

SCRIPTURE – PART TWO

NEW TESTAMENT

- **A COLLECTION OF BOOKS: 27 SEPARATE WORKS**
 - Different authors, different types of writing
 - Writing began about 50C.E. roughly 20 years after the death of Christ and continued to about 100 C.E.
- **ONE PRINCIPLE THEME**
 - All of NT books deal in some way with the life, death, resurrection of Jesus and the impact he had on the community of those who believed in him.
 - Four gospels deal directly with Jesus – his life, preaching, wonderful works, his death and resurrection. Offer us something about the historical Jesus
 - Other writings offer us little about the historical life of Jesus. They concentrate on happenings within the early communities of faith: the meaning of Jesus' life, death and resurrection for the individual believer; difficulties encountered by the early Christians as they moved out into the world
 - By end of second century church had come to some general agreement about accepting the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John as particularly special and authoritative

NEW TESTAMENT

- Catholic faith is centered on Jesus Christ. Everything we believe has been revealed in him or through him. We start to understand with the central event of Christian history and Christian faith: the resurrection of Jesus. The followers of Jesus as they experienced the risen Christ began to realize who Jesus really was. Once they experienced him as the risen Lord, they saw his every word and action in a profoundly new light. They started to remind each other about what he had said about this and that.
 - **Followers of Jesus gathered to remember and retell.** The sick remembered some days more fondly, sinners others. Those who would have to debate publicly would remember what suited their need. If you were hungry you would remember bread. If you were being ground into poverty, you would remember the Beatitudes, the story of the rich man and Lazarus. The church in Jerusalem might emphasize the cleansing of the temple and not recall Jesus going to the Gentiles. In Galilee the church might stress stories that centered around the lake and merely summarize Jesus' baptism down in Judea. Memory would be sharpened by need, by personal experiences, by local conditions. Some things would be emphasized in some locations and not recalled in another
 - **Stories of Jesus would be told when the community gathered to break bread.** Gradually there would be collections of stories, told and retold over the years. Scholars have found that folk memory preserves detached units best:
 - General sayings of Jesus apart from any particular situation
 - Stories that lead up to a punch line
 - Narratives, with almost no words of Jesus, but colourful details centering on a miracle. The units were told in patterns that were easy to remember. As time went on these separate units would be polished to smoothness.
 - When first Christian preachers went out, they preached the meaning of Jesus in terms the people could understand, in the Jewish way to Jews, in the Greek way to Greeks.
 - The only bible they had was the Old Testament. They found Jesus in its pages. He was the fulfillment of all that had been promised. His life, death and resurrection were according to the scriptures. But they were gradually building up what we call the New Testament., at first in oral and then in written collections.

- By saying the New Testament is inspired, we mean that the Holy Spirit guarantees the truthfulness and trustworthiness of what human beings said and wrote in a human manner.
 - **Three levels in New Testament:**
 - **Stage One:** Jesus' own words and actions: Jesus was a man of his time. He used the manner of teaching followed by the rabbis. He had his own purpose, for instance, in telling the parable of the sower. He preached the Good News in many places, not always in the same words. He emphasized one thing to the poor, another to the hypocritical religious establishment, another to the sick. He wrote nothing down.
 - **Stage two:** The apostles' preaching – the apostles proclaimed the death and resurrection of Jesus and explained his life and words, taking into account in their method of preaching the circumstances in which their listeners found themselves
 - In other words, the apostles adapted and interpreted Jesus so that their hearers would understand as fully as possible who he was and what his life, death and resurrection meant for their eternal salvation. They preached with the fuller understanding that they had. They did not merely repeat the words of Jesus: They proclaimed the meaning of the words and actions of the God-man in the light of their fuller knowledge and experience. The Holy Spirit did not print words on their imaginations' blackboard but showed them the ever-deepening meaning of Jesus. The words they used to preach and teach were their own
 - They apostles used different forms of expression – catechesis, stories, hymns, doxologies, prayers and other literary forms that people used at that time
 - Jesus' words and actions received a new light, a new depth and a fuller interpretation than was possible before the Resurrection and the coming of the Spirit. They were passed on in new situations and according to the mentality, culture and need of new hearers. The apostles interpreted Jesus
 - **Third Stage:** The authors' actual accounts. We see a twofold source for the gospel writers – the original stories, sometimes taken word for word into the gospels from oral tradition, and also the fuller interpretation of Jesus as it appeared in the teachings and preaching of the apostles. This third stage now takes place in the attempt of the writers to compile a narrative of the events which have been fulfilled in their midst.
 - All four gospels have the same general purpose. Each gospel has its own style and flavour because four different authors and traditions were at work.
 - Mark concentrates on what Jesus did rather than what he said
 - Matthew is the Christian rabbi intent on catechesis
 - Luke has an eye for Jesus' mercy, for Christian prayer and for renunciation, for the poor
 - John present a majestic, divine Jesus, and a kingdom of salvation already in force.
 - Each writer selected some stories and sayings rather than others, according to his individual purpose and viewpoint.
 - Seven last words of Jesus are not all together in any one gospel: Luke has three of them, Matthew and Mark share one, John has the other three.

