is used throughout this section by Matthew, binding its different parts together.

In 14:13-21, Jesus hears of the death of John and withdraws. This has been a typical action of Jesus - the time was not right yet to bring the confrontation between himself and the religious leaders to a head. When he withdraws, he is followed by crowds who are contrasted to Jesus' neighbors who have not recognized and responded to Jesus as they should. Jesus has compassion on the crowd and miraculously feeds them. His words of blessing anticipate the Last Supper. Somehow, then, this feeding is about more than satisfying physical hunger. The feeding of the five thousand is followed by another miraculous feeding in 15:29-39. In the first story, the disciples suggest that Jesus send the crowds away. In the second, the disciples don't expect that Jesus will send the crowds away, but they still have not completely understood. They know he will have compassion, but ask where they are to "buy" enough food for the people. The theme of bread shows up for a third time in 16:5-12. Here Jesus tells his disciples to beware of the "yeast" of the Pharisees and Sadducees. The first story looks forward to the Eucharist - to Jesus giving us himself. In this passage, the bread is related to teaching. As yeast causes the dough to grow, so too will the teaching of Jesus and the religious leaders of Israel cause growth. Jesus is offering his disciples a choice, an either/or - to follow his teaching and receive himself or to follow the teaching of the Pharisees and be filled with their spirit.

Immediately after the first story about the multiplication of the bread, Jesus performs an act of power demonstrating his control over nature. Peter responds with faith and duplicates what Jesus has done. The implication is that the disciples can, with faith, do what Jesus did - throwing light back on the feeding story. With faith, the disciples can feed the hungry. This is one message for us. But what Peter did was also overpowering and frightening. He doubted. That is a reality as we try to imitate Christ. In the end, the disciples who, represented by Peter, are chided but not condemned for "little faith," finally see things clearly and confess Jesus as the Son of God. This is the first such confession on the part of humans in Matthew's Gospel. Against Mark, the disciples recognize the true identity of Jesus fully. The second confession of Jesus is Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi in 16:13-20. This is followed by Jesus' commission of Peter to be head of the Church. John had preached repentance for the forgiveness of sins and that theme was central to Jesus' preaching. When Jesus sets Peter up as head of the Church, he entrusts to him the keys to the kingdom of heaven, he gives him the power to bind and loose, to forgive sins. The third pronouncement that Jesus is the Son of God, a pronouncement that confirms the other two, is the statement of God himself in the Transfiguration. Here Jesus is seen in his future glory. If the episode with Herod and John foreshadows Jesus' death and the stories about bread anticipate the Last Supper and the Eucharist, this story anticipates the glory of the Resurrection.
If the people of Jesus' home town take offense at him and Herod misunderstands who he is, while the crowds follow him and his disciples confess him (13:54-14:33), the next little episode records the response of the people of Gennesaret, Gentiles who can see more than Jesus' own people. Their faith is what 14:34-36 is all about. They provide contrast to the supposed "insiders." Again, Matthew is asking "Who are the legitimate sons of Abraham?" This episode is balanced by the faith of a Canaanite woman in 15:21-28. The hostility of Jesus to the woman is surprising and shocking. But this just highlights her faith and again faith - even in the face of obstacles - is the necessary condition for an act of power. As was the case in Mark, this story suggests that the bread Jesus has to offer has enough left over for all people. Note that there are only two instances of this theme of the faith of supposed "outsiders." Jesus' mission is to Israel, but open to "outsiders." The pattern of three is broken here to emphasize that the unexpected response of people "outside" Israel is out of the ordinary, and yet a true part of Jesus' mission.

Another pattern of two stands against this one, another example of an irregular response. This is carried in two controversy stories. In 15:1-9, Pharisees FROM JERUSALEM question Jesus about the disciples and their breaking of the customs of the ancestors by not washing their hands before they eat. Jesus refutes them by showing how they have put their traditions before God's Law. In this Jesus shows himself to be more faithful to the Law than the self-proclaimed legal experts. In the second instance, 16:1-4, the Pharisees are now openly testing Jesus and asking for a sign. The Sign of Jonah is another symbol of the resurrection. Jonah was in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights, just as Jesus will be in the grave for that length of time. Just as Jonah's story did not end in the fish, so Jesus' story will not end in the grave. In this incident, the Pharisees are ridiculed on two counts. They want a sign, demonstrating that they still do not see what is true, and they cannot understand Jesus' reference to Scripture even though they are supposed to be the experts in Israel's sacred traditions.

The next passage, 15:10-20, begins a set of three teachings about the Pharisees. Jesus teaches the crowd about what really defiles, what really makes people sinful. Peter points out that this is offensive to the Pharisees. It's as if Peter is saying, "Lord, I'll follow you, but let's be careful not to make enemies." Yet from the very beginning of his story, Matthew has pointed out that Jesus will be the cause of offense and scandal for those who cannot accept who he is and the salvation he offers. Still Jesus proceeds to identify that which makes people sinful with what the Pharisees teach. In 16:5-12, the third bread passage, the disciples are led to understand that Jesus is condemning the teaching of the Pharisees. At this point, then, themes are beginning to merge. At the very end, in 17:24-27, there is a controversy about the Temple Tax. Sonship again becomes important. Sons should be exempt, but the religious leaders are imposing a tax on them. Jesus submits, but only to avoid the final confrontation until the time is right. In these three passages, Jesus teaches about the Pharisees and what he teaches is not going to be to their liking. He is calling them illegitimate sons, hypocrites who impose unnecessary burdens on others and miss the real meaning and spirit of God's Law.

As was also the case in Mark, Matthew includes three predictions of the passion. After Peter's confession and commissioning, Jesus began to teach the disciples about his suffering and Peter could not accept this teaching. Here, then, are Jesus' strongest words against one of his disciples. He can forgive them and correct their little faith, but he
cannot tolerate Peter's denial of what the Messiah is all about. Against that largely negative picture, 17:9-13 present Jesus' second prediction of the passion, a passage which again brings John the Baptist into the story. Some held that before the Messiah would come Elijah would first return. Jesus says that Elijah has returned and the disciples UNDERSTAND that he is speaking of John. This confirms his status as Messiah - the forerunner has appeared, but also associates Jesus' fate with John's - suffering and death. The third passion prediction comes in 17:22-24. The disciples' response was to be greatly distressed, but they do not doubt, they begin to accept the message of suffering.

The final pattern of three, then, concerns the role of the disciples. In 16:24-28 Jesus announces that those who would be his disciples must be willing to take up their own crosses and follow him in suffering. In 17:14-21, as the whole section is coming to an end, after the disciples have witnessed acts of power, heard Jesus' teaching about the Pharisees and the nature of his messiahship, after they have recognized who Jesus really is, they fail to cast out a demon because of their "little faith." Again, this is not something to be condemned in Matthew's Gospel, but a reality that the followers of Jesus must constantly work to overcome. The third passage is, again, 17:24-27, which speaks of the sons of the Kingdom. In the end, that is what disciples are.

In the TEACHING of chapter 18, then, Jesus takes up the behavior expected of sons of the Kingdom. The chapter falls into three broad sections. In the first Jesus describes those who belong to the Kingdom as children. Children know what it is to need and can accept things at face value. In the next two sections, Jesus' teaching centers on how the sons of the Kingdom are to get along with each other. Here, the focus is on forgiveness. In the narrative section Peter was commissioned to have the power to forgive sins. His question about how often he should forgive leads Jesus to say, basically, that forgiveness is to be unlimited. The final section is a parable in which we are to understand that we are to forgive as God forgives us (the king and the servants). This, in story form, is an illustration of the teaching of the Lord's Prayer: **Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.** In recalling this, Matthew is looking back to the Sermon on the Mount and drawing the whole story into a grand unity.


In 19:1 Jesus finally begins his journey to Jerusalem and the fate that awaits him there. Along the way he is followed by large crowds and he ministers to them by healing the sick. Also along the way he debates with his opponents and teaches his disciples. He counteracts his disciples' misunderstandings and desire for power and position by blessing children. These children serve as a contrast both to the ambitious disciples and the rich young man who would be a follower of Jesus. He warns the disciples about the risks of possessions, but also gives them a prediction of the rewards of discipleship. In the parable of the laborers in the vineyard (20:1-16) he challenges the disciples to generosity, but also indicates that all who accept the "yoke" of the Kingdom, of following Jesus, share equally in its rewards. When they respond makes no difference at all.

Throughout chapters 19-20, the idea of understanding is the key. Jesus continues to prepare his disciples for what lies ahead - immediately in his own passion, and in the future in their role after he has been raised. The theme of acceptance/rejection is developed in the disciples' inability to understand and is obvious after the final passion prediction in 20:17-23, when they again vie for special positions in the Kingdom.

New Testament Notes
Matthew 21:1-25:46 gives the account of Jesus' ministry in Jerusalem. The theme of rejection dominates the story. Jesus' first act in Jerusalem is the cleansing of the Temple, an act which challenges the authority of the Jewish leaders. This event sets the tone for the remainder of Jesus' stay in Jerusalem. Jesus heals the sick and is acclaimed "Son of David" by children, that is by characters on the margin of society. This provokes the hostility of the religious leaders. Then comes a controversy story which looks back at the fate of John and indicates that the Jewish leaders' rejection of Jesus parallels their rejection of John. In response to such rejection, Jesus tells a series of parables reflecting the long history of Israel's religious leaders' rejection of the plan and will of God. In each parable Israel has failed to respond properly to the rule of God: they do not act, they do not bear fruit, and they do not accept the invitation to the wedding feast. The themes of acceptance and rejection appear to operate on another level in these three parables, for Matthew makes an addition to the last parable, 22:11-14, which makes the community of believers the focus. There are now two acts of judgment: the first is on the invited guests who refuse the invitation (the Jewish leaders) and the second is on those who accept the invitation but then do not fulfill its requirements. This is a warning for us today to live up to our Christian commitments.

The themes of acceptance and rejection continue to be used as the Gospel proceeds to tell a series of controversy stories. The circle of Jewish leaders who debate with Jesus grows larger and the series of debates is only concluded when Jesus finally confounds his opponents in 22:46. Unable to get the better of Jesus in debate, his opponents withdraw and, in chapter 23, Jesus delivers a vehement attack against them.

After Jesus leaves the Temple he delivers his last extended sermon in the Gospel, the Eschatological Discourse of chapters 24-25. This sermon is delivered to Jesus' disciples in private. The key focus of this sermon is the scene of the Last Judgment. Here, at last, Matthew's key theme gets explicit development. The basis of our judgment is how we treat each other. That is now identified explicitly as the way we treat Christ himself. For Matthew, then, we find Christ within the Christian community and they way we treat each other is the way we treat Christ. This becomes the basis of our judgment as followers of Jesus.
3. **EPILOGUE (Matthew 26-28).**

The Epilogue to Matthew's Gospel presents Jesus' passion and resurrection. Each of the teaching sections in the body of the story ended with the concluding formula "When Jesus finished..." and then an indication of his moving on to continue his mission and ministry. 26:1 is significantly different. The verse reads, "When Jesus finished he said to his disciples..." This indicates that Jesus' ministry of word and deed is finally done.

The focus of the story now shifts to the celebration of the Passover. In this context, the entire ending of the story is governed by the passion prediction in 26:2. Throughout the ending of the Gospel, rejection will be the dominant theme. Jesus will be rejected by all the people, not just their religious leaders and will ultimately be abandoned by his disciples. But the themes of acceptance and rejection are skillfully woven together with the themes of prediction and fulfillment. If rejection is the dominant theme, prediction and fulfillment are the moving force behind the events Matthew narrates.

Jesus instructs his disciples to prepare the Passover meal; he predicts which disciple will betray him; he foretells Peter's denial; and predicts that the disciples will abandon him. In the last half of chapter 26 these predictions come to fulfillment. Jesus is betrayed by Judas, denied by Peter, forsaken by his disciples, arrested, tried and condemned. All this is as was predicted. In the Garden, Jesus is confronted with a choice. He can accept or reject his fate. Against the rejection of all those around him, Jesus accepts his Father's will. In the midst of this horror story, however, the prediction/fulfillment pattern shows that Jesus is in control of his own destiny - no matter what the religious leaders may think, and his authority is highlighted. What he has predicted has come true. This indicates that we can expect his further predictions to be true - his predictions about his resurrection and about the fate of his followers in the time after the resurrection.

The last use of the ideas of acceptance/rejection comes in the incident about the release of Barabbas. Note that Matthew gives his full name as Jesus Barabbas. Jesus is derived from the Hebrew word meaning "savior." In choosing to have Barabbas released, the people have chosen and thrown in their lot with the wrong savior.

Pilate's wife is warned in a dream that Pilate should have nothing to do with Jesus. In the bible, dreams are signs of God's involvement, letting people know what to do. Still, the picture of the Roman governor is not that good. He may wash his hands of responsibility for Jesus' death, but he still lets himself be pressured by the crowd to go against what he knows is right. While the effect of this is to place the responsibility for the death of Jesus squarely on the shoulders of the Jews, Matthew's purpose seems to have been not so much to condemn the Jews as to indicate that those who are supposed to be on the "inside" can reject Jesus and his message of salvation. That is a warning for us.

In all three of the Synoptic Gospels, the crucifixion has an element of tragedy to it - at least on the surface of the story. Someone insignificant rises to fame and power; that person has a fatal flaw; and that flaw leads to his downfall. On the surface, Jesus' flaw appears to be that he sees himself as the Bringer of God's Kingdom. But his death is not the end of the story. In fact, the surface reading of tragedy is a complete misreading of the story.

In Matthew we learn that Jesus could call on twelve legions of angels to protect him, but he doesn't. He accepts his fate, again providing us with a model of how we are to live as
his followers. It is in accepting his fate, in the crucifixion, that Jesus is raised up to kingship. Again, this is not what was expected of a Messiah and a crucified Messiah is a cause for scandal.

While Jesus is the model of accepting the will of God throughout the passion story, acceptance of Jesus, staying with him, is rare. In death, the Roman centurion confesses him; certain women are named and stand by as witnesses to the crucifixion; Joseph of Arimathea provides a tomb. But the acceptance of Jesus which was rare in the story of the passion becomes the norm after the resurrection. The women at the tomb come to believe and accept their mission; the disciples do go to Galilee and there they are commissioned to carry on Jesus mission and ministry. In the end, the Gospel draws to a close with Jesus' promise to be with all of his disciples until the end of time. Emmanuel, God with us, remains with us now in the community of faith.

In the end, what we, as disciples of Jesus, do to each other we do to him, for he is with us and we find him in our fellow members of the Church, the community of believers.

Objective: Luke's Gospel has been called the Gospel of the Holy Spirit. Luke is careful throughout to present Jesus and everything he does as guided by the action of the Holy Spirit. Luke's special theme is that in Jesus, whose activity is directed by the Spirit of God, the Kingdom has drawn near and that in this Kingdom all, especially the poor, the oppressed and the outcasts of society, can find love, acceptance and forgiveness. Luke's aim in writing his Gospel is to get his readers to respond by carrying on the ministry of Jesus in offering love, acceptance and forgiveness to all people.

Vocabulary List:
SECOND GENERATION CHRISTIANS
MAGNIFICAT BENEDICTUS
NUNC DIMITTIS SALVATION HISTORY
ANNUNCIATION STORY
QUEST STORY STORY PAIRS


LUKE'S GOSPEL was written after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. While Mark and Matthew seem to have been written for communities which had their roots within the Jewish Religion, Luke was written totally for Gentile Christians. In fact, Luke's audience were SECOND GENERATION CHRISTIANS. This means that Luke wrote for people who had never seen Jesus and probably had never heard the preaching of the original Apostles. This was a problem for Luke's
readers who had witnessed what had happened to the Jews - how God had apparently abandoned them to the destruction of the Romans. If God was not true to his promises to his Chosen People, would he be any more faithful to the Gentiles who believed in Christ? Luke, then, wanted to demonstrate God's faithfulness to his word. If the promises to the Jews seemed to be failing, it was because they had rejected God, not because God had rejected them.

Luke's work is also PREACHING IN STORY FORM, but Luke writes a two-volume work, not just his Gospel. He continues the story of God's dealings with his people in his second volume, THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES. Where Matthew was concerned to show - primarily through his use of Fulfillment Quotations - that Jesus completes a story begun long ago, Luke sees Jesus as the turning point in an ongoing story. The story is not completed, but continues in the life and actions of the believing community.

A particular feature of Luke's double-work is his idea of TIME. Luke divides TIME into three significant eras:

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<th>The story of Israel before the Messiah</th>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>The story of Jesus - THE MIDDLE OF TIME AND ITS DECISIVE TURNING POINT</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>The story of Israel after the Messiah - that is, the story of the Church which has not yet been completed.</td>
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Luke's Gospel, like Matthew's, follows the basic outline of Mark's and adds special material from "Q" which allows Luke to make his special points. Since Luke follows Mark's story-line, his Gospel has a similar plot structure to both Mark and Matthew. Luke's Gospel has a simple, three part outline:

1. Jesus' ministry in Galilee
2. The journey to Jerusalem
3. The passion, resurrection, appearances and ascension of Jesus.
Like Mark and Matthew, Luke does not write to convert anyone. He writes to reinforce the beliefs of his community and urge his readers to respond to the demands of their faith. Luke carries this purpose through in both of his volumes and there are two special themes which serve to tie the two works together:

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<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Jesus has a place with outsiders and outcasts, with the poor, the oppressed, the unloved and unacceptable within society. These are the people who make up the Kingdom of God.</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>Jesus is the savior of Israel - exclusively. But, like Matthew, Luke will radically redefine what ISRAEL means. For him, the true Israel is composed of all who believe in Jesus and continue to do what Jesus did.</td>
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As was the case with Mark and Matthew, Luke's beginning gives important clues about what he wants to stress. Luke's beginning is his INFANCY NARRATIVE, contained in the first two chapters of his Gospel.

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<td>1.</td>
<td>Jesus' genealogy is traced back, not to Abraham as it was in Matthew, but to Adam, showing the connection of Jesus and the whole Christian movement with all people within God's plan, not just the so-called Chosen people who are descended from Abraham.</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>The message of the angel is to Mary, not to Joseph as in Matthew. Women were not leaders in the ancient world and could be considered a &quot;lower class.&quot; <strong>In Luke's Gospel, Jesus will show a special concern for those for those who are considered less important and unacceptable.</strong></td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>At his birth, Jesus is visited by lowly shepherds (a class of people who were not highly regarded) and not by &quot;Royal&quot; Magi. Nobody of importance takes notice of his birth. Again, Luke will be concerned with outcasts.</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>In Matthew, Jesus' birth fulfills prophecy - bringing an older story to completion. In Luke, the stress is on the fact that God the Father actually fathers the child, demonstrating God's continuing action on behalf of his people.</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>Mary's conception of Jesus occurs under the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit. <strong>The Spirit will direct Jesus throughout his life and will continue to be active, guiding the actions of the apostles in the beginnings of the early Church.</strong> Luke's double-work, then, is an exploration of and meditation on the presence and action of the Spirit in the world.</td>
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<td>6.</td>
<td>Mary's hymn, the MAGNIFICAT, stresses the reversal of fortunes; the high and mighty will be thrown down, while the lowly and the outcasts will be raised up. This is a constant theme in Luke.</td>
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<td>7.</td>
<td>Major characters in the birth story, and in the Gospel as a whole, are good, pious Jews, but lowly ones, not leaders or the rich and powerful. Again, the poor and outsiders, the sinners, constitute a major emphasis in Luke's writings.</td>
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Like Mark and Matthew, Luke stresses the **NEARNESS OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD.** He, too, presents Jesus as a **TEACHER, PREACHER,** and **MIRACLE WORKER.** Like Matthew, Luke's presentation of Jesus as a teacher makes used of **PARABLES,** which, as was the case with Matthew, serve to reveal the nature of God's Kingdom to whomever will listen and accept. But, where Mark stresses Jesus role as a PREACHER and Matthew stresses his role as a TEACHER LIKE MOSES, **Luke lays stress on Jesus as a MIRACLE WORKER.**

Luke's stress on Jesus as a MIRACLE-WORKER highlights the presence and power of the Spirit with Jesus, but also serves Luke's purpose to present Jesus as another MOSES. However, where Matthew stressed the teaching aspect of Moses' career, Luke looks more to the stories about Moses in drawing out his comparison between Moses and Jesus. In the stories of Luke's gospel, **Jesus is presented as a New Prophet Like Moses, a prophet promised in the Book of Deuteronomy, a prophet who would be recognized by the signs and wonders associated with him (see Deuteronomy 18:15-19 and 34:10-12).** It is in this light that Luke uses his Miracle Stories. So, while Mark uses miracles to demonstrate the truth of what Jesus preaches - that the kingdom of God is really near - and Matthew uses them as examples of faith and occasions for Jesus to teach, **Luke uses the Miracles to PROVE that Jesus is, indeed, the Messiah.**

It is the model of Moses which provides a special key for understanding Luke's teaching about those who make up the true nation of Israel to whom God offers his salvation. Luke's thinking runs as follows:
1. Moses went to his people and was rejected (Exodus 1-2, especially the story of how Moses saved an Israelite from a beating by killing an Egyptian, and then intervened in a quarrel between two Israelites who rejected his right to get involved.)

2. Moses met with God and then returned to his people (Exodus 3-4).

3. Jesus has come to his people who reject him (carried by the controversy stories - as in Mark and Matthew).

4. Jesus returned to his Father (the Ascension).

5. Because of the people's rejection of Moses, the way was open for others to inherit the promise (while away from Egypt, Moses gets a foreign wife and establishes a relationship with his father-in-law.)

6. Because of the Jews' rejection of Jesus, the way is open for others (the outcasts, especially among the Gentiles) to inherit the promises.

7. The story of the promises extends back into Old Testament times and there it was stressed that God chose a people and blessed them so that they could bring blessing to all others (a major theme in Genesis) - all the sons of Adam

8. Now, in the Church, is the time to respond. If we do not, when Jesus returns, we will be rejected in favor of people who will respond and accept the promises (as the Jews were rejected in the desert.) In Luke's view, the people who will accept the promises are the poor, the down-trodden, the oppressed and the outcasts.

Luke's story ends with the resurrection and ascension of Jesus. Unlike Mark and Matthew, this ending is not a WRAP-UP, a tying up of loose ends in the story, but a transition to the one-going story of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in the Church, the story that continues in ACTS OF THE APOSTLES. Luke stresses that the story is not over, that God's work of salvation is not complete, but continues wherever people respond to the presence of the Spirit and carry on the mission and activity of Jesus.

IN SUM, Luke was written for Second Generation Gentile Christians. His readers were people who had never met Jesus, who had not witnessed his works or heard his teaching. They most likely had not even heard the words of the original witnesses to the Good News, the Apostles. Yet, like the earliest believers, these Christians hoped for the return of Jesus and the final establishment of God's Kingdom. By the time Luke wrote, it was becoming evident that Jesus' Second Coming, the Parousia, was delayed and that no one could predict when it would happen. In the absence of Jesus, Christians may have wondered if their faith had any value. To whom could they respond? Luke answered this concern by stressing the activity of the Holy Spirit in the life of Jesus, an activity that continued to make Jesus present in the community of believers. For this reason, Luke continued his story in Acts of the Apostles, to demonstrate the continuing activity of the Spirit in overcoming all obstacles to the spread of the message of love, hope, acceptance and forgiveness - THE GOOD NEWS - that was announced by Jesus.
The subject of Luke's Gospel, then, is the activity of the Holy Spirit in the life of Jesus.