- Matthew has eight beatitudes, Luke only four, but he parallels them with four woes.
 - John has no account of the institution of the Eucharist
 - The baptism is progressively de-emphasized in the four gospels
 - The Our Father is slightly different in Luke and Matthew
- Gospel writers, speaking for and in the church, and following the practice of the church, shaped the words of Jesus, adapted them to apply to new situations, one that did not exist when Jesus spoke.
 - Jesus would not have said to the Jews that a woman could not divorce her husband. This was unheard of in Jewish law. But among Greeks it was possible, so Jesus full meaning had to be expressed.
 - Matthew and Mark describe Jesus as dying with a loud cry, but they do not record the words; in Luke Jesus says, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit". Some scholars feel that Luke's expression of trust is parallel to Matthew "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" In John, Jesus says "Now it is finished"
- Gospel writers often had to vary their accounts because the communities for which they wrote were so different. Some were widely scattered, some in totally pagan areas, some close to the Jerusalem tradition, some being persecuted, some living in peace.
- New situations impacted the gospels written;
 - Jesus is called Lord by persons who did then know or believe that he was God. Even the apostles took a long time to realize who Jesus was. It took the church a long time to decide how to define the Trinity
 - In John's gospel we no longer find the harassed, beaten and suffering Jesus. Now we meet a Jesus who speaks as though he is already in glory. It is not he who is on trial. It is the world. He is master of the situation, serene, powerful. There is no agony in Gethsemane in John. Rather a cohort of soldiers falls down merely at his word
 - Even the place where a gospel writer puts a story may depend on his purpose. John has the cleansing of the Temple at the beginning of Jesus' public life. Matthew at the end.
- **Gospels are testimonies of faith addressed to those who are the faithful.** They are the picture that developed in the minds of those who loved Jesus, the community we call church. It was the church who wrote the New Testament – this loving group of followers. The gospel writers did not go away from community to write. Though they each had their own purposes, they were expressing the basic faith record that had been developed in the meditation and prayer of the church and by the light of the Holy Spirit. The church rejected whatever did not have an authentic ring to them – there are several non-canonical gospels filled with accounts of supposed incidents in Jesus' life. But these were not incorporated into the New Testament.
- **The Gospels are written accounts of Jesus' life that were inspired by the Holy Spirit.** Reading them is a way for us to personally meet Jesus and to understand his life and message.
- God reveals in the bible what we need to know for our salvation. Historical, geographical, or even scientific accuracy isn't necessary for our salvation.

- **Gospels are faith portraits of Jesus, not historical biographies.** When they wrote the gospels, the authors wrote their stories of Jesus in a way that emphasized the religious truths their communities had learned through the Holy Spirit. The four authors were members of different communities, facing different concerns and difficulties. The Holy Spirit guided these communities in understanding and applying the stories and teachings about Jesus to their situations. So sometimes they used the same stories but told them in slightly different ways to emphasize a religious truth needed for their community. Because of this, we need all four gospels to understand the whole truth about Jesus.