Luke's theme was that the activity of the Spirit in Jesus offered love, acceptance, hope and forgiveness to all who responded to Jesus in faith - especially the poor, the outcasts, the oppressed and the unaccepted in society.

II. Commentary on Luke's Gospel

At the outset, there are features of Luke's Gospel which are worthy of note. One special feature of Luke's Gospel is his use of historical settings and dates. He relates the birth of Jesus and the ministry of both John and Jesus to the larger sphere of world history - stating who was the current Roman Emperor or governor of Judea and how long they had been in office. For Mark, and probably also for Matthew, the working out of God's plan of salvation was to be accomplished in a decisive action by God when Christ would return and establish the Kingdom in power. For Luke, however, the working out of God's plan was currently being accomplished in the everyday activities of God's people. In this regard, Luke develops an idea of salvation history, a story of God's continuous activity for and involvement with his people in their daily lives and, while Mark and Matthew drew heavily on Israel's prophetic and apocalyptic traditions to derive images of Jesus for their understanding of him as the Messiah, Luke drew on Israel's story traditions - especially the stories of Joseph and David - to color his views of Jesus as the Messiah.

With this in mind, a second feature of Luke's story becomes evident. The marked sense of urgency in Mark and Matthew is lessened. In Mark Jesus was often disappointed and angry because of the urgency of his message and the lack of response he met; in
Matthew, while the anger of Jesus is lessened, the urgency is still there and Jesus is presented as an impassioned teacher, though in his teaching he is somewhat remote or distant - a figure of ultimate authority. In Luke, Jesus is presented as COMPASSIONATE, close to those to whom he ministers, a man of the people.

Finally, Luke's PREACHING IN STORY FORM, his Gospel, can be considered as one, long parable. Of the three synoptic writers, Luke's use of parables is the most distinctive. He includes more developed parable stories than either Mark or Matthew. In the settings for these parables, Luke portrays Jesus as PREACHING WITH STORIES. Faced with a problem, a misunderstanding, a need to get a response from his audience, Jesus tells a story which is designed to get his hearers to understand and respond. What Jesus is shown as doing with his many stories in the Gospel, Luke is doing with his large story as a whole.
1. **THE INFANCY NARRATIVE (Luke 1-2).**

Luke presents the careers of John the Baptist and Jesus in parallel fashion. His purpose seems to be to underscore the activity of God, his involvement, in preparing for and directing the salvation he offers to Israel in his own Son. The first instance of such paralleling is the fact that both John and Jesus are introduced into the story-world of Luke by an **ANNUNCIATION STORY.** Annunciation stories are built on Old Testament models; such stories were used to introduce such figures as Isaac, Ishmael and Samson. These stories follow a regular pattern:

1. a divine messenger appears on the scene
2. the person to whom the messenger appears reacts with fear
3. the message is given and includes:
   A. a reference to the name of the one receiving the message
   B. a reference to some quality of that person
   C. the command not to fear
   D. the promise of the birth of a son
   E. the name of the child is given and explained
   F. something about the child's future is foretold
4. the one receiving the message expresses doubt which is answered by a sign.
The purpose of such stories, in the Old Testament and in Luke, is always to stress God's activity and involvement in the unfolding of events. While the two annunciation scenes are parallel, (1:13-20 and 1:26-35), there are already indications that Jesus will surpass John in God's plan. John will be born to a barren woman, an Old Testament theme that suggests that God brings life out of barrenness, and will be filled with the Holy Spirit from the womb. Jesus, on the other hand, is actually fathered by the Holy Spirit, indicating a more intimate involvement of the Spirit in his life. John will serve to prepare the way; Jesus will rule the Kingdom of God - he will be the Son of God.

The accounts of the births of John and Jesus are also parallel. In both cases, the birth of the child is followed by his naming and circumcision. In both cases there is great rejoicing, recognizing the presence and power of God in the birth of these two special children, and in both cases this celebration is expressed in a special hymn. However, the contrasts also continue. John's birth is told as briefly as possible, while great attention is given to the birth of Jesus. There is, in fact, a second annunciation scene which accompanies the birth of Jesus - the message of the angel to the shepherds nearby. In Luke, no one of importance takes note of Jesus birth, but the lowly and the poor are told that a time of great joy is upon them.

Throughout the Infancy Narrative hymns play in an important role in interpreting the meaning behind the events Luke is narrating and foreshadowing later developments in his story. The first hymn is Mary's MAGNIFICAT (1:46-55). It is a typical hymn of praise motivated by God's actions. In her hymn, Mary praises God for what he has done for her, one of his lowly servants. But the hymn also broadens its perspective to announce the significance of God's action on Mary's behalf for all people. The basic theme of the hymn is the REVERSAL OF FORTUNES God's involvement with his people brings. This reversal, the lifting up of the lowly and the bringing down of the rich and powerful, is at the heart of the Kingdom Jesus comes to bring near.

The second hymn is the BENEDICTUS (1:67-79), the prayer which Zechariah utters upon the birth of John. This prayer is a celebration of the saving purpose of God as it is beginning to unfold. This hymn raises great expectations for the story which Luke is about to tell. John is sent to prepare the way for the salvation of God which brings light and peace. The time of Israel's salvation is now. But, as readers of Luke's story - and Luke's announces that his purpose is to set out in order what happened - we read from the perspective when Israel has already rejected it's Messiah and the salvation he brings. In the Benedictus there is an unmistakable sense of loss, of what could have been.

Finally, at Jesus' presentation in the Temple, Simeon, a righteous man who had been looking forward to the coming of God's saving action for his people, offers his hymn, the NUNC DIMITTIS (2:28-32). Like Zechariah, Simeon is joyful over what God is doing in Jesus for his people, Israel. But Simeon's hymn announces another aspect of God's saving activity: the glory of Israel is the light of salvation which is presented to ALL people. Simeon's encounter with Jesus' parents also foreshadows the ending of the story. He announces to them that Jesus is destined to be the salvation and the fall of many in Israel, that is, that acceptance or rejection of Jesus determines the fate of God's people, and that the sword of sorrow will pierce Mary's heart. He anticipates the role of suffering that is characteristic of the career of Israel's Messiah.
In Simeon (2:25-35) and Anna (2:36-38) we meet the first example of Luke's use of **PAIRED STORIES**. Anna, like Simeon, recognizes in Jesus the redemption of Israel and begins to announce this to all who will listen. Both are guided by the Spirit to see and to proclaim what they see. Both are witnesses and share a ministry to announce. Such paired stories serve to add emphasis and underscore the point Luke wants to make - here that the redemption offered by God can be grasped, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, by those of good faith and that recognizing it carries with it the obligation to make it known to others. But such pairings also add a sense of inclusiveness. Usually contrasting characters are presented in each member of the pair, here a righteous man and a righteous woman. Such pairing of men and women is frequent in Luke and indicates that women as well as men share equally in the mission of the Church, which is nothing short of a continuation of the mission of Jesus.

**Luke's story of Jesus begins with a focus on Jerusalem and its temple.** The Jerusalem temple represents the very heart of Israel, the place where the people meet with and worship their God. In the beginning of his story, there is great joy here, as God begins to offer his love, hope, acceptance and forgiveness to all people. Jerusalem will be the focus of Jesus life. He will journey there to meet his final fate - crucifixion and death. But it is that suffering and death which accomplishes the salvation God offers. And it is from Jerusalem, the symbolic heart of the Jewish people, the center of their lives, that the story will continue in Acts of the Apostles, as the message of love, hope, acceptance and forgiveness spreads from Jerusalem to begin to make its way to the ends of the world.

One final aspect of the Infancy Narrative needs comment. This concerns the characters involved. The major characters are all pious and righteous members of the nation of Israel and they come from all walks of life. There is a priest and his wife, a poor girl and her husband, a temple official and a "prophetess," and lowly shepherds. The way that Luke presents these characters again raises high expectations for how the story will unfold. Israel can and should respond to the salvation which God is offering to it in the person of his Son. Sadly, this will not be the case, but all Israel does not deny Jesus and other characters like those introduced in the Infancy Narrative will make their appearances throughout the Gospel. There is a faithful remnant in Israel out of which God will fashion witnesses to and preachers of the message of the Kingdom. As Luke tells his story, what he will want us to pay attention to is the fact that our own expectations about receiving God's redemption can be shattered if we do not respond to the Spirit and spread the Good News of the Kingdom as God intends.
Chapter 3 begins with Luke's dating of the onset of the ministry of John. Again, this serves to see the working out of God's plan within the world of human reality, not in some unknown and earth-shattering disclosure of God, but in the here and now. John's ministry fulfills prophecy, indicating that it is part of God's ongoing plan, and this corresponds with what was indicated about him in his annunciation and birth story. This shows not only God's long range plans being carried out, but highlights the fulfillment of foreshadowings within the Gospel itself. We can expect such foreshadowings and predictions to come to fulfillment.

The significant aspects of John's ministry which are worthy of note are that we see him involved in a controversy with Israel's religious leaders, preaching a baptism of repentance, and spelling out the proper way to repent and respond to the message he offers - by caring for the poor, the lowly and the oppressed (3:7-14).

John's ministry is brought to a close with the note of his imprisonment in 3:18-19. In this way, John is given an individual focus. He goes before to prepare the way and then passes from the story. There is no overlapping. One age is ending as a new age comes to be in the ministry of Jesus. Throughout all of this, Luke continues to draw out the parallels between John and Jesus: they preach the same message, call for the same response, and have conflicts with Israel's religious leaders and with Herod.

Jesus' baptism is reported in the briefest possible way. The focus is not on the baptism, but on Jesus' reception of the Spirit which will govern his ministry. This is followed by the genealogy of Jesus. Luke includes the genealogy at this point, rather than at the beginning as Matthew did, to dramatize the new beginning in God's dealing with his people that begins with Jesus' public ministry. John's ministry is included in the old story of God's dealings with his people. In Jesus something radically new begins.

In 4:1-13 Luke presents his account of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness. Here, he makes some significant changes in Matthew's version. In each temptation, Satan begins by saying, "If you are the Son of God..." It is Jesus' divine sonship which is the focus. Jesus' success in resisting temptation, combined with his genealogy, which traces Jesus' line all the way back to Adam, suggest that Jesus represents a reversal of the original state of affairs which was dominated by Adam's disobedience. Luke also changes the order of the temptations which was found in Matthew. He places the temptation at the Jerusalem temple in the climactic last position. Jesus' success in overcoming the
representative of evil ends at the temple just as his whole ministry will end there when Jesus finally overcomes the forces of evil by his suffering and death.

Empowered by the Holy Spirit and successful in his defeat of the representative of evil in the world, Jesus now launches on his public ministry in the synagogue of his home town of Nazareth (4:14-30). This incident in Nazareth reveals in advance what Jesus whole ministry will be about. He quotes the prophet Isaiah to explain what his mission is. He is sent by the Spirit to bring about the great reversal of fortunes which is characteristic of God's Kingdom. After the high expectations raised in the Infancy Narrative, the response of Jesus' neighbors is disheartening. The basic crisis of the incident is that they do not take him seriously. He is one of their neighbors, the mere son of a carpenter. There can be nothing special about him. In short, the people see only what they expect to see and not what is really there for them. Sadly, Jesus points out that this has always been the case with Israel. The challenge Luke lays before the readers is to look at each other within the community with the eyes of faith and see what God offers us in each other. The rest of the Gospel and Acts will make clear that we carry out Jesus ministry, that we continue it. Will we be willing to take each other seriously as we live out this task, or will we see others only as we expect to see them?

Luke's technique of pairing now comes into play in Jesus' seeming success in the synagogue at Capernaum (4:31-37). In Capernaum he frees a possessed man and what he says and does is met with awe and amazement. This contrasts sharply with the response of the people in his own home town. However, it soon becomes evident that the favorable response Jesus receives in Capernaum is motivated not so much by faith as by wanting to get and hang on to the good things Jesus has to offer. It is not a response which leads the people to take up their own mission. In short, it is selfish. The pairing of episodes continues in the account of the healing of Peter's mother-in-law. This episode, balanced with the act performed on behalf of the possessed man, demonstrates Jesus care and concern for outcasts and those who have no social standing within the community. A woman and someone considered unclean are those on whom Jesus turns his attention.

So far in this section, Luke has presented Jesus as being filled with and empowered by the Spirit and has characterized Jesus mission as a ministry of word and deed which brings God's Kingdom near by reversing the expected status of people within society. With chapter 5, Luke begins to introduce the other major characters in his story, the disciples and the opponents of Jesus. The first disciples are presented in 5:1-11. It is significant that the first disciples are not called until after Jesus has begun performing his ministry of healing and exorcism. They also do not receive their call until after the incident of the great catch of fish. By this, Luke is showing us the significance of Jesus' works of power in his Gospel. They are the occasions which elicit faith and response. They demonstrate Jesus' care and concern for people, especially the lowly, poor and oppressed, and they provide models of what discipleship is to be all about. Disciples must follow Jesus in showing acceptance, care, love and concern for the lowly and the poor, for the despised and unwanted in society. In this way, the kingdom will grow. This is the significance of the episode involving the great catch of fish. From this point on, the disciples are to be "fishers of men." Their role is to gather people in and they will do this by following the example of Jesus in showing love for others.

New Testament Notes
While 5:1-11 introduce the disciples to Luke's story, 5:12-6:11 introduce the opponents. In this section, Luke basically follows Mark's presentation. In a series of controversies, the outlook of the religious leaders is presented and contrasted with Jesus' point of view. There is a progression in hostility as we move from one incident to the next. What Jesus says and does threatens the power, authority and position of Israel's religious leaders. But Luke also introduces a change in Mark's presentation. In Mark, this series of controversies ended with the religious leaders seeking Jesus' death. In Luke, the religious leaders go away discussing what they might do about Jesus. Throughout his story, Luke presents Israel's religious leaders as being, at least partly, open to Jesus and what he says and does. They remain in conversation with each other until the final break occurs in Jerusalem at the end of the story. In this, Luke holds out hope that all is not lost in Israel, that there is a possibility for acceptance of Jesus and his message. It remains possible that the people and their religious leaders will take Jesus seriously, that they will change their behavior and enter the kingdom.

In 6:12-16 the Twelve are appointed to their special office on a mountain. In Luke the special role of the Twelve is to be witnesses to Jesus, to what he says and does, and especially to his death and resurrection. Again, the role of a witness is not just to see, but to proclaim. That the appointment takes place on a mountain is important, since the mountain is the symbolic place of God's revelation. Immediately afterwards, however, Jesus and the disciples "come down" to a level place and Jesus gives his first extended speech in Luke's Gospel. The contrast between these two settings, the mountain and the level plain, is significant. Having received God's special revelation and appointment, Jesus and the disciples "come down to earth" and address the people on the level of everyday life. The theme of Jesus' speech is the reversal of fortunes which the Kingdom brings. In this, Luke is much more concrete than Matthew. Matthew called the poor in spirit blessed; Luke makes this the actual, physically poor, hungry, sorrowful and persecuted. In the rest of the speech, Jesus spells out what it means to be a disciple and the type of behavior which is appropriate for disciples. This behavior is a reversal of the typical behavior expected in normal life - loving people who hate us, doing good to people who hurt us, praying for those who abuse us.

With all the major characters now introduced, Luke portrays the ministry in action in the rest of this section. The first incident concerns the healing of the centurion's servant and serves to anticipate the Gentile Mission. In Luke's framework, it is important to note that Jesus and the centurion never come into contact, but deal with each other through delegates. For Luke, this underscores the fact that Jesus' mission is to Israel. His mission to Israel lays the groundwork for the later mission to the Gentiles, but that mission will belong to the Apostles and will be recounted in Acts. The story of the centurion (7:2-10) is significant in another respect. It is an example of a QUEST STORY. Quest stories often share the features of both miracle stories and controversy stories. In a Quest Story someone approaches Jesus seeking something which is important for human well-being. The search is the primary focus of the story which does not end until it is noted that the search was a success or a failure. In this, the Quest Story differs from controversy stories which end with Jesus' pronouncement about himself. These scenes regularly feature conversation and the conversation points up some difficulty blocking the person's access to what he or she seeks. Sometimes the
blocking factor is an objection raised by another person in the story. The purpose of these stories is to develop Luke's key idea about the reversal of fortunes in the Kingdom. There are seven such stories in Luke, six of which end successfully. These are:

1) the story of the paralyzed man (5:17-26)
2) the story of the Gentile centurion (7:2-10)
3) the story of a sinful women (7:36-50)
4) the story of a Samaritan leper (17:12-19)
5) the story of a chief tax collector (19:1-10)
6) the story of a crucified criminal (23:39-43).

In each of these cases, there is something about the one searching which would seem to exclude them from the salvation God has to offer. However, it is just such people God, in Jesus, seeks out for his kingdom. In 18:18-30 there is one further Quest Story which does not end in success. This one is the story of a rich ruler who cannot accept the demands discipleship makes.

The next incident, the raising of the son of the widow of Nain (7:11-17), accomplishes several of Luke's aims. With the story of the centurion, this story forms another pairing in which an outsider, a Gentile, and someone at the bottom of society, a defenseless widow, both experience the power and presence of God. The stories stress that special places in the Kingdom are reserved for those on the outside. Next, the story portrays Jesus as a powerful prophet. This story is based on the stories of Elijah and Elisha in the Books of Kings. As such it contributes to Luke's presentation of Jesus as the Messiah, a prophet like Moses, known by his mighty works. Finally, both the story of the centurion and the story of the poor widow demonstrate the fulfillment of the purpose of Jesus' ministry which was announced in Jesus' programmatic speech in the synagogue of Nazareth in chapter 4.

The next Quest story comes in 7:36-50. Included between the story pair of 7:1-17 and this later Quest story is Luke's account of a question addressed to Jesus by the disciples of John. The purpose of this incident is to provide interpretation for the framing stories and further characterize Jesus' ministry as the fulfillment of God's plan as it has been announced earlier in the Gospel. The key idea in 7:18-35 concerns expectations. In responding to John's disciples, Jesus asks the people what they had expected to see in John. In Jesus' words is a warning - that if we see only what we expect to see, we run the risk of missing what God really wants to show us about his Kingdom. This becomes even more apparent in the story of the sinful woman at the Pharisee's house.

The story in 7:36-50 again demonstrates that the conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders has not progressed to the point of irreconcilable hostility. Jesus is invited to a meal at a Pharisee's home. In this story, contrasts are the order of the day. Jesus and Simon have conflicting attitudes towards the woman, but the woman and Simon also have conflicting attitudes towards Jesus. The basic point of the story is that the sinful woman's search for forgiveness and acceptance is successful because of her love and service. In God's Kingdom, love and service opens the way to acceptance and forgiveness. The woman, though sinful, displays the attitude which wins her a home in the Kingdom. The Pharisee, seeing only what he expects to see and congratulating
himself on his self-righteousness, cuts himself off from the acceptance and the forgiveness to be found in God's reign.

These stories are now followed by a parable discourse in 8:4-18 in which Jesus spells out the contrasts between the religious leaders and the poor outcasts. Up to this point, then, Luke has presented Jesus and his ministry and introduced the developing conflict between Jesus and Israel's religious leaders. In contrast to Mark and Matthew, while Luke points out the failings of the religious leaders, he also indicates that they are open to Jesus and share table fellowship with him, showing him respect as a teacher. The disciples have also been introduced and, so far, their characterization has been positive. They have witnessed the mighty works of Jesus and heard his teachings and have responded to him. In 8:22-25 we get the first indication of the disciples' lack of understanding. In the story of the calming of the storm, the disciples respond with fear and do not recognize Jesus' identity.

The next story is that of the Garasene demoniac in 8:26-39. As was the case in Mark and Matthew, Luke's purpose in including this story is to indicate that the mission to the Gentiles will be no easier to accomplish than the mission to Israel. This is indicated by the fact that the people of the area, having seen Jesus' saving act of power, do not respond with faith but with fear, asking Jesus to leave their territory. In another pairing move, Luke contrasts the fear of the Garasenes with the faith of Jairus, a synagogue leader, and the woman with the hemorrhage in 8:40-56.

Now, as the Galilean ministry of Jesus begins to draw to a close, Jesus commissions and empowers the Twelve to do what he does and then sends them out on their first mission. This commissioning and the later commissioning of the seventy-two disciples in 10:1-16 serves Luke's purpose to demonstrate the inevitable expansion of Jesus' mission. All of this is in accord with God's plan. Then, after the return of the Twelve and the account of the feeding of the five thousand, the Galilean Ministry of Jesus draws to a close with affirmations about Jesus' true identity. The first is Peter's confession in response to Jesus' questions to his disciples. Peter's confession is confirmed as correct by the voice of God in the Transfiguration scene. The effect of Peter's confession and its confirmation is to suggest that the disciples' ability to recognize Jesus stems from the fact that they are witnesses to Jesus' works of power - especially the multiplication of the loaves - and from the fact that they share in his ministry of bringing the power and presence of God to bear on the sufferings of others, especially the poor and the outcasts. The implication for us, as Luke's readers and present-day disciples, is that we will only be able to recognize the presence of Christ around us if we carry on his mission and make Christ present to others, especially those most in need of love, acceptance and forgiveness.

The next large block of material in Luke's Gospel concerns the journey to Jerusalem. Both Mark and Matthew also include a "journey narrative," but for them, the purpose of this journey is mainly to provide instructions for the disciples about the fate that awaits Jesus in Jerusalem. **What is distinctive about Luke's journey narrative is that it parallels the Galilean ministry of Jesus.** In his Galilean ministry, Jesus called the people to repentance, gathered disciples, and entered into conflict with the religious authorities. All of these aspects of Jesus' ministry are present in his journey to Jerusalem. What this means, in Luke's telling of the story, is that the journey to Jerusalem, to journey to Jesus' final fate of suffering, death, resurrection and ascension, is a continuation of his earlier ministry. While Mark and Matthew depicted Jesus in ministry, then travelling to Jerusalem, then suffering there, Luke presents Jesus in ministry, a ministry that IS a journey which ends in suffering and death.

The parallels begin immediately. In 9:51, Jesus sets his face towards Jerusalem. In 9:52-62, Jesus sends messengers ahead of him, just as John had been a messenger going before in his Galilean ministry. Along the way Jesus is met with rejection in Samaritan territory, just as he had been rejected in Nazareth. And the call of the first disciples is matched by the three would-be followers of Jesus. Their inability to follow Jesus underscores at the beginning the difficulty of the way. A worthy disciple must break all ties with the past, with former loyalties, and with any sense of home, security, or possessions.

Chapter 10 concerns the mission of the seventy-two. These disciples, like the Twelve Apostles before them, are given a ministry of word and deed. They are empowered by Jesus to do what he does, to teach and heal, to overcome evil and preach repentance. In this Luke makes two significant points. The first is that the ministry of Jesus continues to expand and grow. But the second is that this expansion and growth comes precisely in the face of the coming suffering of the Messiah. In this Luke offers assurance to all followers of Jesus that suffering cannot choke off the spread of the Gospel, that hostility and conflict will be the soil in which the mission of the kingdom is rooted and grows.
10:25-42 now contain two stories which are unique to Luke. The first is a controversy story in which a lawyer asks Jesus what he must do to have eternal life. This story is Luke's version of the controversy over which commandment of the Law is the greatest which is found in both Mark and Matthew. In response to the question, Jesus tells the story of the Good Samaritan. Luke shows Jesus PREACHING IN STORY FORM. The purpose of Jesus' story is to show that, in fact, love of God and love of neighbor are the same thing, that we show our love of God by the love we give to each other. Secondly, Jesus' story defines the "neighbor" as anyone who is poor, oppressed, suffering or cast aside. He reveals the hypocrisy of Israel's religious leaders who, for the sake of ritual purity - avoiding a dead (or possibly dead body) so that they would not become "unclean" and be excluded from worship, ignore the greater commandment, to show love and concern for a fellow human being. The representatives of Israel's religious establishment, in Jesus' story, won't even cross the road to check on the fallen victim. Finally, Jesus' story shames the religious establishment by depicting the person who really follows the spirit of God's law as a Samaritan, a member of a group which was hated by the Jews. Again, Luke stresses that it is outsiders and marginalized people who are accepting the kingdom and that it is just such people as these that God intends to include in his rule, to whom he offers peace, love, acceptance, and forgiveness.

In the next episode, again an incident found only in Luke, the story portrays another contrast. This time the contrast is not between Israel's religious establishment and an outsider, as it was in the story of the Good Samaritan, but between two possible responses to Jesus by his followers, women followers. The focus of the incident is hospitality, which symbolizes how one receives Jesus and his message. Martha represents those who hear and receive Jesus and his message on their own terms. They are more concerned about how they receive what is offered than what it is they receive. Mary, on the other hand, sits at feet of Jesus and receives him on his own terms. She represents those who put aside their expectations, their need to control, and let the words of the Gospel enter in and lead them where they will. In today's world, people like Martha are those who make the practice of their faith something fixed, predictable and manageable; those like Mary are the ones who let themselves be challenged by the newness of the Gospel message, who constantly look for fresh ways of hearing and following Jesus.

11:1-13:35 now present an extended account of Jesus' teaching along the way. In 11:1-13, Jesus is observed in prayer and one of his disciples asks Jesus to teach them how to pray. In response, Jesus teaches the Lord's Prayer. He follows his teaching with the parable of the friend who comes at midnight. In this way, Luke gives a concrete story example of what he says about prayer. In human terms, the friend receives what he wants because of his persistence. We need to have that persistence when we approach God. But, God's ways are not human ways. To the human way of viewing things, the friend who shows up on the doorstep at midnight is a pest. However this is exactly the kind of behavior which God expects of us. In God's eyes, there is no such thing as a pest.

The rest of this section moves by way of Jesus' teachings and intermittent controversies. Throughout the section, Jesus stresses that people's fate depends on their ability to recognize Jesus. He discusses who will be able to do so and who will not and speaks of the consequences of this. And he predicts the Gentile Mission.
In 11:14-26 Jesus casts out a demon and this provokes division. Some people in the crowd who observe Jesus in action are amazed, but others state that he is casting out demons by the power of the prince of demons. Some of the crowd, then, ask for a sign from heaven to authenticate what Jesus is doing. What happens in this episode, then, picks up on Jesus' teaching about prayer in 11:1-13 and, in effect, reverses Jesus' teaching. Rather than asking for the Holy Spirit, the people are asking for a sign; rather than asking for forgiveness for sin, they accuse Jesus of sinning; rather than asking to be delivered from testing or temptation, they put Jesus to the test; and rather than recognizing Jesus and his authority, they say that he is acting with the power of Satan.

In 11:27-36 Jesus deals with those who will be able to recognize him. A woman speaks up to praise his birth, but Jesus directs attention away from himself to those who hear and keep the word of God. These are the ones who can see correctly, who will recognize Jesus for who he is. They are not concerned with signs or works of power, but with the love, acceptance, hope, and forgiveness which is available in Jesus to those who hear and do the will of God.

This is followed immediately with a conflict story, 11:37-54, in which Jesus directly attacks the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and teachers of the law. They are concerned with external observance, with recognition, outward signs of holiness, but they neglect the simple, straightforward teachings of God - to love other people and deal with them justly. Not hearing and doing the will of God, they will not be able to recognize Jesus and the salvation which is present in him. They are caught up in their own self-righteousness. Because of this, the episode ends with the note that they have not recognized Jesus, but rather than they now are set on a way to try to trip Jesus up, to prove him wrong and discredit him. In Luke's Gospel, life in the Christian community, especially roles of leadership, involve service, not power and prestige. What Jesus demands is something people like the Pharisees and Lawyers reject.

In 12:1-12, Jesus turns to his disciples and warns them about the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, hypocrisy which has just been demonstrated. He speaks of the unforgivable sin - speaking against the Holy Spirit. What this basically means is a speaking against the authority of Jesus. It is the Spirit who guides what Jesus says and does. Authority is the key issue in the conflict between Jesus and Israel's religious establishment. What they fail to see, in challenging Jesus' authority and claiming God's authority for themselves and their own positions, is that God empowers people for service not for rank and prestige.

Now, in 12:13-34, a man calls out to Jesus to act as mediator in a family dispute over possessions. He has completely missed the point of what Jesus has just been saying to his disciples. His petition to Jesus shows that he recognizes the Lord as something more than a mere lawyer. He could give a binding pronouncement which would settle the case. However, he is turning to Jesus, in Luke's mind, for something trivial. Jesus' story about the rich fool draws out this lesson. It is not possessions which give safety and security in life. Jesus' further teaching in 12:35-48 makes plain what Jesus means by growing rich for the kingdom. This comes through service. Everything we have is a gift. These gifts are not to be hoarded for their own sakes but are to be shared with all. From the one who has much, much is to be expected. In short, the kingdom is all about SERVICE AND

New Testament Notes
SHARING. In verses 49-59, chapter 12 draws to a close with Jesus' call for a decision. He speaks of division, so the decision is a strict "either/or." The decision calls for commitment and dedication to service, to being ready at all times to live up to the demands Jesus places on his followers.

In chapter 13 Jesus deals with the issue of retribution. He explains that those who died a sudden and violent death were not more sinful than anyone else, thereby challenging a popular misunderstanding of the day. This is particularly significant in the light of the fact that Jesus is travelling to Jerusalem where he himself will face death, a criminal's execution which could be interpreted as the result of sin. On the contrary, it is those who are suffering, those who might seem, in the light of Jewish expectations to be the sinful and those to be avoided, who are being called by God to share in his kingdom and the path to the full reception of the kingdom moves through suffering. Again, this is made clear in the miracle Jesus performs for the poor, stooped woman. It is to such people that the kingdom belongs. That Jesus heals her on a Sabbath is again an occasion for controversy with Israel's religious leaders and another stage in the intensification of the hostility of the religious establishment to its savior.

Throughout chapters 11, 12 and 13, Luke has been alternating the audience. Now Jesus speaks to his disciples, now to the crowds, now to representatives of the religious establishment. He instructs the disciples, calls the crowds to follow him, and attempts to get the religious establishment to repent, to change its way of looking at things and the way it lives. Chapters 14 and 15 now contain an extended section of controversies with Israel's religious authorities. That the conversation between Jesus and the authorities has not finally broken off is clear in the fact that the setting of chapter 14 is a meal which Jesus shares in a Pharisees house. However, here, even at a dinner party, conflict erupts. The two stories Jesus uses in his teaching in chapter 14 draw on the imagery of a dinner party. In the first Jesus argues against acting for the sake of getting repaid. He talks about inviting the poor, lame, blind, and oppressed to the party. In this, Jesus is saying that those who would be his disciples must follow the example of his Father who invites, specifically, the poor and the outcasts to the banquet of salvation in the Kingdom. The second story picks up on this idea directly. In this story, those invited to the banquet proved unworthy and were excluded. This symbolizes the rejection Israel is facing in refusing to accept Jesus' invitation to enter into the Kingdom. But, for Luke's community, the warning is still valid. Some who have answered the invitation prove to be unworthy of it, unwilling to live up to the demands the feast of the Kingdom makes. That warning is addressed to us today.

In chapter 15, as the religious leaders of Israel witness the tax collectors and sinners coming to hear Jesus, they object to his association with these outcasts. In response to them, Jesus tells three parables which all deal with the same theme - the joy that follows finding what is lost. The parables concern a man who has lost a sheep, a woman who has lost a coin, and a father who has lost a son. These parables all portray, in story form, the truth of the idea that Jesus has been sent to call the lost sheep of the house of Israel. The pairing of the man with the lost sheep and the woman with the lost coin again lays stress on the inclusiveness of the Kingdom. All have a place, whether rich or poor, whether male or female. The third parable is the most significant. In this story being lost appears to be a matter of guilt. The son is suffering the consequences of his actions. He is
getting what he deserves. But the father receives him back. He will always be father, and the boy will always be his son. Jesus says that this is how God deals with us. The lesson of the parable is that, no matter what another person does, we are still brothers. We are invited to act as the father does, as God himself does, and to forgive our brothers and welcome them back into our fellowship.

Chapter 16 contains Jesus' teaching about the right use of possessions. In a strange story, Jesus teaches his disciples that a corrupt servant used possessions to his advantage - and to the advantage of those around him. The purpose of the story is to shock, to startle by seeming to hold out disreputable actions as good. But such a strange use of possessions displays what Jesus has stressed throughout. Possessions are to be used to benefit others and that, in fact, works to the advantage of the disciple who gains treasure in the heavenly kingdom. The rest of the chapter deals with the response of the religious leaders to what Jesus has said. They take what he has said literally and do not get the symbolic significance of his story. Faced with this, Jesus must try to correct their misunderstanding and he tries to do this with the parable of the rich man and Lazarus.

Continuing on his journey, Jesus, in chapters 17 and 18 continues to carry out his ministry of word of deed. The two significant stories in these two chapters are the Quest Stories of 17:12-19 and 18:18-30. In the first case, a leper, a Samaritan, seeks healing and his quest is successful, while in the second case, a rich ruler seeks eternal life but cannot let go of his attachment to material possessions. His quest ends in failure. The failed quest is bracketed by another successful quest in the story of Zachaeus in 19:1-10. A Samaritan and a chief tax collector prove to be more worthy of the Kingdom than the rich ruler. The Samaritan is in dire need and approaches Jesus with faith. The rich ruler has no need and thinks he is self-sufficient because of his possessions. The tax collector uses his possessions to give alms, to benefit others. He, though considered a sinner, shows that he knows more about what is required to be a member of the Kingdom than the righteous, rich ruler.

At length, the journey to Jerusalem is complete. As Jesus approaches the city, his disciples acclaim him as king, but again this provokes the hostility of the religious authorities. The stage is now set for the Jesus' ministry in Jerusalem and the passion.

Jesus first action, upon entering Jerusalem, is to cleanse the temple of the money changers. This is the last straw and provokes the final conflict with the religious leaders. The religious leaders of Jerusalem now do what other religious leaders have failed to do so far in this story, they plan the destruction of Jesus. The cycle of conflict stories in Luke basically follows the pattern of Mark and Matthew. The intensity of the conflict and the fact that the open lines of communication which had been maintained to this point are now finally broken is demonstrated in the fact that Jesus is now no longer welcome in the homes of the religious leaders. There are no more invitations to dinners, no more invitations to hear him speak. Rather, all conversations are characterized by challenges and hostility. In the face of this hostility Jesus warns the people and his disciples about their religious leaders and avoids them except for the sake of fiery debate. There is no more social contact. The key issue in the controversy with the religious leaders is the matter of authority. Jesus has challenged their authority by his attack on the temple and they deny that he has the right to do this, that he has any authority at all.

After the round of controversies ends with the religious leaders determined to destroy Jesus, they withdraw until the time is right. Until that time they give up control of the temple to Jesus who daily teaches the crowds and his disciples, preparing them for the end. On this note, the story of Jesus' active ministry closes.

The setting for the end of Luke's story is the feast of the Passover. In the Transfiguration, Jesus death, resurrection and ascension are interpreted as his "exodus." Just as the Passover and Exodus were the decisive turning points in the formation of Israel, so Jesus' passion, death, resurrection and ascension are the decisive turning points in the formation of the Christian community. Just as the exodus from Egypt was celebrated in advance with the first Passover meal, so the events of Holy Week are celebrated in advance with the Last Supper, the first Eucharist.

At the end of this story, Luke begins to weave themes together to provide a closing. At the beginning of the story, after the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness, Satan withdrew until the opportune time. That time is now and Satan enters into Judas - who, on his entrance into the story was identified as the one who would betray Jesus. Several times in the course of the story Jesus has predicted that the religious authorities would oppose him and hand him over to death. In the end, they enter into an agreement with Judas to betray Jesus. Throughout the whole ending the goodness or righteousness of Jesus is consistently contrasted with the evil of the religious authorities who draw on false witnesses, false charges and misrepresentations of Jesus' actual words to finally be rid of him.

Luke's ending differs from the endings of Mark and Matthew in some notable ways. While Mark and Matthew stress the failure of the disciples in their endings, in Luke the disciples remain loyal. They never abandon Jesus and remain as witnesses - though from afar - to his crucifixion. What characterizes the disciples in the end of Luke's story is their lack of understanding of the necessity of Jesus' suffering and death, even as that destiny of Jesus is unfolding before their eyes. Likewise, Luke differs in his characterization of the people. As was the case in Matthew, during Jesus' trial the crowds are joined with their religious leaders to demand the death of Jesus. In this way Luke also demonstrates that the rejection of Jesus by Israel is inclusive, involving the whole nation, but the crowds show up again at the crucifixion where, as opposed to their leaders, they do not mock Jesus, but remain open to him and his message. This is consistent with Luke's theme that all hope is not lost for Israel, that - though the message of the love, hope, acceptance, and forgiveness which all can find in the Kingdom will spread to the whole world - the nation of Israel still has a place in the kingdom, the people can still respond.

The trial of Jesus is presented in four phases. Jesus appears before 1) the Sanhedrin (22:66-71), 2) Pilate (23:1-3), 3) Herod Antipas (23:6-12), and 4) Pilate (23:13-25). The Sanhedrin is made up of representatives from the religious authorities who have opposed Jesus throughout the story, but now their opposition has solidified into hatred. The key issue is, again, AUTHORITY. Jesus answers the Sanhedrin's charges against him indirectly with references to Daniel 7:13 and Psalm 110:1. The basic meaning of his indirect response is that he is, in fact, claiming to be God's son. For the Sanhedrin this was a false claim to divinity and a direct challenge to the authority of the religious leaders of the people. In rejecting Jesus' understanding of himself, the Sanhedrin is also rejecting
God's understanding of Jesus as it was revealed in the Baptism and Transfiguration scenes.

As Roman governor, it is Pilate who must decide cases which carry the death penalty. Therefore the Sanhedrin takes Jesus to him. Now the deceitfulness of the Sanhedrin becomes fully evident. They interpret Jesus' claim to be God's son, a Messiah, as a claim to be king. They suggest that in claiming kingship, Jesus is placing himself at odds with Roman authority. They lie to make Jesus appear to be an enemy of Rome. Luke presents Pilate as sympathetic to Jesus. However, he is not strong or decisive, not the example of what a civil authority should be. When he learns that Jesus is from Galilee, he attempts to sidestep a difficult situation by sending Jesus to Herod Antipas, the ruler of the Galilean region. With this, the threat to Jesus' life becomes intensified. Herod had killed John the Baptist and, while Jesus was on his journey towards Jerusalem some Pharisees had warned him that Herod was out to kill him. When Jesus responds to Herod's questions with silence, Herod sends him back to Pilate who again attempts to free Jesus but finally falls to the pressure of the people. He condemns Jesus to death because of the people and with that Israel's rejection of its Messiah is complete.

Four scenes depict Jesus' death. These scenes are the mockery of the religious leaders in 23:35-38, Jesus and the two criminals in 23:39-43, the death scene itself in 23:44-46, and the reactions of various humans to Jesus' death in 23:47-49. The element of mockery is prominent in the first two scenes and the irony is that, in mocking Jesus, the religious leaders, the soldiers and one of the criminals all speak the truth. Their mocking puts Jesus to the test (balancing the testing by Satan at the beginning of the story). They challenge him to save himself and show that they are ignorant of the basic faith statement that all salvation comes from God. The second scene also includes the final Quest Story of the Gospel. On the cross, Jesus is shown to continue to carry out his ministry in responding to people who seek him out in faith. This serves to reinforce the basic idea that the crucifixion and death of Jesus is the very heart of his ministry.

Chapter 24 is Luke's ending of the story and shows the gradual growth in understanding of the disciples. The chapter is composed of four scenes: the empty tomb; the appearance to the disciples on the road to Emmaus; the revelation to the disciples in Jerusalem; and the ascension. What is significant in these scenes is the dawning awareness of the disciples, their recognition of Jesus and their understanding of his mission of suffering as a fulfillment of the Scriptures. Only when their eyes have been opened and they understand what Jesus is all about, an understanding which comes from a proper understanding of the Scripture and a sharing in the Eucharistic Meal, are the disciples given their final commission to await the reception of the Spirit and then to carry on the ministry of Jesus. Now the story awaits its fulfillment in the continuing account of the activity of the Spirit in the disciples of Jesus in Acts.

In the end, Luke's Gospel demonstrates that Jesus' whole life and mission was directed by the Holy Spirit and promises the continued presence of that Spirit to the church. Luke challenges his readers to respond to this Spirit and spread the Good News of love, acceptance, hope and forgiveness to ALL people, especially the poor and the outcast.
In This Unit:

Overview of John 99
Commentary on John 104
Prologue 104
Book of Signs 107
Book of Glory 119

Objective: John's Gospel tries to get its readers to make a personal and committed response to Jesus and his Father. John stresses that the critical time to respond is NOW. The issue is crucial for the reader. The way we interpret and judge Jesus and the major characters of the Gospel becomes, for us, the means by which we are judged and that judgment determines whether or not we belong to Jesus and the salvation he offers.

Vocabulary List:

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<tr>
<th>Wisdom</th>
<th>Tradition</th>
<th>Signs</th>
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<td>Book of Signs</td>
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<th>Dualism</th>
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I. An Overview of John's Gospel

**JOHN'S GOSPEL** includes only a few of the events or stories which were so much a part of the synoptic Gospels (Mark, Matthew, and Luke). He includes none of the familiar parables and stories which Jesus was presented as making such an important part of his ministry in the synoptics. Instead, John uses long, developed **SPEECHES** which make use of elaborate symbolism and double-meaning phrases.

IN JOHN, Jesus does not speak about the Kingdom of God. Rather he preaches about:

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<td>1.</td>
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<td>2.</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>his relationship with his Father who has <strong>sent</strong> him.</td>
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"**SENDING**" is an important theme in John's Gospel.

John's Gospel has a unique characterization of Jesus. It presents him as a **WISE MAN** who can give complicated interpretations of the Biblical Text - in much the same way as the Rabbis (the Pharisees). That is, John presents Jesus as part of Israel's **WISDOM TRADITION**.

In Israel, **WISDOM** was

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<td>1.</td>
<td>a way of thinking</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>a body of knowledge</td>
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<td>3.</td>
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**AS A WAY OF THINKING**, Israel's Wisdom Traditions believed

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<td>1.</td>
<td>that God created a <strong>good and ordered</strong> world</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>that people could live good lives by learning the common sense lessons living in the world could teach</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>that God speaks his word in his world, his revelation of himself.</td>
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**AS A BODY OF KNOWLEDGE**, Israel's Wisdom Traditions include

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<td>1.</td>
<td>the &quot;wise sayings&quot; (proverbs) of past ages</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>the Wisdom Books of the Old Testament</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>by the time of Jesus, this body of knowledge came to include the <strong>Law</strong> (the Torah as expressed in the writings of Scripture) as the ultimate expression of God's word in the world, and the object of study through which we can learn how to lead the good life.</td>
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**AS A MOVEMENT**, Israel's Wisdom Traditions

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<td>1.</td>
<td>form an educational system - the Rabbis hand on the learning (wisdom) of the past; they meditated on God's word in the Law and offered further instructions for living the good life.</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>provide a balance to prophetic, legal and priestly traditions as movements (as well as political expectations).</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>promote a way of living in the world in which real happiness comes from devotion to learning the lessons which God’s world and his Word have to offer.</td>
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</table>
In Israel's Wisdom Traditions, there is a **DUALISM** of thought, a contrasting of two ways, the way of the wise and the way of the foolish. **DUALISM**, as a way of thinking, divides the world into two camps, the righteous and wicked, the wise and foolish, the insiders and the outsiders, those who know and those who do not know.

*John's Gospel draws on DUALISTIC images to picture a wide gap separating Jesus from his listeners. That gap demonstrates that Jesus is wise and his listeners are foolish, that Jesus is righteous and his listeners are wicked.*

In John's Gospel, characterized as it is by long, developed speeches, there is a pattern or progression as we move from one speech to the next.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>the distance between Jesus and his listeners gets progressively bigger</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>Jesus becomes more explicit in his teachings - stressing the gap</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>likewise, his use of irony and double-meanings increases</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Jesus' speeches serve to develop themes introduced in the prologue</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>they interpret (teach about) his SIGNS (= miracles)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>they are addressed more to the reader of the gospel than to the characters within John's story of Jesus.</td>
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**JOHN'S USE OF MIRACLE STORIES**, which he calls SIGNS, is unique in the Gospel Tradition. He includes only a couple of the stories which are also found in the synoptic Gospels. The rest are original to his Gospel. Where Mark used miracle stories to demonstrate the truth of Jesus' message that the Kingdom of God is near, and Matthew used them to demonstrate faith, and Luke used them to demonstrate that Jesus is the promised "Prophet Like Moses," **JOHN USES THE SIGNS TO INTRODUCE THEMES WHICH ARE DEVELOPED IN JESUS' SPEECHES.**

The SIGNS speak God's word in the world, and that word IS JESUS. The **WORD OF GOD** is his revelation of himself and in John's Gospel, Jesus is the **INCARNATE WORD, THE WORD BECOME FLESH**. In the person of Jesus, God reveals himself, makes himself known in human terms. The SIGNS, then, reveal Jesus' identity as the **INCARNATE WORD OF GOD.**

John includes only seven signs - and from Old Testament tradition, seven is the number of fullness or completion. These signs are:

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<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>changing water into wine (2:1-11)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>curing the son of a royal official (4:46-54)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>curing the paralytic at the pool of Bethesda (5:1-15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>multiplying the loaves in Galilee (6:1-15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>walking on the sea (6:16-21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>restoring sight to the man born blind (chapter 9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>raising Lazarus from the dead (chapter 11).</td>
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</table>

As we move from one speech to the next, the gap between Jesus and his listeners grows ever wider. There is also a progression as we move from one miracle to the next. As the story moves from one sign to the next the hostility towards Jesus grows. This is especially true of the signs in chapters 5 and 9 which prove to be occasions for people to make threats against Jesus' life, and, in chapter 11, the raising of Lazarus is directly tied to Jesus' arrest and trial.
In a typical miracle story in the synoptics, Jesus is the main focus. Little or no information is given about the one for whom the miracle is worked. The stories are most often a revelation of Jesus' power, demonstrating the nearness of the Kingdom of God; after the miracles, nothing more is heard of the one who was healed. Most often, the stories simply conclude with an expression of astonishment on the part of those who witness the work of power.

In John, however, the miracle introduces the main lesson. The sign is followed by a speech in which Jesus relates the meaning of the miracle. Often the meaning is challenged or questioned by the listeners - even the one on whose behalf the miracle was performed. The result is that the gap between Jesus and the people grows wider. Irony dominates as the real meaning of Jesus' words is missed.