- **CANON OF THE NEW TESTAMENT**
 - **Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John** include information about the life, works, message, death and resurrection of Jesus. Each of the gospels is organized chronologically, which suggests that they are something like historical records of Jesus' life, though they are not as concerned with the details of Jesus' history as with his message. The Gospels were **written approximately between the years 65 and 100 C. E.** The **first Gospel, Mark**, was probably written 30 –40 years after Jesus' death and resurrection. The **last gospel** to be written, **John**, was probably written 60 – 70 years after Jesus' death and resurrection. Doubtful that any one person was responsible for the total development of any one of the gospels. Seems the work was done by at least several people. The gospels of Matthew, Mark & Luke are similar in so many ways that they are called the synoptic gospels – to see together
 - **Acts of the Apostles** is Luke's account of the early days of the Christian community under the leadership of Peter. Though he does record the initial development of the church in Jerusalem, his main focus is the spread of the Good News through the Roman Empire. Focuses on the missionary work of St. Paul. Seen as a companion to Luke's gospel.
 - **Thirteen Pauline Epistles:** these letters are written by or attributed to Paul. 1 Thessalonians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Romans, Philemon. Scholars agree these seven were written by him and the other six were probably written by authors who wanted to honour Paul or who sought special authority in community by claiming Paul as the author of their letters. Doubtfully Paul: 2 Thessalonians, Colossians, Ephesians. Not written by Paul: Titus, 1 & 2 Timothy. Primary purpose of the letters was to support and further educate either individual Christians or small communities who believed in Jesus because of the missionary work of Paul or others. Paul's Letter to the Thessalonians is generally considered to be the first book of the New Testament, roughly about 50 C.E.
 - **Letter to Hebrews:** often attributed to Paul, scholars believe it was written by unknown author – kind of extended sermon.
 - **Catholic Epistles:** collection of 7 epistles attributed to other personalities – James, Peter (2 letters), John (3 letters), Jude. Some or all of these are often referred to as catholic (meaning universal) or general epistles, because they are addressed to believing Christians as a general audience rather than to specific individuals or communities. **The last book of the New Testament is generally believed to be Second Letter of Peter, written about year 100 C. E.**
 - **Book of Revelation:** Book with highly symbolic and mysterious language which reflects a kind of writing popular with Jews since 200 years before Jesus. Written for first century Christians who suffered persecution at the hands of the Romans for their beliefs. Book encourages them to remain faithful to Christ. Deals with their expectations that Jesus will return in glory at the end of time to fulfill God's work on earth

- **THE FOUR GOSPELS: FOUR PORTRAITS OF JESUS**
 - **GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MARK 65 – 70 C.E. COMMON ERA – THE HUMAN JESUS**
 - Nothing in gospel identifies the author by name. Scholars believe this gospel was put together by John Mark, who lived in Jerusalem, called the interpreter of Peter

by one of church earliest writers and is described in Acts as working with both Peter and Paul. We may assume that this gospel gives at least the flavour of Peter's preaching

- First gospel written. Seems to have been written in Rome for the church there and for Gentile readers. Jewish customs that would have been readily understood by Jews are explained in the gospel in way that suggests the customs were not familiar to the intended readers.
 - Strong sense of suffering dominates gospel with many references to trials and persecution. This may reflect the persecution of the Christians by the Roman Emperor Nero. Also the Jews revolted against the Romans between 66 – 70 and many feel that Mark's gospel reflects an awareness of the suffering of that period as well.
 - Stresses the human suffering of Jesus in his passion and death, perhaps to encourage the Christians who were being persecuted at the time. Jesus' death is such a central point that everything else that precedes it seems to be offered almost solely by way of introduction. Seems certain that one of Mark's intentions was to explain to the members of the early church how suffering is an essential part of Christian life and to give them the courage to endure it as Jesus had. Mark never lets us forget that Jesus is a suffering, crucified Saviour, but one who proclaims both penance and Good News.
 - Emphasis on humanity of Jesus – portrays Jesus expressing strong emotions for example. Makes it clear Jesus was truly a human being, that Jesus truly possessed both human and divine natures.
 - In Mark, Jesus' teaching is the gradual unfolding, mostly in action, of the mystery of Jesus as embodying and revealing the kingdom. Running through it is the strain of the disciples' lack of understanding
 - Is shortest of gospels, provides perhaps the most intimate portrait of Jesus.
- **GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MATTHEW (70 – 100 C.E. – 80 - 90 C.E.) JESUS AS THE MESSIAH OF THE JEWS**
- No clear agreement on either the author or the date for this gospel. Early in the history of the church, tradition held that the author was Matthew, an apostle and therefore an eyewitness to Jesus' life and work. However, the author seems to have used almost all of Mark's gospel, an early collection of Jesus' sayings (Q) and relied on Luke's account as well. It would have been strange for an eyewitness of Jesus' life to rely so heavily on other sources. Perhaps, the final unknown author relied heavily on the stories used by the apostle Matthew to teach about Jesus. His insights into the meaning of Jesus seem more developed than those of Mark and Luke and so probably written after them.
 - Different in structure than gospels of Mark and Luke. Some scholars suggest that its organization pattern copies of the first five books of the Old Testament, indicating a particular desire by the author to show the Jews that Jesus was clearly the Messiah they had awaited.
 - Matthew is thoroughly Jewish, exploring the Hebrew scriptures for the Messianic signs now fulfilled. Jesus is the new Moses, giving us a new covenant on a new Mount Sinai. He is the son of David the king, the Messiah the Jews could recognize. Jesus brings the Law to perfect fulfillment and is superior to it. He is Lord over it, but he does not annul it any more than adulthood annuls childhood. The law can now be reduced to one commandment: love. Writing for largely Jewish Christian audience for whom he presents Jesus as new Law-Giver. Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies. He also needs to persuade this

audience of legitimacy of Christian converts. More than 130 passages refer directly or indirectly to the old Testament