Two major themes are to be found in John's Gospel:

| 1. JESUS HAS COME INTO THE WORLD AS THE WORD OF GOD. |
| 2. JESUS MUST ALSO RETURN TO HIS FATHER. |

The first eleven chapters of John's Gospel tell the story of Jesus' coming into the world. These chapters have been called the **BOOK OF SIGNS**. Chapters 13 through 21 tell the story of Jesus' return to his Father. These chapters have been called the **BOOK OF GLORY**.

Chapter 12 marks the transition from the first to the second phase of the story, summing up what has happened and pointing ahead to what will occur.

Within this two-fold division there are five major sections:

| 1. Chapters 1-4, Jesus' Ministry as he travels from Cana to Cana |
| 2. Chapters 5-10, Jesus' Ministry as he travels from Jerusalem to Jerusalem |
| 3. Chapters 11-12, The raising of Lazarus - with the transition. |
| 4. Chapters 13-17, the dialogues at the Last Supper. |
| 5. Chapters 18-21, the passion and resurrection narratives. |

John's story of Jesus is punctuated by the celebration of a variety of Jewish feasts. The mention of these feasts, especially several Passover celebrations, suggests that *for John the public ministry of Jesus lasted about three years*. This differs from the picture given in the synoptics in which the ministry of Jesus lasted only about one year.

As was the case with the synoptics, John's beginning, the Prologue of chapter 1, introduces John's major themes. John's major themes are the dualistic or opposing ideas of

- Light vs. Darkness
- Life vs. Death
- God vs. the World.

As an example of the Wisdom Tradition, John's Gospel sees a connection between **CREATION** and **REVELATION** (as it is found in the Scriptures and in the life of Jesus, the Word Made Flesh). Both Scripture and Jesus speak God's word. John links
light (enlightenment) with God's first act of creation - the giving of light. But the real
source of enlightenment is Jesus - the new light God sends into the world.

In John's Gospel there is a **PARADOX** - as in the Wisdom Tradition where wisdom
opposes folly, but both can be learned from the same world. For John, on the one hand,
Jesus enlightens everyone; he reveals who he is and in so doing reveals his Father. On
the other hand, most of his own people live in impenetrable darkness; they cannot see.
The dispute between those who are enlightened by Jesus and those who are not will focus
on the understanding of Moses and the Law. This dispute is seen, not as a one-time
conflict, but as part of the very conflict between light and darkness, good and evil, life
and death, that has been a part of the world since the beginning of time. For John, Jesus,
not the Law, is the true light which enlightens and brings life to people.

**THE PROLOGUE INTRODUCES THE CONFLICT BETWEEN LIGHT AND
DARKNESS. JESUS COMES BECAUSE THERE IS DARKNESS, AND HIS
COMING BRINGS ABOUT A CONFLICT BETWEEN THESE TWO FORCES.
IN MAKING A DECISION ABOUT JESUS, THE CHARACTERS IN THE STORY
REVEAL SOMETHING ABOUT THEMSELVES - WHETHER THEY BELONG TO
LIGHT OR DARKNESS, WHETHER THEY WILL INHERIT LIFE OR DEATH.
JESUS HAS COME TO BRING LIGHT (AND SO LIFE), BUT HIS COMING ALSO
MAKES AN URGENT DEMAND SINCE, NOW THAT HE HAS COME AND
OFFERED LIGHT, THOSE WHO REJECT THE LIGHT ARE CONDEMNE
THAT IS, THE LIGHT JESUS BRINGS CAUSES JUDGMENT.**

**JUDGMENT** is a key idea or image in John's Gospel. From beginning to end, Jesus is
**ON TRIAL.** But so are we.

The conflict between Jesus and his opponents ends in the **LEGAL TRIAL** of Jesus

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Jesus has come to bear WITNESS to the truth</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>God is a WITNESS for Jesus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>John the Baptist bears WITNESS to Jesus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>miracles are signs which provide TESTIMONY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>the Spirit will give TESTIMONY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>the disciples are appointed as WITNESSES</td>
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<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>the narrator himself is a WITNESS.</td>
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In John's Gospel, the characters in the story and the readers of the Gospel must
judge Jesus. But the judgment the characters in the story make, and the judgment
we make, shows whether we belong to the light or not. **HOW WE RESPOND TO JESUS PERSONALLY IN OUR LIVES BECOMES THE MEANS WHEREBY WE ARE JUDGED.**

It is in this regard that John's Gospel is said to develop the idea of **REALIZED ESCHATOLOGY.** Eschatology refers to the "last things." In the synoptics, eschatology refers to the expectation of the Second Coming of Christ and the establishment of God's Kingdom in Power. For John, however, the decisive moment of salvation is now; the moment of judgment is not some future event but determined in the present. What will be the fate of the believer is determined in the way we live now, in whether we establish and maintain a personal relationship with the Incarnate Word.

John's use of the Wisdom Traditions of Israel and other indications of his Jewish background, then, make it likely that he was writing for a group of Jewish believers, a group which had recently been excluded from the synagogue (by the council of Jamnia after the events of 70 AD). The exclusion of John's particular community was part of a broader purge within the Jewish religion at large in which anyone professing faith in Christ was expelled from fellowship with the Jews. The Gospel of John, like the synoptics, was minority literature. John seeks to interpret for his audience a bewildering world in which reality does not conform to expectations, where the light and life offered by God in Jesus seem to be defeated by the darkness of evil.

**JOHN'S THEME IS TO ENCOURAGE HIS READERS TO RESPOND TO THE LIGHT IN JESUS SO AS TO AVOID THE JUDGMENT OF ETERNAL CONDEMNATION.**
II. Commentary on John's Gospel


The prologue to John's Gospel, like the beginnings of the synoptics, introduces John's key ideas. **For John, Jesus is the Christ, the anointed Messiah from all eternity.** That is, John develops a **Three-Stage Christology**. In John's Gospel Jesus IS the word of God, not a word about God, but God's revelation, his giving of himself in a relationship to us. **The response John will call for from his readers is to enter into a personal and loving relationship with God. We meet God in Jesus.**

John's Gospel develops the idea that we are who we are because of our relationship with others. Our relationship with others comes from knowing them, not about them. For John, the critical difference in our lives must come from knowing God and we come to know him in Jesus. The crucial question is whether our relationship with God through Jesus makes us children of the light or of the darkness, whether we relate to God in love and acceptance and belong to him or reject him and his relationship and line ourselves up with all that opposes God.

The Prologue identifies Jesus as the eternal word of God, as the revelation of God, as the means whereby we enter into a relationship with God. Jesus is related to the Father by being his word and by having been sent from him. His destiny is to return to the Father. In the meantime, his mission is to reveal the Father and call all to an intimate relationship with him. Plot development in the Gospel, then will center on how Jesus' identity is
recognized and how it is failed to be recognized. This theme is also introduced in the Prologue. Jesus comes as revelation, as light, but that light is surrounded by darkness. Verses 11-12 function as a summary for the whole Gospel. Jesus comes to his own and his own do not receive him. This is the conflict which provides the moving force for the story of Jesus that John will tell. The conflict is carried in a series of oppositions or antitheses:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>1. Light vs. Darkness</th>
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<td>2. belief vs. unbelief</td>
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<td>3. grace and truth vs. the Law.</td>
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As was the case in the synoptics, the major conflict in John's Gospel comes in Jesus' relationship with the Jews, especially the religious leaders of the Jews. The controversy centers on what is the true source of revelation, Jesus or the Law. While the Law is a partial word of God, the fullness of God's word is the Word Made Flesh and those who reject this word, those who reject Jesus are those who love darkness and persist in unbelief. They have no life in them.

In the Prologue, the narrator establishes his control of the story. He knows where Jesus comes from and where he is destined to go. He knows that Jesus is the creative word of God and that he will continue to create in the story of his mission - creating faith in the midst of unbelief, light in darkness, sight for the blind, new life for the dead, and Spirit for those lacking spirit. In short, Jesus creates life by creating a relationship with God. However, the conflict introduced in the Prologue indicates that there are those who will reject this relationship, who prefer unbelief and death.

The final aspect of the Prologue which is worthy of note is the role of John the Baptist. John is the first of a series of REPRESENTATIVE FIGURES to be introduced into John's story. These figures include the Jews, the disciples, John the Baptist, and several of the minor characters of the Gospel story. They REPRESENT a possible response to the revelation of God which is encountered in Jesus. In John's Gospel, there are seven possible responses to Jesus:
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>outright rejection</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>acceptance of Jesus as a miracle worker, as someone who can give people what they want</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>acceptance of Jesus' words which leave people open to a fuller response to Jesus and the revelation he presents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>acceptance of Jesus without commitment, another unsatisfactory response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>acceptance of Jesus' identity but with some misunderstandings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>acceptance of Jesus with a full and loving commitment to him and his Father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>defection, that is acceptance of Jesus and then betrayal.</td>
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**John the Baptist** represents the full and loving response to God's revelation. He represents what the role of the disciple really is - to be a witness. *The introduction of John in the Prologue, then, introduces the trial imagery which will be developed throughout the entire Gospel.* John is a witness to the truth and light which comes in Jesus. The role of a witness is not only to "see" but to testify, to proclaim the truth of what he or she has witnessed. At the outset, then, John provides a model of what true discipleship is all about. The disciple is to call others to faith by proclaiming the truth he has witnessed.
The Prologue introduced the identity of Jesus as the eternal Word of God which has become a human being and entered into the world. 1:19-2:11 now introduce the man Jesus as he begins his public life. In these verses Jesus is proclaimed by John the Baptist, calls his first disciples, and reveals his glory to them in the first of his signs at the wedding feast at Cana. John the Baptist is depicted as fulfilling his role as it was described in the Prologue. Through his role as witness others come to faith, to a relationship with Jesus. He points to Jesus as "the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." This phrase, placed on the lips of the Baptist, begins the Gospel's rich and elaborate use of symbolism. The phrase, "Lamb of God," conjures up the image of the paschal lamb, the lamb sacrificed for the passover meal. From the start, then, true disciples, true witnesses, acknowledge that Jesus' identity involves being sacrificed for the forgiveness of sins. Because of his testimony, two of John's disciples come to faith in Jesus and leave John to follow "the Lamb of God."
Here we meet the Gospel's next representative figure, Andrew. As the Gospel story continues, Andrew will demonstrate the response of those who accept Jesus but still have misunderstandings - the general response of most of the disciples of Jesus - but he also exemplifies the basic role of a disciple - to bring others to a relationship with the Christ. He calls his brother. This will be a characteristic activity of Andrew in the Gospel. Another disciple, Philip, calls Nathanael. Nathanael is another of John's representative figures. His first response to Jesus is decidedly negative. For him, Jesus is a rustic from Nazareth. In modern terms, Nathanael would consider Jesus to be a red-neck, an unsophisticated, uneducated, crude person and hardly someone in whom to encounter the presence of God. Nathanael represents those who can get beyond surface appearances and narrow expectations in order to respond to the underlying truth. In distinction to the synoptics, we have already had two major confessions on the part of Jesus' earliest followers. Andrew, in summoning his brother Peter, announces that they have found the Messiah and Nathanael confesses that Jesus is the Son of God. The introductory scenes come to a close at the wedding feast at Cana. At the request of his mother who, like the Baptist and the Beloved Disciple, represents loving commitment to Jesus and full trust in him, Jesus performs the first of his signs. The purpose of this sign is to reveal Jesus' glory to his disciples and confirm the confessions they have already made about him. This first sign represents another example of John's use of symbolism to present his understanding of the identity of Jesus. It is significant that the jars of water which Jesus transforms into wine are jars used in Jewish ritual purification rites. In changing the water of purification, used to remove ritual uncleanness which kept people from participating in Israel's worship, into wine Jesus is transforming the old ways of Israel into something radically new. What is present in Jesus goes beyond what was present in God's former ways of dealing with his people. Jesus mission, then, will involve transforming the old ways of encountering his Father into something different, something more personal. Now God is met, not in ritual actions, but in the person of his Son.

In 2:12-25 Jesus' first public act is the cleansing of the temple. The fact that John tells of this event at the beginning of Jesus' ministry rather than at the end, as in the synoptics, demonstrates that Jesus is openly embracing conflict from the beginning of his public life. As was the case with the first sign at Cana, this is a symbolic act. What Jesus does, in effect, disrupts Israel's worship system. With his coming into the world nothing can be the same. He stands opposed to a relationship with God which is based on external practices and rituals and calls, rather, for a personal commitment to and relationship with God. What Jesus does occasions the first controversy or conflict in the Gospel. The religious authorities ask for a sign to authenticate Jesus' right to act in the way he does. In response to their request Jesus himself provokes the controversy by speaking in symbolic terms of his death. He speaks of destroying and rebuilding "this temple." He is shifting focus away from the temple building, the symbolic representation of the place where Israel can meet with its God, to himself, the reality of God's presence with his people. Yet, as will be the case throughout the Gospel, what Jesus says and the images he uses are misunderstood. It is significant that Jesus, who has been identified as the Lamb of God, begins his public ministry in Jerusalem during the feast of the Passover and provokes a controversy. This all foreshadows the ending of the story when, during
another Passover, Jesus' controversies with the Jews will lead them to condemn him to "be sacrificed" - again in Jerusalem.

This first phase of Jesus' ministry ends with a summary statement in 2:23-25 that many believed in the signs Jesus was performing. The summary makes it clear that such a response to Jesus is not adequate, that believing in signs is merely looking for what we want, how we can benefit, and does not represent a true commitment to the revelation available in Jesus. Jesus refused to entrust himself, to give himself fully to those who made such a response.

All of chapter 3 concerns Jesus' encounter with Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. Nicodemus is another of John's representative figures. He represents a religious leader, a man of standing and education who is attracted to the words of Jesus but who cannot bring himself to sever his ties with his background, with his usual ways of seeing things and doing things, to fully respond and commit to Jesus and his revelation. Nicodemus approaches Jesus with a question. It is important to note that he comes at night, in darkness. Symbolically, Nicodemus, who lives in darkness - the religious and legal practices of the Jews - approaches the light. Sadly, although he approaches the light, he never enters fully into it. He can't let go. Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus demonstrates a pattern which will characterize most of Jesus' conversations with others in the Gospel.

| 1. Jesus speaks | 2. His audience misunderstands | 3. Jesus continues to develop his theme - often getting more adamant in what he says and more outrageous in the images he uses to illustrate his point. |

Nicodemus acknowledges his respect for Jesus, but Jesus tells him that no one can enter God's Kingdom without being born "from above." That phrase is the point of misunderstanding. In Greek, "from above" can also mean "again." Nicodemus takes what Jesus has to say very literally and does not understand that Jesus is talking about spiritual rebirth rather than physical rebirth. Jesus goes on to explain that he is speaking about birth into eternal life - being born of water and the spirit. He is speaking of baptism and belief. In his conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus explains his whole purpose for coming into the world and offers an old testament image to interpret this purpose. He has come into the world as its light, but people, like Nicodemus, are proving to love darkness. The attitude of people will determine their judgment and that judgment is for eternal life or eternal damnation, death. The basis of the judgment is belief in the light and truth present in Jesus.

To interpret the purpose of his mission, then, Jesus uses the image of Moses "lifting up" the serpent in the wilderness. When the people of Israel had sinned in their wilderness wanderings and faced the punishment of God, Moses was instructed to fashion a bronze serpent and raise it up on a pole for all the people to see. Whoever looked on the serpent was saved. Jesus has come to save people so that all who look on him and believe when he is "lifted up" will have eternal. Jesus is calling Nicodemus - and the readers of the Gospel - to faith, faith which leads to life, faith in the revelation of the "lifted up" savior - that is, the crucified Christ.
Nicodemus' inability to understand and respond to Jesus is underscored by the fact that he gradually disappears from the story. He fades back into darkness. He will return twice more to the larger Gospel story, but he will never enter into the light. His first reappearance comes when the religious leaders want to arrest Jesus is chapter 7. They are trying to determine what to do about Jesus and his works of power and Nicodemus speaks up to defend, not Jesus, but the Law. He is still on the wrong side. His last appearance in the Gospel comes at the end when he joins Joseph of Arimathea in burying Jesus. Again this shows that his blindness is still intact. He comes to Jesus, but in death, not in life, in darkness and not light.

4:1-42 portray Jesus' encounter with a Samaritan woman and the reaction of the Samaritans to him. The setting for this story - that Jesus is traveling back to Galilee and passing through Samaritan territory - is the fact that hostilities are mounting in Jerusalem. It is not a safe place for Jesus to be. John's account of Jesus' meeting with the Samaritan woman at a well is patterned after an Old Testament Story scene, the scene of finding a wife at a well. These stories follow a regular pattern:

1. **the hero travels to foreign territory**
2. **he meets one or more girls at a well**
3. **someone draws water**
4. **there is running back and forth to the girl's house**
5. **the hero is invited to share hospitality**
6. **a marriage is arranged between the hero and the girl.**

In the Old Testament, these stories always show that the hero is at a crucial turning point in his life and this is the case with Jesus, who is setting out on a new phase of his public ministry, heading away from Jerusalem and the danger that it holds for him. Also, what happens at the well symbolizes something about the future fate or career of the hero. So, what happens in this story serves to anticipate later developments in John's presentation of Jesus. Finally, the hero regularly marries the girl. That doesn't happen here. In this detail, John is asserting that Jesus is not going to be the kind of hero we might expect. In this way, then, this story functions for John as the genealogies and infancy narratives do in Matthew and Luke. That Jesus may not be what people expect is further underscored by the fact that in this story he is associating not only with a Samaritan, but a Samaritan woman and, in strict terms, this violates the Jewish laws of purity.

Once again, the heart of this story is the conversation Jesus has with another person, a person who represents yet another possible reaction and response to Jesus. As was the case with Nicodemus, the moving force behind the conversation is the woman's misunderstanding of what Jesus says, and that misunderstanding is occasioned again by a double-meaning phrase. In this case the phrase is "living water." What Jesus means by this is the waters of life, the waters leading to life, the waters of baptism which symbolize belonging to Jesus. He speaks of a spiritual reality. The woman, however, understands the phrase in its literal or physical sense. "Living waters," in Greek, is the phrase used to describe "flowing water" - a river or stream. The conversation now centers on proper worship. For the woman, this issue centers on where that worship should be carried out; for Jesus the where is not important. It is the attitude which counts - worshipping in spirit and truth. When he confronts the woman about her multiple marriages, he touches her
heart. His mission is to bring the forgiveness of sins - not through stale rituals, but through personal encounter.

This story, then, serves to develop several important ideas for John. First, the story displays a contrast between Nicodemus, the leader of the Jews, and the Samaritan woman and the people of her town. While the religious authorities of the Jews are locked in darkness, those who are considered to be outsiders, to be rejected and in the dark, are coming to the light. The revelation and relationship with God that Jesus offers is not just for the Jews. Second, the woman comes to a partial and immature faith. She responds to Jesus words, is attracted to them, and witnesses to what he has said and done for her. Her partial faith leads many in her town to come to full faith. In a sense, then, this story conveys the same basic idea as the parable of the mustard seed in the synoptics. The response to the salvation which God offers to the world in his son starts small and grows in unseen and unpredictable ways. The story also indicates that coming to true faith, coming to that full personal relationship with God is a process. We grow into the relationship by stages and each stage along the way has value.

4:43-54 now relate Jesus' second sign, the healing of the son of a royal official. As a royal official, probably some type of officer in Herod's court, this man would have been on the fringes of Israelite society. This story contrasts his faith with many in main-line Judaism who were attracted to Jesus only because of his signs and not because of the man himself. The official is persistent in his belief that Jesus can help him. He is responding to Jesus not just to his image as a miracle worker. In this story, then, John is showing that Jesus' signs can be real occasions for faith - but only if people respond to the person of Jesus and not merely to the good they can get from his signs. The two stories of chapter 4, then, show Jesus as active in word and deed. Both his words and his deeds lead people to faith, but also the response of the Samaritan woman to Jesus' words and of the royal official to Jesus' deed lead others to believe. They represent the role of Jesus' true witnesses.

Chapter 5 is made up of four sections:

| 1) the healing of a paralytic - the third sign |
| 2) the controversy this healing causes  |
| 3) a speech by Jesus; and  |
| 4) Jesus' discussion of his witnesses. |

The scene is once again Jerusalem, where Jesus has gone for one of the Jewish feasts. Because of this setting, we do not expect things to go well for Jesus. Two aspects of the healing story are worth noting. First, the paralyzed man does not recognize the saving power that is present in Jesus. His point of view is completely physical. His problem is that he has no one to put him in the water. The second feature is that Jesus heals him with a WORD. The creative word of God creates healing by his word. The healing, however, provokes conflict. The man is confronted by the Jews for carrying his mat about on the Sabbath. Rather than being grateful to Jesus he turns him in to the authorities. The paralyzed man, then, is another representative figure. He represents those who are willing to accept the good things that can come from Jesus but who do not respond to him personally. He represents the inadequacy of "signs faith."
The Jews' conflict with Jesus is over authority. Basically they challenge him to know by what right he breaks the Sabbath laws. Jesus' response is to claim that he is acting on his Father's authority but this claim just sharpens the conflict. The Jews reject this claim because they do not recognize and refuse to recognize the truth - that Jesus is God's Son. They refuse to take him seriously. As such, Jesus offers a warning. The attitude of people to him is the means by which they will be judged. He ends by citing witnesses - John the Baptist, his own works, and even the Scriptures. That is, as this section of the Gospel closes, John emphasizes TRIAL IMAGERY.

This first section of the Book of Signs, chapters 1-4, has introduced and identified Jesus and depicted his mission as a ministry of word and deed. Chapter 5 has introduced the hostility to the light and truth, the revelation and possibility for a personal relationship with the Father that is offered to the world through Jesus. And it presents John's major image - that of the trial. Jesus has moved from a Passover in Jerusalem, through Samaria to Galilee, and back to Jerusalem for a feast and throughout he has been on trial. The people he encounters must judge his words and deeds; they must judge him. But the judgment they make about him reveals who they really are, whether they belong to the light or not. And finally, we judge Jesus, his words and deeds, and we judge the response of those around him. But the judgment we make reveals who we are. For John, it is crucial for us to believe in and respond to the true witnesses and judge things correctly. It is imperative for us to enter into the light and receive life through our personal relationship with Jesus and his Father.

A new phase in Jesus' public life begins in chapter 6 and continues through chapter 8. The movement of this section of the Gospel is from the events in Galilee during Passover to the events in Jerusalem during the Feast of Tabernacles.

The opening words of chapter 6 already anticipate a gloomy outcome for what is about to be narrated. Jesus has returned to Galilee and is followed by large crowds. But they are following him because they have seen his signs. John has already gone to great lengths to demonstrate that mere "signs faith" is inadequate. 6:1-15 is one of the few stories John shares with the synoptics, the feeding of the five thousand. The feeding is followed by the boat trip and Jesus' walking on the water. What is different about John's telling of these stories is that the departure of Jesus and the disciples is now due to the misunderstanding of the crowds who would make Jesus a king. Further, in the synoptics, Jesus gets into the boat and calms the storm. Here, John notes that the disciples wanted to take Jesus into the boat, but found themselves safe on the opposite shore. In this, the disciples are beginning resemble the crowds who want to hang on to Jesus or make him king so that they can keep his benefits. The disciples want to take Jesus into the boat, to hang on to the safety he offers. In this, they are also like Israel's religious authorities who want to see God as their exclusive possession, met in their rituals and worship. John is making it clear that no one person or group of people can make exclusive claims on God. The story continues in 6:22 with the crowd who had eaten the bread discovering that Jesus had departed. They immediately set out to follow him and, because of the beginning of the story, we suspect that they are following him only for the sake of the signs. Jesus makes this clear in the words he speaks to them. They are following him simply because they have had enough to eat, because their needs and wants have been met. Jesus tells them that they should be seeking the food that brings eternal life, but
they are stuck in the physical plain. They want another sign - they want more food. They cite the fact that Moses had given the manna and want Jesus to do the same. Their idea of bread from heaven is, again, something that will satisfy physical rather than spiritual and eternal needs. Now Jesus identifies himself as **THE BREAD OF LIFE**.

It is through him, through taking him into ourselves that we gain life. For John's community and for us, this implies the Eucharist, but even before the giving of the Eucharist, what Jesus says indicates a personal response of taking another in, making them a part of our lives. When the crowd misunderstands this, again looking at only the physical and material meaning and thinking that Jesus, the son of Joseph and Mary, could not have come from heaven, Jesus uses shock value to try to get them to see what he is talking about. He talks about eating his flesh and drinking his blood. For the literally minded in the crowd this was too much. It was scandalous and shocking and many turned away from him. Symbolically, Jesus words drive home the fact that, in him, the people **DO SEE GOD IN THE FLESH** and need to take him into their hearts and lives. But, the crowds had asked for Manna as Moses had given and like their ancestors before them, they end up grumbling and murmuring against Jesus.

Chapter 6 is a turning point in the first half of the Gospel. In this chapter Jesus works his fourth sign, the multiplication of the loaves. This is the middle sign of the seven. This sign provokes an acute misunderstanding of Jesus' identity and mission. Jesus is the Bread of Life which has come from the Father and offers eternal life. But this understanding of Jesus' identity and purpose is too much for even some of his disciples. Now, not only do the religious authorities and Jews reject him, but some of his own followers turn away. That things are now destined to move to Jesus' ultimate rejection and death is indicated in the end of the chapter with the mention of Judas Iscariot.

In chapter 7 Jesus again returns to Jerusalem. He returns secretly because of the threat to his life there, but before he goes he is challenged to go and work more signs. He is challenged by his "brothers," those closest to him, in a taunting kind of way. Again the
focus is on the signs and again we see those closest to Jesus misunderstanding who he is and what he is all about.

Chapter 7 is made up primarily of speech material and the speeches of Jesus in this chapter are again in the mode of a legal defense. This chapter is clearly related to chapter five. Jesus, now in Jerusalem again, faces the same controversy he faced in chapter five, the hostility of the religious leaders and the Jews because of his Sabbath healing. In his words, Jesus refers back to the healing of the paralytic, to the controversy it sparked, and to the desire of the religious leaders to kill him because of it. A major focus of this chapter, then, is the reaction of five distinct groups to Jesus - how they judge him and the defense he makes of himself and his mission. The five groups include his brothers who have only "sign faith" and want to force Jesus to reveal his glory openly before the proper time; the crowds who represent a variety of responses to Jesus, from total unbelief to full faith, but a faith that does not lead to witness, to proclaiming Jesus because of fear of the Jews; the Jews who represent those associated with the Pharisees and other religious leaders and who carry out in public what the religious authorities plot in private; the Pharisees who plot behind the scenes and attempt to get Jesus arrested; and the temple guards, the delegates of the religious authorities who cannot carry out their task because they are impressed by Jesus and his words.

The major opposition comes from the religious authorities and throughout his defense Jesus is shown to refute their charges and demonstrate their ignorance and ill-will. Throughout the Gospel, these religious leaders are the objects of sharp and biting satire. In doing this and presenting his defense, Jesus' major image in the chapter is derived from the feast which is being celebrated. On the last day of the feast of Tabernacles, a priest would fill a pitcher of water from a spring in Jerusalem. The water would be carried in ritual procession to the temple and poured on the altar of sacrifice. Against the background of this feast Jesus again proclaims himself to be the source of "living water." That water is the Spirit which he will impart to his disciples, the Spirit which is available to all true believers through the waters of Baptism.

The trial imagery of the chapter, along with the fact that time is beginning to slow down, intensifies the death threat that is hanging over Jesus' head. In the larger story, chapters 2-6 move from one Passover feast to the next, covering a year. Chapters 7-10 will not cover about four months. Chapters 11-12 cover about two weeks, and chapters 13-19 take up only about twenty-four hours. As the time progression of the story slows, the conflict and hostility intensify. In slowing the pace of the narrative, intensifying the trial and judgment imagery and focusing on five representative responses to Jesus, John is demonstrating the urgency to respond to Jesus, to come into the light before time runs out. Once again, Jesus' claims about himself in the context of Israel's religious celebrations give witness to the new and full revelation which is available in Jesus and goes beyond the ritual practices of Israel. Our relationship with God should be based on personal terms and not on legal and ritual conditions.

In chapter 8 the verbal conflict reaches its high point. The chapter opens with an incident which demonstrates the central aspect of Jesus ministry - to bring the forgiveness of sin and effect a reconciliation between the sinner and his Father. The episode also highlights the difference between Jesus and the religion he represents and the Scribes and Pharisees.
and the brand of religion they represent. In this story the Scribes and Pharisees are acting as judges and they presume to judge for God. They condemn the woman caught in adultery. Jesus reveals what God's will really is, that the woman and all sinners turn from their sins, not that they be condemned. In choosing to condemn the woman, the Scribes and Pharisees show themselves to be at odds with God, to be in darkness. In judging they bring judgment upon themselves.

The rest of the chapter focuses on Jesus' identity, his origin in God and his destiny to return to his Father. In the course of his remarks, Jesus words are interrupted by and contrasted with the questions, accusations and statements of bewilderment on the part of the crowd. The purpose of this chapter, then, is to show the growing hostility to Jesus. The crowds who, in chapter seven displayed a variety of attitudes to Jesus but generally kept quiet for fear of the Jews, have now found their voices and speak against him. The question of ancestry is the focal point of the chapter. Jews claim to be sons of Abraham, but also to be Sons of God, at least in a symbolic sense. Yet they reject Jesus' claim to be God's Son in both the figurative and literal sense. The basic point this chapter makes is that the question of ancestry is crucial, for faith in Jesus means faith in his relationship with his Father who has sent him. As with chapter seven, legal terminology and imagery dominates chapter eight.

Chapter 9 begins with a simple healing story, the healing of a man born blind, then builds on that story to present John's understanding of spiritual blindness. There are seven scenes in the story which are arranged in a concentric pattern:

| A. Jesus and the blind man - healing (9:1-7) |
| B. reaction of the crowd (9:8-12) |
| C. a "Trial" scene (9:13-17) |
| D. testimony of the blind man's parents (9:18-23) |
| C. a "Trial" scene (9:24-34) |
| A. Jesus and the blind man - faith (9:35-38) |
| B. reaction of the Pharisees (9:39-41) |

The story begins and ends with Jesus' dealings with a blind man and the reactions this provokes. The core of the story involves two interrogations or trial scenes, with the blind man appearing before the religious authorities. These two scenes, in turn, surround the central scene of the testimony given by the blind man's parents. That scene is the heart of the story.

There is a progression or development in the story which moves on two levels. The blind man recovers his physical sight and then moves, step by step, to spiritual insight, belief. The Pharisees, by contrast, move deeper and deeper into darkness and unbelief. In the development of this contrast, the Pharisees are the object of biting satire, especially in the interrogation scenes where the words of the blind man highlight the stubborn lack of faith of the religious leaders and holds them up to ridicule.

In the pivotal, central scene, the scene involving the blind man's parents, the narrator, in a rare aside to the reader, lets his voice be heard. He notes that the Jews had decided to expel from the synagogue anyone who confessed Jesus as the Messiah. This accounts for the fear of the blind man's parents and provides the backdrop against which the whole
The story is to be viewed. The story addresses directly the situation of John's community, the audience for whom he wrote his story. In this regard, it is important to note the small role of Jesus himself in the story. He gets the whole progression moving by healing the blind man, but then drops out of the tale until nearly the end. Because of his encounter with Jesus the blind man gradually comes to faith and he achieves this faith by progressively giving testimony to those who are hostile to Jesus. He is a witness.

Again, the trial imagery is prominent in this story. The blind man is on trial for confessing Jesus. Many scholars believe that some sort of trial or hearing was involved in expelling those who believed in Jesus from the synagogues in the time of John's community. In this way, then, this story reflects the actual situation of John's audience. But even more, though it is the blind man who stands before the religious authorities, it is Jesus himself who is on trial. The blind man who has encountered Jesus in his life gives testimony about Jesus, about his identity, about his authority, about his mission. In doing so he moves closer and closer to full faith. The Pharisees, the apparent judges in this case, weigh the evidence and form the wrong conclusions. They judge wrongly and move more into unbelief. Their judgment, their condemnation, then, is of their own making. They witness the light, they see the difference Jesus makes to people but refuse to believe. They exclude themselves.

Because of his confession of Jesus, the blind man is expelled from the synagogue and disowned by his parents. In these details John wants us to see that there is a price to pay for being a follower of Jesus, but that the price is worth more than anything imaginable. In the end, Jesus comes to the blind man, receives and accepts him. That is the message of hope John addresses to his readers. If we pay the price of following Jesus, if we enter into a full and loving personal relationship with him, then he will come to us and receive us. To do this may mean that we have to stand against others, even those who are closest to us and most important in our lives, but in doing this we form our own judgment: we are children of the light, born to eternal life in Jesus. Our decision, our judgment to stand for or against Jesus, to believe or not believe, is of crucial importance, a matter, literally, of life and death, eternal life or eternal condemnation.

The story of the blind man in chapter 9 marks a kind of turning point in the development of John's story. The focus was on a personal encounter with Jesus that lead a man to faith and as a result of that faith he became a witness to the truth. The story foreshadows the situation of the disciples after the death and departure of Jesus. As a consequence, in chapter 10, John now presents Jesus' teaching. Jesus teaches in images which shed light on who he is and what is about to happen to him. In 10:1-6 Jesus presents the basic image or parable. In 10:7-10 and 11-18 he offers two explanations of his image. He himself is the gatekeeper, that is, the way to a personal relationship with the Father, the way to Eternal Life. Likewise, he is the Good Shepherd who leads and protects his flock. The crucial aspect of this part of the image, in the ongoing story in John, is that the Good Shepherd puts his life on the line for his flock. He lays down his life for his sheep. No one takes his life from him. In this way John asserts that, contrary to how it may seem, Jesus is in control of his own destiny. He is doing the will of his father and that will means that he will die for the forgiveness of sins so that his flock, his followers, will have eternal life. As is typical in John, what Jesus says is met with both negative and positive responses.
Chapter 10 closes with another trial scene. Jesus is questioned about his messianic identity and challenged to speak plainly. When he does, the people accuse him of blasphemy and attempt to stone him. They have already formed their judgment. Jesus again cites the testimony given on his behalf by the Scriptures, his works and his Father and, while he eludes the crowds' attempt to kill him on the spot, the end result is an increased desire to arrest him. The Jews do not understand that their judgment on Jesus is sealing their own fate and that fate is one of condemnation.

Jesus' public ministry draws to a close in chapters 11 and 12. In chapter 11 the raising of Lazarus foreshadows Jesus' own resurrection, while the anointing of Jesus in chapter 12 prepares for his death and burial, a death determined by the Pharisees in response to the last and greatest of Jesus' signs. Death is even determined for Lazarus because he is a living example of the life to be found in Jesus. In this way John joins the fate of disciples and their witness to Jesus with the fate of Jesus himself.

The raising of Lazarus is the seventh and final sign. It is balanced with and contrasted to the first, the changing of water into wine at Cana. There, the setting was a celebration of a wedding in a rural area; here, the setting is a funeral outside the main urban center. Symbolically, these two signs with their distinctive settings demonstrate that Jesus is involved with his people at all the critical turning points of their lives: birth, new life in marriage, and death. It is further significant that the miracle of the raising of Lazarus is the final act in the story. Other signs occurred at the beginning or middle of their story-units and led to controversies and speeches. Now, in his greatest sign, actions speak louder than words and the sign activity of Jesus comes to a close.

Two further features of the story are worth noting. In it the disciples are characterized as lacking understanding. They take what Jesus says about Lazarus' "sleep" literally. In this they respond just like the Jews. As the passion nears, the demands on the disciples become stronger and they fail to understand. Likewise, as Lazarus emerges from the tomb, he is still wrapped in the shroud and bindings. Jesus commands that these be removed. Symbolically, Jesus is asserting his control over the forces of sin, suffering and death which "bind" humanity.

11:45-54 present the aftermath of the last sign. There is a progression of scenes in this unit focusing on 1) the reaction of the Jews, some of whom go off to report to the Pharisees (11:45-46); 2) the gathering of the Sanhedrin (11:47-48); 3) the prediction uttered by Caiaphas (11:49-50); 4) the gathering of the children of God (11:51-53); and 5) Jesus' reaction to the Jews - withdrawal (11:54). The high point of the whole unit falls on the words of Caiaphas. He asserts that it is better for one man to die for the sake of the nation rather than for all to die. His words are highly ironic, for that is exactly the purpose of Jesus' death - to bring life to all.

Just as Caiaphas unknowingly predicted Jesus death in 11:45-54, so now Mary unknowingly prepares Jesus for his death and burial (11:55-12:11). In this unit, the female characters are depicted in positive terms and sharply contrasted with Judas. At a dinner party in Bethany, Martha is shown as serving Jesus, a characteristic role for a disciple. Even more so, Mary prepares him for death. What is stressed is the expense of the gift she makes. She gives her all for Jesus. Judas objects to this, but the narrator lets
us know that Judas is a thief, that he follows Jesus only for what he can get out of it for himself.

Finally, the Book of Signs draws to a close with Jesus entry into Jerusalem (12:12-19). The crowd who acclaims him is filled with a spirit of nationalism. They misunderstand Jesus' identity and mission. Even the disciples do not fully understand. It is the Pharisees, however, who stand out. They complain that "All the World" is coming to Jesus, yet they fail to see that this is his purpose as the savior of the world. What they say anticipates the growth of the Church throughout the Gentile world after Jesus' departure, but also, tragically, highlights their own love of darkness which doesn't allow them to see what all the world is seeing. It is in this context that Jesus announces that "his hour" has come (12:23), and the book of Signs ends with the narrator's explanation and Jesus' last public words about judgment (12:37-43 and 12:44-50).

The first section of the Book of Glory, which develops the theme of Jesus' return to his Father, is composed of a narrative segment, the story of the washing of the disciples' feet in chapter 13, and a long, unified speech, the Farewell Discourse of Jesus to his followers (chapters 14-17). The story of the foot-washing has a double focus. On the one hand, the story makes it clear, especially in the dialogue between Jesus and Peter, that the true disciple must accept the cleansing activity of Jesus in his or her own life. On the other hand, what Jesus does is a model for his disciples. The essence of Jesus' ministry and the essence of true discipleship is SERVICE - even in the smallest and most humbling details. The story ends with the prediction of Judas' betrayal of Jesus and his departure. The tragedy of the account is that it is one of Jesus' own disciples who will betray him; one who has witnessed Jesus' service and experienced his cleansing. Sadly, too, the rest of the disciples fail to recognize the betrayer in their midst. With Judas' departure Jesus now takes up his Farewell Discourse. The story material in chapter 13 and the Farewell Discourse are together structured in an elaborate concentric pattern which rehearses at the end of his life the major themes that have characterized Jesus' words and works throughout his ministry.

| A. | themes of glorification, service and love (13:1-38) |
| B. | Jesus' departure and encouragement for the disciples (14:1-31) |
| C. | the themes of abiding and joy (15:1-11) |
| D. | The Command to LOVE (15:12-17) |
| C. | the themes of hatred and exclusion (15:18-16:3) |
| B. | Jesus' departure and warnings to the disciples (16:4-33) |
| A. | themes of glorification and love (17:1-26). |

The heart of the whole unit is the Commandment to Love. Jesus tells his disciples to love one another as he has loved them. That is the true nature of discipleship and it is only by mutual love, only by personal ties and strong relationship among the disciples that hatred and exclusion can be overcome. It is by this love that the world will know that we belong to the light, that we belong to the Christ; and it is by this love that we will witness to the world and call others to faith.
The story of Jesus' passion is told in chapters 18 and 19. In John, Jesus has a two-part trial - before the religious authorities of the Jews and before a representative of the Roman government. In the actual trial of Jesus, the trial imagery which has been so pronounced in John's Gospel, is brought to its logical conclusion. As was the case in the synoptics, Jesus trial is presented side by side with Peter's denial. In John, the implication is that BOTH Jesus and Peter are on trial - and Peter represents the disciples. Also, according to the logic of the trial imagery as it has been used by John, the religious leaders and Pilate are also on trial and end up being condemned for unbelief.

The crucifixion in John, even more than in the synoptics, is regal. It is Jesus' HOUR, the moment of his glorification towards which the whole story has been moving. What appears to be defeat and condemnation is, in fact, victory - for Jesus and for his Father whose will Jesus is accomplishing. In a sense, then, the crucifixion is the last sign-act of the Gospel, the one that completes and fulfills all the rest. It is the proof of Jesus' identity as the one "lifted up," as the Paschal Lamb sacrificed for the forgiveness of sins. In this light, then, the apparent victory of the religious leaders and the Jews is their ultimate moment of condemnation because they have failed to believe, to receive the light and enter into a personal and committed relationship with the person of God through his son rather than a formalized and ritualistic commitment to the Law.

Chapter 20, now, presents a series of reactions to the resurrection: that of Peter and the Beloved Disciple; that of Mary Magdalene; that of the disciples as a group; and that of Thomas. By focusing on these various reactions, John develops two themes: seeing and believing (or, perhaps, in the case of Thomas, "Seeing IS believing.") In 20:1-2 Mary sees the empty tomb but does not yet believe. In 20:3-10 Peter and the Beloved Disciple see the empty tomb and, while nothing is said of Peter's response, the disciple loved by Jesus sees and believes. It is the relationship of love with Jesus which opens the eyes of faith for him. In 20:11-18 Mary gradually comes to resurrection faith. Her coming to full faith is carried by the title "Rabboni," which means "MY Teacher." Her full faith comes only in the personal relationship she has with Jesus and not through others. The
personal aspect of full faith is again carried in the paired stories of Jesus' appearances to his disciples, one when Thomas is absent and again later when he is present. While Thomas can be viewed negatively as needing personal and concrete reassurances to come to faith, on the positive side he represents the journey of all believers. While the world can see and be led to the first stages of faith by the witness and testimony of others, by seeing the love disciples have for one another, it is only through personally experiencing the cleansing of Christ and responding to him in a committed, personal relationship of love that we come to full faith.

John's Gospel story of Jesus comes to a close in an almost anti-climactic fashion in chapter 21. This chapter combines the pattern of resurrection appearances from the previous chapter with the pattern of Jesus' signs from the body of the Gospel. The key focus of the chapter is on Peter, whose reaction to the empty tomb and the appearances of Jesus in chapter 20 was largely ignored. Within the body of the Gospel, Peter's name was changed and he was given a significant role. He professed his undying loyalty to Jesus and ended up denying him three times. In this chapter, Jesus asks Peter three times to profess his love. He, in effect, undoes or removes the effects of Peter's denial. And that is the essence of resurrection faith. The personal relationship with Jesus that such faith represents overcomes all human weakness and sin. Again, the chapter stresses what the effect of this love is to be. Peter is to carry on a ministry of loving service for the followers of Jesus, to feed Jesus' sheep. In the end, Peter's death in the service of his Lord is foretold. That too is of the essence of discipleship, to be willing to follow Jesus and to serve the needs of others, even in the face of hostility and death. Service of others which puts them first and personal concerns last, that is the core meaning of the love Jesus had for us and the love he calls us to have for each other. That is the meaning of Jesus words, "No greater love does a man have than to lay down his life for his friends."
In This Unit:

Overview of Acts 123

Commentary on Acts 128

Objective: The key idea in Acts of the Apostles is that the early Church continues to do what Jesus did and that the role of doing what Jesus did continues in the Church today. Luke's major theme in Acts is that God's word continues to spread under the direction of the Holy Spirit by overcoming all obstacles. That word of God involves the love, hope, acceptance and forgiveness which is available to all through the ministry of the present-day Church.

Vocabulary List:

DELAYED PAROUSIA
CLASSICAL GREEK HISTORY
KERYGMA
PENTECOST
SUB-PLOT
JUDAIZERS
JERUSALEM COUNCIL
MARTYR
DEACON
GOD-FEARERS
CHRONOLOGICAL NARRATIVE
I. An Overview of Acts of the Apostles

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES is Luke's second written work. Like his Gospel, Acts is a work of written PREACHING.

PREACHING is a way of writing or speaking which is intended to get the readers or listeners to respond, to do something.

Luke and his community are SECOND GENERATION CHRISTIANS. That is, they are people who have accepted the Good News not because they heard and saw Jesus, but because they have believed the witness or testimony others have given about him.

Luke's Gospel, like all the Gospels, is PREACHING IN STORY FORM. The message that Luke's Gospel preached was:

REPENT (change your life) FOR THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS NEAR.

For Luke that message meant:

1. that God offers love, hope, acceptance and forgiveness to ALL people
2. that people can find that love, hope, acceptance and forgiveness which God offers within the community of believers
3. that those who were offered this message were, literally, ALL - non-Jews, sinners, social outcasts, etc.

As preaching, Luke's Gospel was intended to get people to respond. The response Luke wanted to get was that people would be loving, accepting and forgiving of ALL others.

Mark had been the earliest Gospel. Mark created something new in what he wrote. He took traditional stories about Jesus, as well as the things Jesus was believed to have said, and created an outline, a story-line in which he arranged the traditional stories and sayings. Matthew and Luke followed Mark's outline, but used other stories and sayings to preach their own particular Christian message.
The GOSPELS spoke about the meaning of Jesus and his life. They told the story of Jesus to preach a message and get a response. At least in Mark's time, some of the people who read or heard his Gospel might have remembered Jesus - or at least the apostles who had known him and preached about him. By the time Luke wrote his Gospel, there were few, if any, still alive who could actually remember first hand Jesus and his first followers. Even more, by Luke's day the Christian movement had spread beyond the limits of Israel and non-Jews were becoming Christians, people who not only had never been to Israel but who know nothing about the Jewish way of life which Jesus himself had lived.

The first generation of Christians had known Jesus and had heard what his apostles said about him after his death and resurrection. They believed that in Jesus' life and works the Kingdom of God had drawn near. They believed that Jesus would return to establish that Kingdom in power once and for all. They were confident in what they believed. For second generation Christians, such confidence was harder to muster. They had not known Jesus and had not heard the testimony of the original witnesses. For them, as for us now, there was a feeling that it would be easier to believe, to get involved and respond, if only we could see Jesus and talk to him. This was a problem that Luke had to face and he tackled this problem by writing a second work, a work that was intended to answer some of the hard questions about hanging on to faith and staying active in spreading God's word in the absence of Jesus.

In writing THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES, Luke wanted to address two questions:

| 1. | In the absence of the physical presence of Jesus, is the message of the Gospel still true, still valid? |
| 2. | In the absence of the physical presence of Jesus, to whom do we now respond? |

In writing his Gospel, Luke had stressed the work of the Holy Spirit:

| 1. | Jesus was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit |
| 2. | Jesus received the Holy Spirit at his baptism and this empowered him to do and say the things he did |
| 3. | Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit to his followers to empower them to carry on his mission. |

The theme of the WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT is what unites Luke's two works. At the beginning of Acts, the apostles receive the Holy Spirit which empowers them to spread Jesus' message, to carry on his mission. Because of the guidance, direction and presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church, in the community of believers, the Gospel message is still valid and continues to spread. It is to the Holy Spirit that we now make our response.
**ACTS OF THE APOSTLES** takes up the story of the Chrch, the community of faith, now that Jesus has returned to the Father. It tells the beginning of our story as we continue to respond to the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives and spread the message of hope, the message that the Kingdom of God is near and that all can find God's love, hope, acceptance and forgiveness in joining with us in the Church.

As a written work, ACTS has a **theme**. The theme of the book describes the basic idea with which it deals. The theme of Acts is:

| THE SPREAD OF THE WORD OF GOD (THE MESSAGE OF THE GOSPEL) |
| UNDER THE DIRECTION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. |

The theme of Acts is developed in the way Luke tells his story. Luke tells his story by adopting the form of a **CLASSICAL GREEK HISTORY**. These "Histories" were not histories as we know them, the type of writing we now find in history textbooks. That kind of history, the modern science of HISTORY WRITING, arranges facts and events and tries to figure out why things happened the way they did and what that means for us now. The Classical Greek Histories were not so much interested in facts, but in what interpretations the history writers gave to people and events. The Classical Greek Histories were more like stories intended to teach us something about ourselves.

The Classical Greek Histories have three regular features:

| 1. a preface with a dedication |
| 2. a chronological narrative |
| 3. speeches created by the history writer and put into the mouths of the leading characters to display and interpret the meaning of the events in the chronological narrative. |
In ACTS OF THE APOSTLES:

1. The **PREFACE** is found in 1:1-14. The work is dedicated to **THEOPHILUS**, as was the Gospel, and the preface suggests some of the major ideas which will develop as the story unfolds. These ideas include:
   A. the absence of Jesus from the community (1:2)
   B. the apostles have received instructions about what to do when Jesus has left them (1:2)
   C. what directed Jesus in giving instructions, and will direct the apostles in carrying out the instructions, is the Holy Spirit (1:2)
   D. the meaning of the Kingdom of God (1:3)
   E. the promise of the Father involves the giving of the Holy Spirit (1:4-5)
   F. it is not for us to know the time of the "End," that is, the **DELAYED PAROUSIA** is a fact in Luke (1:6-7)
   G. the Holy Spirit will empower the apostles to be witnesses (1:8)
   H. the message is to spread out from Jerusalem to the surrounding areas and ultimately to the ends of the earth (1:8)
   I. the story about to unfold will involve the original apostles and certain women (1:13-14).

2. The **CHRONOLOGICAL NARRATIVE** begins in 1:15 and will develop, by its plot, its story-line, the basic theme of **THE SPREAD OF GOD'S WORD UNDER THE DIRECTION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT**. *The CHRONOLOGICAL NARRATIVE is basically a story.* What makes for a good story is an interesting portrayal of conflict which the story resolves. *The portrayal of conflict and its resolution is the PLOT (story-line) of the story.* The Plot of Luke's Chronological Narrative in Acts is:

   **HOSTILITY TO THE SPREAD OF GOD'S WORD.**

(Note: PLOT deals with HOW the THEME is developed.)

*Luke's Chronological Narrative falls into two parts, both parts having the same basic PLOT - Hostility to the Spread of God's Word.*

| A. | 1:15-15:35 tells the story of hostility to the spread of God's word in the work of the apostles in and around Jerusalem - especially in the work and preaching of Peter. |
| B. | 15:36-28:31 tells the story of hostility to the spread of God's word in the work of Paul during his three missionary journeys throughout the larger Greco-Roman world, beyond the confines of Jerusalem. |
Note, too, that there is a major **SUB-PLOT** in the first section of the narrative. *(A SUB-PLOT in a story is an additional element of tension or conflict which must be resolved before the conflict in the main plotline can be resolved).* In the first section of Acts, the SUB-PLOT is

**DIVISION OR DISSENSION IN THE COMMUNITY OF FAITH**

Here, the division involves the question of whether non-Jewish converts to Christianity must obey the whole Law of Moses - including circumcision - in order to be full members of the community. Only when this division is successfully resolved can the main plot line continue with the story of Paul's mission to the Gentiles in the second part of the book.

3. Finally, throughout the book, Luke creates speeches for his main characters. These *speeches carry Luke's main ideas* and the basic message of his preaching. Since Acts is **PREACHING**, it is intended to get us, as readers, to respond, to do something. *The speeches in Acts are examples of what we as Christians should do.* On every occasion and under all circumstances, the leading characters (Peter, Stephen, Paul) speak out to spread God's word. If they need to explain something marvelous (like a miracle) or defend themselves against accusations, the leading characters use these occasions as opportunities to give speeches whose aim is to spread God's word. Luke's preaching in Acts is designed to get us to do the same thing.
II. Commentary on Acts of the Apostles

After the preface, which introduces the key ideas Luke will develop, the story begins with the election of Matthias to replace Judas (1:15-26). The purpose of this story is to demonstrate that if the Christian community is to be engaged in the spread of God's word, that task cannot be completed when something is missing. The story challenges modern believers to ask, "What is missing in my life that holds me back?" and "What is missing in our community which keeps us from living up to our Christian vocation?"

The key feature in this story is Peter's speech. This speech has a three-fold Pattern:

1. an address to the audience (which sometimes includes a call to attention and appeal for the audience to listen)
2. narration
3. conclusion - drawn from the argument of the speech.

The reason for the speech, within the story, is Peter's perception of a need to fill the vacancy among the disciples which was caused by the betrayal and suicide of Judas. The address and appeal for attention is a single word, "Brethren." Peter, here, is merely assuming his role of leadership which was given to him by Jesus in the Gospel. His address assumes that his audience is friendly. The narrative tells of Judas' death and includes proof that action should be taken to replace him. Peter's argument is based on Scripture and the conclusion is drawn from both what Peter has to say and the situation which the story is describing.

The speech functions, within Luke's whole story, as a spur to us to address what is lacking in our lives and in our community so that the work of the Spirit may proceed.

Acts 2:1-47 now tells the story of the first Pentecost. Jesus had promised to give the Holy Spirit to his TWELVE chosen witnesses. In 1:15-26, the community has replaced
what was missing so that the giving of the Spirit can now take place. The giving of the Spirit on this occasion gives the apostles, the witnesses, the power they need to carry out their commission. The significance, then, of the coming of the Spirit at PENTECOST is that this marks the beginning or birth of the Church. Now the work of the Church begins and this work is nothing other than a continuation of the mission and ministry of Jesus Christ.

Again, here, the key to the text is Peter's speech. The setting for Peter's speech is the descent of the Holy Spirit which is demonstrated by the fact that the apostles speak in many languages. The reason for Peter's speech is the amazement and confusion on the part of the crowd and Peter's wish that they should correctly understand what is happening. The address and appeal of the speech is again simple, "Men of Judea." What is most important is that this is the first example of Peter (or any other of the leading characters in Luke's story) taking the opportunity to use some event or set of circumstances as an occasion to spread the Gospel. The basic form of the speech is judicial - that is, it uses the language and type of argumentation common to law courts. 2:14-21 is a kind of legal defense that those speaking in tongues are not drunk, while 2:22-36 functions as an indictment - the bringing of formal charges - of the Jews for the death of Jesus. The purpose of the indictment is to highlight, by way of contrast, the innocence of those who are speaking in tongues and being judged as drunks. Again Peter bases his arguments on Scriptural quotes. The success of his speech is seen in the question from his audience, "What shall we do?" Peter answers this question with an exhortation, "Repent and be baptized." That is, Peter uses the occasion to spread the preaching message of the Gospel.

This chapter advances the theme and story-line of Acts in two ways:

| 1. | Jesus had commissioned his apostles to be witnesses to him and his message to the ends of the earth. At Pentecost, men from all over the world were in Jerusalem and witnessed the event. Many were converted. |
| 2. | Though the initial reaction of many is positive - amazement - some in the crowd judge the apostles harshly, considering them to be drunks. There is hostility to the spread of God's word. |

A basic point Luke makes in this story is that if we, as Christians, are open to the guidance of the Spirit and simply do what we feel directed and called to do, others - even foreigners (and foreigners can mean anyone "foreign" to the Christian message of hope, love, acceptance and forgiveness) - cannot help but see this and respond too. But here, too, Luke introduces the idea of hostility to the word. Our good example sometimes meets with hostility and ridicule because it can make people uncomfortable. Our good example highlights short-comings in others and people don't like to have their failures and faults pointed out.

One final point is worthy of note. In the end, Luke presents a picture of the early church living in peace and sharing all possessions in common. As a result of the influence of the Holy Spirit, the early Christians begin a life of care and concern for each other. That is what the presence and guidance of the Spirit in the Church today should be leading us to.
Luke's second picture of the Jerusalem Church (3:1-4:37) consists of four units:

1. the healing of a lame man  
2. Peter's speech  
3. the arrest and appearance of Peter and John before the council  
4. the prayer of the community in the face of opposition.

The healing of the lame man is a direct fulfillment of the prophet Joel's promise which was quoted in Peter's speech in the previous section (2:19). This story (3:1-10) is designed to show that the Church, as represented by Peter and John, continues to do what Jesus did. **In general, the miracles in Acts indicate:**

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<td><strong>1.</strong></td>
<td>that the power of Christ is still active in the Church (the miracles do not occur because of the personal power of the apostles but because the Spirit of Christ works in them)</td>
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<td><strong>2.</strong></td>
<td>that God's Kingdom is near and people can respond to it.</td>
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This healing miracle is interpreted by Peter's speeches before the people (3:11-26) and the council (4:8-12, 19-20) and by the prayer of the community (4:24-30).

In 3:11-26, the cure of the lame man has attracted a lot of attention and Peter uses the occasion, again, to preach the Gospel. He provides a model of how we should act. This speech, too, is judicial and follows basically the same pattern that was used in chapter 2. First Peter explains what has happened by giving God credit for the cure and then he again lays the charge of killing Jesus at the feet of the Jews. Peter's argument associates what is accomplished in and through Jesus with the great saving acts of God in the past. He demonstrates that rejecting Jesus is the same as rejecting all of the traditions of the Jews. In the end, his speech is a call for his listeners not to reject what God is offering, but to repent and believe the Good News.

However, as was the case in the controversy stories in the Gospel, hostility gets stronger and Peter and John are arrested. Peter's speech in 4:8-12 is definitely judicial, a defense against the implied charge that it is through some evil force that he has cured the lame man. (Note how this is a mirror image of charges leveled against Jesus in the Gospel story). Peter must respond to the question, "By what power or by what name did you do
this?" (4:7). Luke tells us that he answers "full of the Holy Spirit." This is a direct fulfillment of the promise given to the apostles that God will provide what must be said to defend the Christian message - that is, what Peter says is evidence of the presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit within the community. The audience responds to Peter's speech by noting his boldness and commenting on his lack of education. In the end, the council is afraid to take any action against Peter because of the popular support he has. The narrative of the section closes with the prayer of the community which celebrates the "victory" of Peter over the enemies of Jesus and asks for a continuation of the gifts of miracle-working and inspired speech for the Church.

4:32-37, then, is a summary statement which repeats the ideas presented in 2:42-47. Luke is presenting an ideal and idealized picture of the Christian community, a model of the early church for his community (and ours) to imitate.

In this whole section Luke holds up Peter as an example of boldness. In witnessing to the word of God, in spreading the message of hope, acceptance, love and forgiveness, it is the Holy Spirit which is at work. No one need fear to SPEAK OUT. Spreading the word does not take special qualifications or education, but openness to the Spirit. In this, the Pope, the Bishop, and the teenager have the same call and the same responsibility. But the reverse is also true. If we all have the responsibility to speak out and witness to the presence and power of the Spirit in our lives, we also have the responsibility to LISTEN to what ALL others have to say, no matter what we think of their qualifications and backgrounds.

The next chapter, chapter 5, continues the story-line (plot) of hostility to the spread of the word. The new element Luke adds in this section is the indication that hostility to the spread of the word can come from within the community itself. The first incident in the section, 5:1-11, concerns a man and his wife who sold a piece of property in order to contribute the money to the apostles for the support of the community. What they do, however, is hold back some of the selling price and lie by saying that they have given everything. As Luke tells the story, what he considers to be wrong is not that they kept some of the money, but that they lied by saying that they were contributing everything they had gained from the sale. Their basic fault is hypocrisy. Whatever their reasons for holding back some of the money - and they could have had good reasons - they wanted to look good in others' eyes. For this they died. This is a harsh story, but the point Luke is trying to make is that those who do anything within the community of faith to look good, those who act for the wrong reasons are DEAD to the community; they are not a living part of it.

5:12-16 is a kind of summary statement that notes the continued spread of the message through the good works of Peter and the apostles. The hostility to the word, however, grows right along with the spread of the Christian message. 5:17-42 tell again of the arrest and imprisonment of the apostles by the religious authorities of Judaism.
Of particular interest here is how chapter 5 parallels chapter 4. In both chapters an arrest is the key feature. In both instances the arrest was the result of miracles followed by preaching. In both cases a night separates the arrest from the judicial proceedings before the council. During the imprisonment of Peter and John the community continued to grow. During the night when all the apostles were imprisoned a miraculous prison break was engineered by an angel. The judicial proceedings on both occasions had three parts. A hearing was followed by a closed conference which resulted in the pronouncement of a verdict. In both chapters the verdict included a prohibition on preaching and the release of the accused. The first release was followed by the community's prayer for boldness in preaching and the performance of deeds of power. The second was followed immediately by public preaching. In both cases the council's prohibition on preaching was deliberately disobeyed.

In chapter 5, in between the apostles’ trial and release Luke presents the advice of Gamaliel, one of the leading Pharisees. He basically counseled a wait and see attitude. This was followed to an extent, since the apostles were released, but the growing hostility is indicated in the fact that they were flogged before they were freed.

While chapter 4 stressed that anyone, regardless of qualifications, could be a witness to the power of God and the spread of his word, chapter 5 stresses that if the witnesses to the word are bold no power on earth can shut the Gospel message up. Here, Luke is calling for us to be courageous and bold in our witness to the presence and power of Christ and his Spirit in the Church.

A new section of the story begins in 6:1 which will end with the martyrdom of Stephen. (Note, MARTYR has the root meaning of "Witness.") The section opens, in 6:1-7, with a problem in the community which needs to be addressed. The problem is that, as the community has grown, Greek speaking Jews have become a part of the community - indicating the spread of God's word - but, because of the language difference, some members of the community are being neglected. What happens here is the beginnings of organization within the community and a definition of specific tasks. Men are appointed to the office of DEACON, an office of service for others within the community, an office of charity. The Church is becoming "institutionalized." If any movement is going to last and be true to its roots, it will have to get organized. What Luke is indicating is that such organization is the result of the Holy Spirit's direction of the Church. Just as the
whole book began with the apostles solving a problem, filling up something that was missing so that the Spirit could come and the work of the Church could begin, so this section begins with the solving of a problem which is necessary to allow the mission of the Church to continue. Here, the solution involves getting the community organized.

In the list of the seven men named to meet the problem presented in 6:1-7, Stephen and Philip head the roster. These two will be the main characters in the next two sections. That is, leading roles are beginning to be played by people who are not members of the original twelve witnesses. In Stephen's martyrdom the opposition in Jerusalem reaches its high point. The story has moved from warning (4:21) to flogging (5:40) to death (7:58). Hostility to the spread of the word is progressing. More than this, however, is the fact that initially the people are pictured in a favorable light. They are eager to hear the apostles and accept what they have to say; but now this too disappears. By 6:12 the people have become a mob who are joined with the religious leaders of Jerusalem in the martyrdom of Stephen. Because of this, the next scenes in Acts will begin to shift the readers' attention away from Jerusalem to Samaria (8:5), then to Gaza and Paul's conversion, with the announcement of the mission to the Gentiles (9:15). In all of this, then, Luke wants us to see that the hostility to the word has a positive function. It is the spur which leads to the spread of the word beyond the confines of Judaism.

In 6:8, Stephen is presented as a dynamic preacher and worker of miracles - just like the apostles. But also like the apostles, this leads to Stephen's arrest and trial. The accusations which are brought against Stephen are similar to those which will later be levelled against Paul and, like Paul's later defense speeches, the long speech of Stephen is not principally concerned with refuting the charges, but with telling the story of God's blessings for his people. The speech also prepares for the shift in the movement of the story away from Jerusalem and out into the larger world.
The setting for Stephen's speech is his trial for blasphemy, specifically that he has said that Jesus will destroy the temple and change the customs of Moses. (Throughout this section, note the parallels between Stephen and the story of Jesus in the Gospel). In 6:13-14 hostile witnesses are furnished. Stephen's speech, then, is a specific response to the question of the high priest, "Is this so?" (7:1). Throughout the whole speech Stephen speaks the words which are given to him, again fulfilling the promise Jesus made to his followers. This shows

1. that the Spirit is active in the community in the person of Stephen
2. that Stephen is truly like the apostles and works under the same assurances of God's presence that they had received.

Luke is stressing that as the church moves farther and farther away from the time of Christ and his apostles, the Spirit is still at work and that the commission given to the apostles to be witnesses to God's word has become the vocation of all Christians.

A key element in this speech is Stephen's hostility to the council. This hostility is revealed only gradually. He begins by addressing the council as "brothers" in just the same way that Peter had addressed the apostles and other friendly audiences. Most of the speech is taken up with narration (7:2-48) which seems to be a re-telling of God's saving actions in history, but which gradually introduces the element of indictment (see verses 25 and 39). This leads to a statement which brings charges against the Jews in general. These charges are supported by historical evidence (verses 52-53). Stephen's speech, however, is incomplete. It never returns to the specific charges, nor does he call for his audience to repent and believe the message he preaches. Instead, he is vindicated (proven right) by the vision of verses 54-56.

The point Luke wants to make in the story of Stephen, especially in the way he parallels Stephen's death with that of Jesus, is that the suffering of Christians has a value. It contributes to salvation. It is like the suffering of Jesus. Our sufferings now, whether they come from illness or injury, from being misunderstood or persecuted, have a value and serve the same purpose as Jesus' passion. They bring - or can bring - salvation to ourselves and others. Suffering can unite people and the suffering itself can be a means by which God's word is spread.

The end result is that Stephen's martyrdom led to a general persecution in which a man named Saul was most active. Also, everyone except the apostles were scattered from Jerusalem throughout the surrounding area of Judea and Samaria where the next actions of the story will take place.

8:4-9:43 now deals with the witness to the spread of God's word beyond Jerusalem. The refugee disciples begin to have success in preaching the word. What was thought to be an evil, the death of Stephen, becomes something good in the growth of the community. The first two incidents in this section involve Philip. The stories about Philip deal with breaking down barriers which keep people apart. Again, Luke stresses that ALL PEOPLE have a place in God's plan and the community which is filled and directed by his Spirit. 8:4-25 tells of Philip's success in Samaritan territory. The Samaritans, though

New Testament Notes
of Jewish descent, were traditional enemies of the Jerusalem based Jews. They were excluded from Jewish worship. Luke is saying that the barriers to unity based on prejudice, different backgrounds, or different life-styles are not to be a part of the community of faith. But this story also has a down-side. A certain Simon also was baptized, but he didn't join the ranks of the Christians because he believed, but because he wanted to profit from the marvelous deeds which happened among the believers. This story, then, is similar to the hypocrisy of the man and his wife at the beginning of chapter 5. We can't join the Christian movement for the wrong reasons - for social status, power, or even material gain.

An important aspect of this story is contained in the presence of Peter and John who confirm the baptism of the Samaritans while condemning Simon the magician. What Peter and John do confirms the rightness of Philip's decision to baptize Samaritans. That is, it gives the apostolic stamp of approval to the place ALL PEOPLE have within the community.

The next incident about Philip, 8:26-40, concerns his encounter with an Ethiopian eunuch. First, the man was a non-Jew. Second as a EUNUCH, a man who had had his testicles removed, he was specifically barred from entry into the religion of the Jews (see Deuteronomy 23:1). Third, as an Ethiopian, he was black. In telling this story, Luke indicated not only the spread of the Gospel beyond Judaism, but also that NO ONE who believes in Jesus Christ is excluded from the Church.

9:1-31 tells the story of the conversion of Saint Paul. Here another barrier is shown to break down. The two incidents about Philip show barriers to the spread of God's word breaking down when "outsiders and outcasts" are accepted into the community. The story of Saul's (Paul's) conversion shows that even the strongest hostility can be overcome when someone encounters the power of Christ. The most significant feature of this story is that it is modelled on an Old Testament CALL NARRATIVE. Such stories, told about Moses and some of the prophets, indicate that the person called has an important role to play in fulfilling God's plan. So we know, before Paul actually does anything, that he will have a significant role to play in the story of the spreading of God's word.
Luke uses the story of Paul's conversion to demonstrate one of his major ideas - **How We Treat Others is How We Treat Jesus Christ.** In the call of Saul, the Lord asks, "Why do you persecute me?" In persecuting the Church, Saul was persecuting Jesus Christ. This implies that we find Christ among the community of believers. We are Jesus Christ for each other. **The final aspect of the story that Luke wants us to consider is the reaction to Paul's conversion.** On the one hand, the Jews turn against him. He becomes an object of hostility. This indicates for the reader that Paul's conversion was real - not like that of Simon the magician who hoped to gain something for himself by converting. However, **the Christians still feared him.** They found it hard to accept that someone who had been so hostile to them could change so completely.

**A major idea in Luke's writing is that ALL PEOPLE can be welcomed into the love, acceptance, and forgiveness of the community of faith. The challenge for us now is to be loving, accepting and forgiving of those who have hurt us.** Just as this was hard for the early Christians, so it is hard for us. It isn't easy to trust those who have hurt us, to believe that they have changed.

The summary statement of 9:31 notes that the mission of the Church continued only after Paul found acceptance. Luke is telling us that **we can live our Christian life and accomplish what Christ asks of us only if we really forgive and accept others.**

Luke's basic point in the next two incidents, Peter's cure of a paralyzed man (verses 32-35) and his raising of Tabitha (verses 36-43) is that the apostles, represented by Peter, continued to do what Jesus had done. These two acts were accomplished by an apostle away from Jerusalem, again showing the rightness of the spread of God's word. But also, these incidents, coming rapidly on the heels of the preaching activity of Stephen and Philip, and immediately after the story of Saul's conversion, anticipate that just such actions can be expected to continue in the Church as it moves in time farther and farther away from the time of Jesus and the original apostles.

**In chapter 10 of Acts, we reach a key turning point in the story. From here to the end of the first section of the book (15:35) the story-line is governed by the sub-plot of dissension or division in the community of faith. The division centers on the question of whether or not Gentile converts to Christianity must embrace the Law of Moses.** It is only when this question is decided in the **COUNCIL OF JERUSALEM** (chapter 15) that the story of the spread of God's word to the ends of the earth can continue with the story of the missionary journeys of Paul in the second half of Acts.

**10:1-11:18 has been called the "Pentecost of the Gentiles."** This is the longest unified narrative in Acts and begins with the vision of Cornelius and ends with Peter's report to the community in Jerusalem. With the baptism of Cornelius and his whole household, Peter's apostolic ministry comes to an end. It was important for Luke that Peter, the spokesman of the apostles, was the instrument through whom God began the mission to the Gentiles.

The crucial aspect of the story is the vision of Peter which is spoken of three times. This three-fold repetition stressed that the acceptance of the Gentiles (represented in the "unclean food") of the vision was the will and intention of God (as demonstrated by the vision - a divinely inspired dream). The vision and Peter's stay with Gentiles show that,
in God's plan, all people who accept the message of hope, love, acceptance, and forgiveness have a place within the community of faith. Within this community there is to be no segregation, no divisions between groups of believers for any reason.

Peter's speech in this section (10:34-43) is the first pure example of kerygmatic preaching in Acts. **By KERYGMA is meant a basic setting out of what is believed about Jesus Christ.** The occasion of this speech is Cornelius' invitation to Peter to tell everything that the Lord had commanded him to preach (v 33). In his introduction (verses 34-35) Peter graciously acknowledges the spreading of the Gospel to the Gentiles. This is a situation into which the apostles have been pushed by Jewish hostility, but which has been shown to be the right way of going by means of signs and visions. The narration portion of the speech (verses 36-42) reviews the prophecy of John the Baptist, the anointing of Jesus, the crucifixion, the resurrection, and the commandment to preach the Gospel and to testify that Jesus has been made the judge of the living and the dead. The demonstration of the truth of the message is by direct evidence, including the miracles of Jesus and the witness of the apostles. This speech focuses on belief. The decision to baptize Gentiles is a reaction to the pouring forth of the Holy Spirit after the speech rather than any appeal made by Peter.

11:4-18 offer a second speech by Peter. This one is Peter's defense of his actions before the "Circumcision Party," or the JUDAIZERS. They have accused him of violating the Law in associating with Gentiles. He admits the fact and the breaking of the Law, but assigns responsibility to God. His listeners, though hostile to his actions, are Christian and are willing to consider Peter's basic argument - that what God wants takes precedence over any stipulation of the Law. The basic format of this speech is a "personal narration" of what has happened to Peter. The tone is personal and the speech is persuasive because of Peter's personal authority. In the end, Luke presents this speech as being entirely successful.

In 11:19-12:25, after the decisive step taken by Peter in Caesarea, Luke presents in summary fashion an historically monumental event, the spread of the Gospel into the third largest city of the Roman empire, Antioch in Syria. The pattern of the story here is becoming familiar. Certain disciples, having fled from the persecution which followed the martyrdom of Stephen, begin to announce the good news to Gentiles in Antioch. Their success is so great that the Church authorities send Barnabas from Jerusalem to confirm the work that had been done among the Gentiles. Barnabas will call for Paul to come and aid in this work, and from this point on Luke's focus will shift to the work done by Paul. An important point which Luke stresses in 11:19-29 is that these new converts behave exactly in the same fashion as the original converts after Pentecost. They offer support and care for all the members of the Christian community of faith by pledging a collection for the Church in Jerusalem when it experienced a famine.

Chapter 12 tells of a third miraculous prison break for Peter. The pattern of the three was a favorite of ancient storytellers. By using three prison stories for Peter, Luke is showing Peter's work coming to completion. As we move from one story to the next, we can note the increase of hostility. Throughout, despite his hostility, the word of God continues to spread. In the first two prison stories, the arrest and trial become occasions for Peter to preach, to continue to spread the word of God. This does not happen here. Rather, the
chapter ends with the notice that Paul and Barnabas arrive from Antioch. What Luke does with this story, then, is to stress that God is still actively involved in the work of the Church - nothing can lock up the word of God. But, since Peter makes no speech in this story, and since Paul arrives, we are being alerted that Peter's work is almost finished, that the Church is growing beyond the control the original witnesses to the message of the Gospel.

13:1-14:28 begin to take up the career of Paul. He now moves center-stage. The story told here sets the pattern for all of Paul's later missionary work. **Wherever possible Paul first entered the synagogue of the city he visited. He spoke first to his fellow Jews and only when rejected by them did he turn to the Gentiles.** The heart of the section is Paul's speech in Antioch of Pisidia (13:16-41). This speech functions as Paul's inaugural sermon, like Peter's speech on Pentecost (chapter 2). There are parallels between the two speeches. The statements Peter and Paul each make about Christ are essentially the same. In both speeches the promise of the Messiah is given to Israel. In both, the Davidic promises play a central role. Both refer to witnesses to the resurrection and both speak of John's baptism of repentance. With these parallels Luke indicated to his readers the continuity of the content of the Christian preaching. Even though Paul was not and could not be an apostle like Peter, his message is the same.

With regards to Paul's speech, it can be noted that the occasion is the invitation the rulers of the synagogue extend to Paul to speak. Paul's remarks aim at belief, not at action. The problem addressed in the speech is chiefly Jewish hostility to Jesus, but since the Pisidian Jews bear no responsibility for that hostility, Paul avoids any accusation against them. He seeks to explain why such hostility existed in Jerusalem. The narration portion of the speech (verses 17-25) is a survey of events from the Egyptian captivity to John the Baptist. These would be familiar to the audience and they help to establish Paul's basis of communication with them. They share the same roots. Then comes Paul's basic point: "**To us has been sent the message of salvation.**" (verse 26). This is followed by Paul's proof of the statement. Verses 27-37 explain the circumstances of Jesus' death, which is attributed to the ignorance, not the wickedness, of the Jews, and claims that there are witnesses to Jesus' resurrection. Verses 38-39 summarize the message and warn against disregarding the prophecy. Paul is successful in interesting the congregation and is asked
to speak again on the next Sabbath. This time a large crowd of Jews and Gentiles collects, some of the Jews revealing hostility. Paul spurns the hostility of the Jews and, since the Gospel must be proclaimed, he turns to the Gentiles (verses 46-47).

In chapter 14, Luke merely reinforces the pattern of Paul's work which he set up in chapter 13. In the on-going story, Luke is here stressing that God's word continues to spread, but also that it does so in the face of continued hostility. Beyond this, Luke here begins to sketch out parallels which exist between Peter and Paul. These parallels demonstrate the legitimacy of the work of the Church as it passes form the control of the original apostles. That is, Luke's theology is a theology of the work of the Holy Spirit within the community of faith. The presence of this Spirit is on-going - guiding ALL successive leaders of the community of faith throughout all ages. As the story proceeds to its end, parallels between Peter and Paul will reinforce this conviction. Both Peter and Paul preach inaugural sermons whose content is essentially the same. Both heal the lame. Peter's shadow and Paul's apron have miraculous powers. Both are defended by Pharisees. Both confront magicians and are instruments in the transmission of the Spirit. Both raise a dead person and are rescued miraculously from prison. These parallels demonstrate that even though Paul was not an apostle like Peter, still he is an authentic preacher and servant who functions as a connecting link assuring the continuity of witnessing from the time of the apostles to Luke's own time, and through that time to our own.

The sub-plot of the first section of Acts is brought to a successful resolution in the story of the COUNCIL OF JERUSALEM in chapter 15.

The question of whether Gentiles had to embrace the Law of Moses, the position held by the "Circumcision Party" or the JUDAIZERS, a question which had seemingly been resolved in the story of the baptism of Cornelius and Peter's defense of this action, is now finally laid to rest. What is significant in this chapter is the way in which Luke presents the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the Church. The question is resolved, not by the words or wisdom of any one man - no matter how inspired - but by a unanimous decision of the leaders of the Christian community. That is, Luke, in story form, is presenting the theological conviction that the Holy Spirit is at work in the WHOLE Church, that individual beliefs and practices may arise and may be good, but that the test of their merit is in the decisions which the Holy Spirit guides the whole Church to make.

The whole chapter revolves about two speeches, that of Peter in presenting an opinion and that of James who speaks for the assembly and announces a compromise which
resolves the question of the Law once and for all and makes the spread of the Gospel throughout the Gentile world possible.

Peter's speech (15:7-11) takes up his remarks from chapter 11. He appears to be trying to get others to identify with his extension of the Gospel to the Gentiles, the validity of which he claims that they all know (verse 7). Peter puts forth only one argument: that to demand strict obedience to the Law would put God on trial by placing a yoke upon the neck of the disciples which not even the Jews have been able to bear. Two points are implied in this argument:

| 1. that the Jews themselves have had difficulty living up to the law and that it is thus unrealistic to expect others to accept it |
| 2. that to demand obedience to the Law by those not born into the Jewish tradition will make it harder for some to accept the Gospel, and that would try God who has indicated that it is his will for all to come into the love, acceptance and forgiveness offered by the community of faith. |

Paul and Barnabas side with Peter, reporting signs and wonders done among the Gentiles. It is God's will, therefore, that the Gospel be extended. In 15:12-23, James, then, uses the evidence of Peter and Old Testament prophecy to establish the point that the Gospel should be extended and proposes a compromise under which only four requirements of the Law, not including circumcision, should be retained.
The **SECOND HALF OF ACTS** opens with the spreading of the Gentile Mission to Europe and Western Asia Minor. Throughout the first part of this section, 15:36-19:20, Paul is portrayed as a loyal Jew in every way. Guided by the Spirit, he enters Europe and preaches in Philippi, Thessalonica, Beorea, Athens and Corinth. After that, he moved his center of missionary activity to Ephesus.

In this section, the first of the "We" passages occurs - during the sea voyage from Troas to Philippi. While some have seen in these passages evidence that Luke was a companion of Paul on his missionary journeys, the more likely explanation is that, in the story-telling conventions of the ancient world, it was customary to tell the story of sea voyages in the first person, plural ("We"). Luke was simply following the normal patterns of story telling, but in so doing, he adds authority to the story he tells by creating the impression that he was intimately associated with his hero in this section of his work.

This section of Acts also presents Paul's usual pattern of activity in the course of his missionary work. Whenever Paul visited a city, he would preach the Good News first to the Jews and the **GOD-FEARERS** (Gentiles who were well disposed to the Jewish faith and attended synagogue services with them, but did not convert because they did not want to be circumcised) in the local synagogue. For Luke this is an important item. Salvation is offered first of all to the Jews. That was God's plan. The Jews are the heirs of God's promises. However, when they reject the promises, the message of hope is offered to all who can accept it. In Luke's scheme it is important to note that Paul's mission was successful. Not all Jews rejected his preaching. To the number of Jewish believers the Gentile converts were added. In this way Luke portrayed the separation of the true Israel from the synagogue.

Further, the opposition which Paul experiences when he preaches is nothing other than another example of the same opposition that was faced by Jesus, the apostles, and Stephen. That is, Paul continues to do what Jesus did, just as Peter and Stephen had done earlier in the book; and as was the case there, the opposition and hostility to Paul's preaching results in the further extension of Paul's missionary activity, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, throughout Greece and western Asia Minor.

The high point of this entire section is Paul's Areopagus speech to the Gentiles in Athens. In this speech, Luke presents Paul as a kind of Christian Socrates. In the place of the usual Old Testament quotations and arguments which characterize Paul's preaching to synagogue audiences, Paul here refers to a Greek poet. In the process of making contact on the basis of our common humanity, Paul simultaneously reinterpreted Greek thought forms, even as he had reinterpreted the Hebrew Scriptures.

The occasion for Paul's speech in Athens is the fact that he is offended by the many idols he sees in the city. His anger sets the tone of the speech as one of judgment, though his primary purpose is still to convince his audience to embrace Christianity. What Paul has to say arouses hostility - in just the same way that it does when he addresses the Jews - and his listeners take him to the Areopagus with the demand that he justify his teachings. It is important to note that "Areopagus" is the name of the court which had jurisdiction over religious offenses. In this, then, Luke intends to us to see this occasion as a kind of legal hearing which might lead to the bringing of formal charges.
The body of the speech Paul delivers falls into two parts. Verses 22b-28 is a denial of the charge that he is teaching a foreign religion; verses 29-31 is an indictment of the religious errors of the people of Athens and the section ends by preaching the Gospel. In his defense, Paul uses the altar of the unknown god as a sign that the god he preaches is not foreign. He then describes this god in terms that the people of Athens would understand - that is, in the language of the Greek philosophers. At the very end, Paul introduces the only specifically Christian doctrine, the resurrection of Christ. For this he supplies no evidence, and the remark leads some to ridicule him. The speech ends suddenly and this seems to fit Luke's purpose. He holds the Greek philosophers in contempt and ends the scene with a picture of Paul, speaking the word of truth in the midst of mocking and ignorant philosophers. Hostility to the word is every bit as strong among the Gentiles as it had been among the Jews. In the end, Paul was forced to abandon his efforts in that city.

The next section, 19:21-21:14, develops another aspect of Luke's presentation of Paul's career. The section looks back and summarizes Paul's missionary success, and looks forward to the future. In this section, Paul does not preach to either Jew or Gentile. Rather he gave encouragement to Christian communities and to their leaders, an activity which Luke has referred to briefly earlier in his story. This section, like Acts 15, functions as a transition between two phases in Paul's ministry, while simultaneously retaining its own particular emphasis. Here Paul is portrayed as caring for those communities already established, but the section also looks forward to later developments in the story when Luke records Paul's intentions, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to visit Jerusalem and to visit Rome.

His speech to the elders in Miletus is the high point of the entire section and the only extended speech in Acts which is addressed entirely to Christians. The first part of his Miletus speech (20:18-35) summarizes his past missionary activity. This look backwards is followed by Paul's vision of what awaits him, namely, imprisonment and afflictions in Jerusalem. He warns the elders to whom he is speaking to be watchful with respect to their own selves as well as the flock entrusted to them by the Holy Spirit. Finally, he commends the elders to the grace of God and once more sets forth his own missionary pattern of working without pay. He ends by calling for the community to fulfill its social obligations. This speech, then, as all the speeches in Acts, functions as an example of how we, as the on-going Church, are to act, how we are to respond to the message Luke is preaching.

The last section of Acts, 21:15-28:28, is concerned with Paul's witness in Jerusalem, Caesarea, and Rome. The section opens when Paul is arrested in Jerusalem and makes a speech. Luke uses this speech to make six important points:

1. Paul was a strict Jew who would never have voluntarily become a Christian, much less a missionary to the Gentiles, had not Jesus himself set him on his course.
2. Jesus never told Paul to turn against the Law
3. Therefore, the accusations against Paul, that he was subverting the Jewish Law, are totally unfounded.
4. Paul's mission to the Gentiles is simply the result of the Jews' rejection of their heritage as it found fulfillment in Jesus.

5. As a prisoner Paul remains what he has always been, one who speaks to BOTH Jews and Gentiles, and the opposition he now faces will not be the end of his activity, but the occasion for him to carry his message to Rome.

6. In defending himself, Paul not only defends himself, but the whole Christian movement against its detractors. In speaking in his own defense, Paul's use of the Old Testament gives way to his telling of his own personal story which demonstrates the fulfillment of Judaism through Christ's resurrection. In the end, his defense of himself becomes, again, an invitation to his listeners to believe.

*The book of Acts closes in an open-ended fashion.* Paul appealed to Rome and was taken there, by means of one last sea voyage and shipwreck, where, like Peter earlier, he merely fades from the scene. In typical fashion, Paul announces the Good News in Rome and some Jews and Gentiles respond. But, again, there is opposition. With that, the story simply ends - or at least Luke's telling of it ends. What the book claims is that the story continues with us. As the community of faith, as the heirs of the Apostles and Paul, we are writing the next chapters. The story continues, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, in the Christian community today.
Unit Seven: The Letters of Paul

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Paul’s Letters 148
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  I Corinthians 154
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Objective: Paul is the Father of World-Wide Christianity and his letters are the oldest writings in the New Testament. Our aim in studying the writings of Paul is two-fold. First, his writings contain the basic teachings or "root" statements of what the Christian life is all about. Second, Paul's letters set the pattern for the way Christian theology would develop throughout the ages. In his letters Paul responded to questions and problems. He defined what could not be said. But that leaves wide open the spectrum of things that can be said about what we believe.

Vocabulary List:
  LETTER FORM
  GNOSTICISM
  SALVATION THROUGH FAITH
  FREEDOM FROM THE LAW
I. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND.

Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea, was recalled to Rome in about 36 AD. The removal of Pilate and the appointing of a new governor, Marcellus, is the likely occasion for the martyrdom of Stephen and the persecution of the Jerusalem Church.

**Paul's Conversion Is Most Likely Connected to These Events.**

During the reign of Claudius, in about 46 AD, there was a famine in Palestine. This forms the background for the collection for the Jerusalem Church mentioned in Paul's Letters.

In the year 49 AD, Claudius issued a decree expelling Jews from Rome. This decree was due to the constant disturbances between Jews and Jewish Christians in Rome.

Paul was arrested at the end of his Third Missionary Journey in about 58 AD. When Porcius Festus became the new governor of Judea in about the year 60 AD, Paul appealed to Caesar for trial in Rome. In Rome Paul met his death.
II. Paul's Personal History

Paul was born in the town of Tarsus, probably in the first decade of the Christian Era. He came from Jewish parents who traced their descent to the tribe of Benjamin. Paul himself claims to have been trained as a Pharissee.

Freedom, immunity and citizenship were given to the town of Tarsus by Mark Antony and this was later confirmed by the emperor Augustus. Because of this, Paul had the status of a Roman citizen and was able to appeal his case to Rome when he was arrested at the end of his missionary career.

**Paul's Missionary activity covered about 12 years, from about 46 to 58 AD.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1.</th>
<th><strong>His first Mission ran from about 46 to 49 AD.</strong> It was based in Antioch and set the pattern for Paul's work.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>A.</strong> Paul would first preach to the Jews in the synagogue of whatever city he visited**</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>B.</strong> when the Jews rejected his preaching he would turn to the Gentiles (beginning with the &quot;God-Fearers&quot; - Gentiles who studied and prayed with the Jews, but who did not convert because they were unwilling to accept the requirements of the Jewish Law, especially the demand for circumcision).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>At the end of this time, <strong>Judaizers</strong> came from Antioch - probably converts to Christianity from the Pharisee party who wanted to impose the requirements of the Law of Moses on all Christians - and began to teach that circumcision and obedience to the Jewish Law was necessary for salvation. This led to the <strong>Council of Jerusalem in about the year 49 AD</strong> in which it was finally decided that Paul's position was correct, that faith in Christ was all that was necessary to be admitted into the Church. The decision of the Council of Jerusalem opened the way for Paul's later missionary activity.</td>
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</table>

**At this point, Paul becomes the Father of Christianity as a world-wide religion.**

Before Paul's work the Christian movement was

| A. | a small sub-group within the Jewish faith |
| B. | some non-Jews were included, but Christianity was still a part of Judaism |

Paul's work paved the way for the Christian faith to survive when Christians and Jews were finally separated from each other after the destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman in 70 AD.
2. **Paul's second missionary journey ran from about 49 to 52 AD.** Paul set out from Antioch and traveled through Syria and Cilicia, ending his journey with a stay of about eighteen months in Corinth. As Paul continued his missionary work, troubles arose in the communities he had already established.

   A. *sometimes what he taught was misunderstood or misinterpreted (e.g., his teaching on "freedom from the law")*
   
   B. *sometimes other missionary preachers stirred up conflicts (e.g., the Judaizers)*

   To meet these problems, Paul wrote letters to the communities he had established, communities to which he was related.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>His <strong>FIRST LETTER</strong> was probably to the <strong>THESSALONIANS</strong> and was written during Paul's stay in Corinth.</th>
</tr>
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</table>

3. **Paul's third missionary journey ran from about 54 to 57 AD.** Setting out from Antioch, Paul traveled through northern Galatia to Ephesus. After his arrival in Ephesus Paul wrote his letters to the **GALATIANS** and **PHILIPPIANS**. Hearing reports of fighting in the Corinthian community and to answer questions posed by its members, he also wrote **FIRST CORINTHIANS**. That letter was not well received by the community and so Paul sent Titus to visit the Corinthian Church. While he was gone, a revolt broke out in Ephesus. This revolt was led by silversmiths of the city who made their living by making shrines to Artemis, which Paul vehemently opposed, and Paul was forced to flee. He settled in Macedonia and from there he wrote **SECOND CORINTHIANS**.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Before ending his third missionary journey, Paul also wrote the <strong>LETTER TO THE ROMANS</strong>. This letter is different from his other letters. It does not attempt to solve problems in that community or answer their questions to him. It is, rather, a statement of Paul's major beliefs and teachings. In the letter Paul was presenting, in advance, his stand-point to prepare the Roman Church for the visit he hoped to make to them.</th>
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<tr>
<th>At the end of Paul's third missionary journey he returned to Jerusalem - perhaps with a collection for the poor. At this time he was accused of violating the temple - bringing non-Jews into the temple precincts - and violating the Jewish Law. Paul was kept under house arrest for about two years by the Roman governor, Felix (who may have been hoping to receive some bribe from him). When Festus, the new governor arrived, Paul appealed to Rome. He was sent to Rome and again kept under house arrest. At this time he wrote his letter to <strong>PHILEMON</strong>, his only letter addressed to an individual rather than to a community. It is most likely that Paul was martyred during the persecution of the Church by Nero (64-68 AD), but we have no specific information about his death.</th>
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</table>
III. PAUL'S LETTERS.

Paul's letters are his legacy. In them we find the basis of early Christian Theology - attempts to define what is true about God and his relationship with us.

The Pauline Corpus includes

A. letters to Churches or communities
   - I and II Thessalonians
   - I and II Corinthians
   - Galatians
   - Philippians
   - Colossians
   - Ephesians
   - Romans

B. letters to individual(s)
   - Philomen
   - I and II Timothy
   - Titus

However, it is highly unlikely that Paul himself wrote II Thessalonians, Colossians or Ephesians. They were most likely written by someone well acquainted with Paul's thought who wanted to claim his authority.

The letters to individuals include
Again, however, it is generally accepted that the two letters to Timothy and the letter to Titus were not written by Paul since they reflect conditions in the Church which would not have been the norm during Paul's own lifetime.

The FORM of Paul's LETTERS was adopted from the common form of business and government correspondence in use in the Greco-Roman world. The regular form of Paul's letters can be outlined as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I. OPENING</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Sender identification of the person writing and his authority to write</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Receiver identification of the target audience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Greeting</td>
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<tr>
<th>II. THANKSGIVING</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Here Paul often states his attitude about the receiver and introduces his major themes.</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>III. BODY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Doctrine what he teaches (in general)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Application &quot;I appeal to you...&quot; with specific applications of his general teaching to the circumstances or questions of the community or individual to whom he is writing.</td>
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<th>IV. CLOSING</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Blessing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Final Greetings - (Give my regards to...)</td>
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</table>
First Thessalonians is the earliest of Paul's letters, probably written from Corinth in the early 50's. Paul had established a small Christian community in Thessalonica, but had stirred up violent opposition from the Jews in that city and had been forced to leave. The letter itself makes it clear that the community was still having a difficult time. Also, since they lacked leadership, the Christians in Thessalonica had questions about the faith, which Paul answers in the body of his letter. Paul wrote to encourage the Thessalonian Christians to remain faithful in the face of the anger of the local Jews and to answer the community's two main concerns:

A. When would the second coming occur?  
B. What was the fate of those who died before the second coming?

Thessalonica was an important crossroads town, a commercial center and the capital of the Roman province of Macedonia. Paul visited this city of 70,000 inhabitants during his second missionary journey, probably around the year 50 AD. On this visit, he was probably accompanied by co-workers, Timothy and Silas. He followed his usual pattern of preaching first in the local synagogue and then to the "God-fearers" - those Gentiles who were attracted to the beliefs of the Jews but did not convert because they did not want to accept the full weight of the Jewish law - especially circumcision. When Paul made converts to Christianity among the God-fearers, he angered the Jewish leaders of Thessalonika so much so that he was forced to flee for his life. He travelled on to Athens and eventually to Corinth where he stayed for an extended period of time. While in Corinth Paul became concerned about the community at Thessalonica which he had been forced to leave. He sent Timothy back to the city to see what was going on and Timothy's report occasioned the writing of Paul's first letter.

1. In chapters 1-3 Paul deals with the circumstances and general purpose of his letter.  
2. In chapters 4-5 he takes up specific questions.
First Thessalonians may be outlined as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I. OPENING</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Sender Paul's authority is &quot;in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Receiver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Greeting (1:1)</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>II. THANKSGIVING (1:2-10)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paul's attitude to the Thessalonians - he praises their faith which has lasted in the face of difficulties.</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>III. BODY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. 2:1-8 is a defense of charges against Paul, anticipating objections to his authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. 2:9-3:13 is a personal narrative. He argues his point and makes his teaching from his own personal experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Appeal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:1-5:22 - based on the authority of Jesus, Paul calls the community to a life of chastity and love of neighbor. He also answers specific questions - the fate of those who die before the Second Coming is the same as the fate of those who live until then; but it is impossible to know when the Second Coming will occur.</td>
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<tr>
<th>IV. CLOSING</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Blessing (5:23-24)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Final Greeting (5:25-28)</td>
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Galatians

Paul's letter to the Galatians is his angriest letter. It sets out to do two major things:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1.</th>
<th>It defends Paul's right to teach the Gospel.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>It corrects the errors of some false teachers who claimed that Gentiles must first become Jews before becoming Christians. That is, Paul had to counteract Judaizers in the community.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Galatians is addressed to a group of churches in cities in the Roman province of Galatia which Paul visited on both his second and third missionary journeys. It was probably written from Ephesus sometime during the years 54-57.

In this letter Paul first defends his right to teach the Gospel. Some false teachers claimed that Paul had no right to teach since he was not one of the original apostles. On his visit to Galatia Paul had taught that the Jewish law does not save a person. Only faith in Jesus Christ brings salvation. That is what Paul meant by freedom from the Law. In two sections dealing with his own personal experience, Paul defends his teaching. He reminds the Galatians of his divine call to teach and that the apostles in Jerusalem, led by Peter, had agreed with his teaching.

Secondly, Paul defends what he preached. Since Jesus' coming Christians were freed from the need to be circumcised and to follow all 613 laws of the Jewish Torah. False teachers, Judaizers, were trying to sway the Galatians into thinking that by strictly following the Jewish law, they would meet the demands of the Gospel. Paul taught that faith in Jesus, not following the laws, brought salvation. Faith in Jesus forces a person to be responsible and to decide to do the right thing with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. With the coming of Christ, Christians are now governed by the law of love.

The letter is highly defensive. Paul is defending his mission and his teaching against attack. Galatians also reveals what was revolutionary and new in Paul's thought - FREEDOM FROM THE LAW. For Paul this did not mean that the community could do whatever it wanted. Paul stressed that salvation was a FREE GIFT that could NOT BE EARNED. For Paul, the Law was given to reveal what was sinful, but observing the Law could not, by itself, bring salvation. Salvation was a free gift given in Jesus Christ. Fitting with the tone of the letter is the fact that there is no THANKSGIVING. Paul is truly angry with the Galatians.

The message of the letter is clear:

The Galatians must choose between Paul, which means being true to their roots, or the "new" preachers who are changing the original message. The heart of the dispute in the letter concerns the keeping of Jewish Law.

The basis of Paul's argument in this letter is his own personal narrative. From his own story he wants to convince the Galatians that what he says is in their own best interests. What he says is that the community should not practice circumcision, which is not only unnecessary, but wrong. Instead, Christians should love one another and practice the
Christian life. Galatians speaks today to Christians who are tempted to substitute forms of behavior for the essence of the Christian life. (For example, being friends with those who wear the "right" kind of clothes or live in the "right" neighborhoods; associating only with those who do the "right" things, like being involved in parish youth groups, Pro-Live, etc.).

Galatians may be outlined as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I. OPENING</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Sender Paul's specific authority as an apostle sent by God</td>
<td>(1:1-2a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Receiver note how the identification of the Galatians is abrupt</td>
<td>(1:2b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Greeting the somber tone of the letter is introduced in the mention of the &quot;evil age&quot; (1:3-5).</td>
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| II. THANKSGIVING    |                                                                 |
| III. BODY          |                                                                 |
| A. Teaching the consistency of the Gospel which should not be mixed with other teachings and Paul's defense of his role (1:6-4:11) |                                                                 |
| B. Appeal          | 4:12-6:10                                                        |

| IV. CONCLUSION      |                                                                 |
| A. Summary          | 6:11-15                                                         |
| B. Blessing         | 6:16                                                            |
| C. Final Greeting   | 6:17-18                                                         |
First Corinthians

The First Letter to the Corinthians responds primarily to questions raised by the congregation. In a simple fashion, the letter represents Paul's struggle to understand with the Corinthians how what he taught about freedom - Christian freedom and freedom from the Law - can be translated into practice in the Church.

Corinth was considered the "sin city" of the ancient world. As a thriving port it attracted all kinds of people and philosophies. It was the center of worship to the goddess Aphrodite. Worship of her involved temple prostitution. In fact, the term "Corinthian Maiden" meant "prostitute."

Corinth was a community with which Paul had particular difficulties. He most likely visited the city on three different occasions. After his first visit, the community soon broke into many factions. Strange beliefs and practices sprang up as the Christian message was watered down and combined with some of the other ways of thinking which were practices in that city. Paul's letters to the Corinthians were intended primarily to correct abuses in that community and answer the questions which the community posed to him.

The First Letter to the Corinthians was probably written from Ephesus during Paul's third missionary journey. The letter takes up a number of problems and issues which had been troubling the Corinthian church. Some of these problems were rival factions in the Corinthian church, challenges to Paul's authority, Christians submitting their disputes to pagan courts, various scandals, what to do about marriage and virginity, what to do about meat offered to idols, disorders in the assembly when celebrating the Eucharist, the nature of spiritual gifts, and doubts about the resurrection.

While Paul's main opponents in Galatia had been Judaizers, his main opponents in Corinth were Gnostics. Gnostics followed a warped version of Plato's philosophy. They held that salvation came from special, secret knowledge and that those who possessed this knowledge could be identified by their gifts, especially speaking in tongues. Since knowledge and the mind were of most importance, these people held that the body didn't really matter - so you could use your body however you wanted and it didn't matter. This led to all kinds of sins, including incest, adultery, gluttony and drunkenness (even at the Eucharist - which was still celebrated at a shared meal), and the like. Gnostics tried to justify all this by a misinterpretation of Paul's teaching on freedom from the law. Against them, Paul had to argue that all gifts were given by the Spirit, not for the sole enjoyment of the person who received the gift, but for the good of all. Again, for Paul, the greatest gift was love.
The First Letter to the Corinthians can be outlined as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I. OPENING</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Sender</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul's authority is based on his call to be an apostle (1:1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Receiver</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the Corinthian community called to be HOLY (1:2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Greeting</td>
<td>1:3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
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<tr>
<th>II. THANKSGIVING</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In the light of the rest of the letter, the Thanksgiving is highly ironic. Those who claim special knowledge don't know what they are talking about; and those who claim special gifts foster exclusivism, so that the claim to be guiltless can hardly be true (1:4-9)</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>III. BODY</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Appeal</td>
<td>1:10-6:20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Paul's defense (1:10-4:21). Paul must defend himself against false teachers who have caused disunity (factions) and misunderstanding. Faith in Jesus is more important than the wisdom and knowledge which were so highly prized in Corinth.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Transition to specific questions - here Paul deals with three topics which he sees as representative of the problems in the community, leading to the questions in the next section</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. Incest (chapter 5)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>ii. Legal Disputes (6:1-8)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iii. Fornication (6:12-20)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Specific Questions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Marriage (chapter 7)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Food Offered to Idols (chapters 8-10)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Behavior of Women (11:2-16)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Practice of the Eucharist (11:17-34)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. The Gifts of the Spirit (chapters 12-14)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Resurrection (chapter 15)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. The Collection for the Poor (16:1-5)</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IV. CONCLUSION</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Final Greeting (16:6-24)</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

New Testament Notes
Romans

The Letter to the Romans is different from Paul's other letters to Churches. It is written to a community which he had not founded and to which he has no relationship; and it is not written in response to problems in that community nor to questions the congregation has addressed to Paul. Rather, Romans is Paul's letter of introduction to that community which he had hoped to visit. It is a theological letter spelling out important aspects of Paul's teaching for the Church in Rome.

In the letter, Paul was trying to do two things:

1. He was trying to show that Greek (Gentile) dependence of knowledge (gnosticism) does not save a person; ONLY FAITH IN JESUS SAVES.
2. He was trying to show that Jewish dependence on the Law and Jewish customs does not save a person either.

These are themes we have seen before, but in Romans Paul gives these themes a fuller and more generalized treatment.

Romans displays the following outline:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I. OPENING</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Sender</td>
<td>an extended introduction of himself as a servant of Jesus Christ and an apostle in the service of the Gospel (1:1-6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Receiver</td>
<td>to the Romans called to be holy (1:7a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Greetings</td>
<td>1:7b</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| II. THANKSGIVING | 1:8-15. Paul praises the faith of the community which he hopes to help strengthen and through which he hopes his own faith may grow stronger. He also introduces key ideas to be taken up in the letter: faith, the Spirit, Gentiles, and the Gospel. |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>III. BODY</th>
<th>Teaching (1:16-11:36)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>statement of theme (1:16-17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>negative treatment of theme (the power of God for damnation - 1:18-3:31)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i.</td>
<td>the Gentiles, using their human reason, should have discovered God, but instead they worshipped creation rather than the Creator (1:18-2:16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii.</td>
<td>the Jews should have been better off because they had the Law, but they did not keep it. Both Jews and Gentiles are under the power of sin (2:17-3:20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Abraham, example of faith (4:1-25) Paul cites Abraham as the key example of faith. Abraham's attitude must be our attitude.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. God's salvation and human freedom (chapters 5-8) i. Jesus is the new Adam, who has brought eternal life (chapter 5) ii. Faith and baptism in the Lord accomplish what the Law could not. They free us from the power of sin (the Law lets us know that we're sinning – chapter 6) iii. Faith frees the Christian from the Jewish Law (chapter 7)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. God will remain faithful to the Jews (chapters 9-11) The Jews do not seem to be accepting God's salvation, but God's promises to Israel stand and he will eventually melt their hearts. This is an important theme since, if Paul wants to convince the Gentiles to accept the word of God, he must convince them that God is true to his word.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Unit Eight: Other New Testament Writings

**Objective:** The other writings of the New Testament are the Catholic Epistles and the Johannine Literature. These two bodies of writings are generally later than the Gospels and the Epistles of Paul and show the development of worldwide Christianity. They are addressed to Christians in general and not to local communities. In this we can see the developing commitment of all Christians to each other throughout the world. Secondly, many of these writings have their settings in times of trial and persecution. These writings, then, demonstrate the solidarity of the Church throughout the world, especially when any of the brothers or sisters are suffering.

**Vocabulary List:**
- CATHOLIC
- CATHOLIC EPISTLES
- OCCASIONAL LETTER
- CIRCULAR LETTER
- APOCALYPSIS
- JOHANNINE LITERATURE
- PSEUDONYM
- PARENESIS
- MESSIANIC WOES

**In This Unit:**

**Catholic Epistles**
- James 160
- I Peter 162

**Revelation** 165
Besides the Gospel (and Acts) and the Pauline Corpus, there are two additional groups of writings in the New Testament. The first of these are the so-called CATHOLIC EPISTLES. The word "catholic" simply means "universal," and this title is applied to these letters because, unlike most of Paul's letters, which were OCCASIONAL LETTERS, or letters addressed to specific communities and their particular needs, problems and questions, these letters are CIRCULAR LETTERS, that is, they are addressed to all Christian communities in general.

The Catholic Epistles include:

| The Letter of James          |
| The First and Second Letters of Peter |
| The Letter of Jude           |
| The Letter to the Hebrews    |

In addition to these epistles, there are also the three Letters of John and the Book of Revelation, also attributed to John or John's disciples. These letters, the Book of Revelation, and John's Gospel together make up the JOHANNINE LITERATURE. The Johannine Literature was not written by the apostle John, but by followers of John who were influenced by what he taught. The writings were said to be written by John to lend them his authority (in the same way that II Thessalonians, Colossians, Ephesians, and the Pastoral Epistles of I and II Timothy and Titus were said to be written by Paul.)

The practice of using a PSEUDONYM, or a false name, was common in the Ancient World. In general, the writings of the Catholic Epistles are PSEUDONYMOUS, that is, they claim to be written by one of the apostles or another notable person to lend authority to what they have to say.
I. The Catholic Epistles

1. The Letter of James.

A major theme in the Letter of James is that faith alone cannot save. For this reason, James must have been written after the activity of Paul and presents a reaction to the misunderstanding of Paul's teaching when Paul was no longer on the scene to defend his position himself. This, along with the fact that James is written in very good Greek makes it highly unlikely that the letter was written in the first century by James who headed the early Church in Jerusalem. Again, saying that James wrote the letter was intended to lend authority to what the letter taught. In the tradition, it was known that James, the brother of the Lord, was the head of the Church in Jerusalem when Paul was active and that he was responsible for the compromise during the Council of Jerusalem which made Paul's missionary activity possible. It was therefore reasonable for the writer of this letter to claim to be James, who was known from tradition to have exercised a corrective influence on the work of Paul.

In reality, James is not really a letter at all, at least not in the way Paul's letters are in their adaptation of a common letter-writing form. More properly, James is an example of Christian PARENESIS. Parenesis is a type of writing whose purpose is to give practical advice. The second section of the BODY in most of Paul's letters, the part where he applies his teaching to specific circumstances, is an example of parenesis.

The Letter of James provides a good example of how Christian theology has developed. One of the main purposes of the letter is to clarify a misunderstanding of Paul's doctrine of salvation through faith. James stresses that faith which does not lead to action is useless. His letter, then, defines what cannot be said about the doctrine of faith. Most Christian theology has developed in just this fashion - reacting to misunderstandings and stating what may NOT be said. The encouraging thing about this process is that it leaves open what CAN BE SAID. That is, in the Christian faith, there is room for a variety of understandings and teachings. Defining theology in NEGATIVES leaves open a variety of positive formulations. Defining things in POSITIVES would rule out all other possible formulations.
The practical advice which the letter gives centers on three topics:

| A. favoring the rich over the poor. | B. faith and works. | C. sins of the tongue. |

The Letter of James displays the following outline:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I. OPENING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Sender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ (1:1a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Receiver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To the twelve tribes in the dispersion (1:1b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(The &quot;twelve tribes in the dispersion&quot; is a symbolic designation for Christians throughout the world.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Greeting - 1:1c</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>II. BODY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. a collection of random moral maxims (in the fashion of Jewish Wisdom sayings, as in the Book of Proverbs) - 1:2-27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. development of three key themes (2:1-3:12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. favoritism of the rich over the poor (2:1-7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. faith and works (2:8-26)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. sins of the tongue (3:1-12)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Recall that the Wisdom Tradition in Israel held that virtue was its own reward and that the key to living the good life was to be found in the world around us. In later wisdom writings, it was noted that God had spoken his word into the world (the Scriptures - especially the Law of Moses) and that this word of God was to become the object of our study to discover how to lead the good life.

By surrounding his three major themes with wisdom sayings, the writer of James is suggesting that what is observable, what we can learn from God's word about living the good life must find concrete expression in our care and concern for the poor, in putting our faith into action, and in watching our mouths.
2. **THE FIRST LETTER OF PETER.**

The First Letter of Peter, like the Letter of James, is a *circular letter*, that is, a letter addressed to Christians in general and not to a particular community, as was the case in the letters of Paul. Also, like the Letter of James, I Peter is an extended homily in letter form.

*The MAIN PURPOSE of the letter is to give encouragement and consolation to those suffering for their faith.*

While the letter claims to have been written by Peter, several facts speak against this:

1. The Greek of the letter is some of the best in the New Testament and hardly to be expected of a Galilean fisherman (whose primary language would have been Aramaic).
2. The letter makes frequent use of scriptural quotes, but the quotes are from the Greek version of the Old Testament, not the Hebrew.
3. Ideas in the letter reflect the teachings of Paul, but in a way that shows Paul's teachings were already well known and accepted. That means that this letter was written after the career of Paul had ended.
4. The Letter seems to address a general persecution of the Christians. While local persecutions had been frequent since the beginning of the Church, general persecutions did not begin until years later (with Nero in about 64 AD and Domitian in about 85-90 AD).
5. The letter itself is addressed primarily to second-generation, Gentile Christians and the evidence of the letter indicates that it's writer was also a second generation Christian.
6. The letter uses apocalyptic imagery (the messianic woes which must happen before the Second Coming; Babylon = Rome; etc.) and such imagery did not come into use until late in the first century.

*In sum, the letter was written to give encouragement and consolation to Christians suffering persecution. It cannot be identified with any particular historical occasion of persecution, but addresses the general situation of Christian communities of the day. By claiming Peter as its author, the letter not only claims apostolic authority for its message, but adds an extra note of encouragement for those who suffer since it was known that Peter had suffered and died in Rome. That is, the encouragement to stand fast in the face of suffering is claimed to come from one who knew what suffering was all about.*

The First Letter of Peter displays the following outline:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I. OPENING</th>
<th>II. BODY</th>
<th>III. CONCLUSION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Sender</td>
<td>A. Teaching</td>
<td>A. Final Greetings (5:12-14a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Receiver</td>
<td>a homily, addressed to people who have only recently been baptized, on the meaning of baptism as a call to suffering (1:3-4:11)</td>
<td>B. Blessing (5:14b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Greeting</td>
<td>B. Application warnings to these people in the face of the MESSIANIC WOES (the calamities which must occur before the Second Coming - 4:12-5:11)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Several features of this letter call for comment:

1. It is addressed to **exiles of the dispersion**. The audience addressed in this letter is pictured as a community of aliens, even though they may have been living in their own homelands. When people turned away from their pagan practices, their neighbors became suspicious of them. They no longer offered sacrifices to the local gods and gave up sexual abuses and other pagan practices which were common in the Ancient World. Because of this, they faced ridicule, abuse and persecution. They became outcasts and aliens within their own communities.

2. As such, **the letter encourages the newly baptized to hold fast to their new way of life**. It argues that suffering is a necessary part of this new life and a way that we can imitate Jesus in whom we have been baptized –
in just the same way that Peter (the supposed author of the letter) imitated the Lord.

3. In its final form, the letter continues to speak to Christians today - communities (as in the Third World) which face suffering and individuals who through illness, poverty, or injustice face oppression. It offers encouragement, consolation and hope to all who suffer.
II. The Book of Revelation

The Book of Revelation is the strangest and most misunderstood book in the Bible. It has been used to try to predict the end of the world and to justify all kinds of horrible actions on the part of people who claim to be the "elect." Our purpose in looking at the Book of Revelation is to come to understand that it represents a special kind of writing for one very particular time in history - a time of persecution in the early Church. Its message today is not to be some kind of elaborate code book predicting the end, but to continue to encourage Christians to be single hearted in their commitments to their faith.

The Book of Revelation is an APOCALYPSE. The word "apocalypse" simply means "revelation." In the Ancient World, AN APOCALYPSE was a LITERARY FORM, a type of writing used in APOCALYPTIC MOVEMENTS. Such movements grew out of perceived crises, real or imagined. The crisis perceived by the author of the Book of Revelation was the general persecution of the Christian Church.

Apocalyptic Movements were characterized by a world-view or way of looking at things that pitted the ins against the outs. Apocalyptic Writings offered a message of hope which asserted that there would be a radical change in the way things were into something totally new and different.

In general terms, the American Revolution can be understood as an apocalyptic movement, a movement whose world view was of a situation radically different from the conditions of the day. The movement pitted absolute monarchic rights against representational government. The "apocalyptic literature" of the American Revolution can be seen in the political cartoons of the day.

APOCALYPHTIC MOVEMENTS differ from PROPHETIC MOVEMENTS.
1. Prophetic movements aim at reforming or cleaning up the present order, at bringing the outcasts and marginalized into the dominant whole.

2. Apocalyptic movements envision a complete change of the present order into something completely different, a complete breaking away from the past and the formation of a new order.

As a **LITERARY FORM**, an Apocalypse makes use of highly symbolic and mystical language, rich with images. The revelation is normally given to a human being by an other-worldly creature who shows him the secrets of things to come. However, such revelations are usually written backwards - listing things that have already happened and ending with the present situation to announce the hope for radical change. They are addressed to particular situations and are not prophecies of future events.

Apocalyptic Literature is the writing of the disenfranchised, of those who have lost hope in the present system and see possibilities for the future only in the complete overthrow of the present power base.

*The PURPOSE of the Book of Revelation was to provide encouragement to first century Christians who were facing harsh persecutions under the Roman state.* The encouragement came through the spelling out of God's plan of salvation for the Church and the world, a plan which would radically change the present state of affairs. The Book is addressed to seven churches in Asia Minor (chapters 1-3).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Church</th>
<th>References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ephesus</td>
<td>2:1-7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smyrna</td>
<td>2:8-11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pergamum</td>
<td>2:12-17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thyatira</td>
<td>2:18-29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sardis</td>
<td>3:1-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philadelphia</td>
<td>3:7-13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laodicea</td>
<td>3:14-22</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The message to those churches is contained in three sets of seven visions in the rest of the book (the seven trumpets, the seven seals, and the seven vials). **These visions represent something new in apocalyptic literature.** The decisive turning point which radically changes everything and gives meaning to the world *HAS ALREADY OCCURRED IN THE CROSS OF JESUS CHRIST.* The sufferings of the present do not serve to usher in the final transformation, but contribute to revealing that the change has already happened and that its effects will now begin to be felt. God's ultimate defeat of the power of evil lies in the past, in the Cross. God's reign has been forever established (This is what is meant by **REALIZED ESCHATOLOGY** in Johannine writings). The Church still continues to suffer under persecution, but it lives in the confidence that the victory has already been achieved.
One final point needs to be made. Apocalyptic writings usually claim to be authored by a significant person of the past (creating the image of a prediction of the good things to come). In claiming John as its author, the Book of Revelation lays claim to apostolic authority, but, because John is not a venerable figure from the long past, the book also reinforces its faith statement that the decisive event in God's plan has already happened - within the life-time of the supposed author, the beloved disciple of Jesus.

The Book of Revelation demands complete resistance to the Roman Imperial Religion, because to give divine honors to the emperor would mean to support his claim over all people. In Asia Minor in the late part of the first century, it was possible to pay lip service to the Roman civil religion and still maintain faith in Christ. It was an inviting option for the Christians in the area since it allowed them to participate actively in social, commercial, and political activities within their society. Such an option, however, is totally rejected by the writer of Revelation. And that message of the book continues to address us today.

CHRISTIANS CANNOT COMPROMISE WHAT THEIR FAITH DEMANDS OF THEM FOR THE SAKE OF SOCIAL STANDING, SUCCESS IN BUSINESS, OR POLITICAL POWER.