- Matthew is goldmine for quotations from Jesus who is seen as a teacher here. Matthew records 5 sermons / discourses of Jesus: sermon on the mount 5:1 – 7:29, about his missionaries 9:35 – 11:1, the kingdom 13:1 – 51, the church 18:1 – 35 and the last things 24:1 – 25:46
 - Shows interest in the church itself – only gospel to use word church and it seems concerned with the church's organization and with the community life and teaching among believers.
 - Because it contains Jesus' teachings in thorough, well organized and understandable manner, quickly became most popular and widely used of all gospels in early church, especially when educating new Christians. Its sensitivity to the continuity between Christianity and Judaism also made it valuable for Jews who were inquiring about the faith.
 - A central theme is the kingdom, the rule of God in human hearts and minds. This kingdom comes in Jesus, whom Matthew shows to be the messiah- not a king ruling over but a humble suffering messiah who offers the kingdom to those who freely submit to the will of God.
- **THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO LUKE (70 – 85 C.E.) JESUS THE COMPASSIONATE SAVIOUR**
- Luke wrote a two-volume work, a gospel and the acts of the apostles. Some identify him with Luke the physician, friend of Paul. He was a Gentile, hence he always needs to explain Jewish customs to his readers. He was from Antioch in Syria. He used Mark which was written earlier. Addresses a primarily Gentile audience . There is less emphasis on Law and Jewish ritual and more on Jesus' mercy and compassion, especially for women, the poor, outcasts, sinners and the afflicted. He did not know Jesus and had to rely on others who were eyewitnesses to Jesus' life.
 - Stresses the universal nature of salvation. Shows Jesus as friend to sinners, outcasts, suffering and particularly women. Christian message is for everyone. Luke illustrates that God, through Jesus, accepts the persons who are least expected to receive God's favour. Picture of Jesus who deeply loves all men and women.
 - Also reminds reader of joy that is shared by those who experience God's forgiving love in Jesus
 - He is a cultured and sensitive mind. Some of the optimism and joy of the early church breaks through his writing. The church is beginning to realize that the day of the Lord is not necessarily imminent. The coming of the Holy Spirit, for what ever length of time is the all important substitute.
 - Jesus of Luke is very human, sympathetic, merciful. Stresses mercy and compassion of Jesus. Also presents the demand to carry one's cross every day.
 - Sets out early to show the continuation of Christianity with Judaism of Hebrew Scriptures.
 - Emphasizes central role of the Spirit in Jesus' life. Even closes his gospel by stressing continuing presence of Jesus through the Spirit after Jesus' death and resurrection
- **LUKE'S ACTS OF THE APOSTLES (80 – 85 c.e.)**
- Concentrates on acts – work – of two apostles, Peter and Paul from the events of Ascension and Pentecost to Paul's captivity in Rome (63 C.E.) when the gospel has been preached to the ends of the known world. Luke's purpose is to show how the Christian community grew under the guidance and control of the Spirit.

- In pages of Acts, Christians begin to separate from Judaism, welcome Gentiles and spread the Good News to the world.
- **THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JOHN (90 – 100 C.E.): JESUS AS THE DIVINE SON OF GOD**
 - Beloved disciple is identified as the witness behind the gospel tradition in John 23:23 but John 21:20 – 23 contains a reference to his death. So clearly he cannot be the one and only author, even though he may be responsible for much of the gospel, which is the result of several stages of editing. Scholars suggest it might have been written by members of the community founded by the beloved disciple. The three epistles of John, seem to have come out of the same group, but some scholars suggest that a Christian prophet, also named John, but otherwise unknown, wrote the book of Revelation
 - Written for Johannine community – a group of house churches which originated among the various sects of Judaism in Palestine.
 - Writer may have known one or more of the other three gospels and certainly drew on traditions related to theirs. Several types of sources seem to be used: collection of miracle stories; collection of sayings of Jesus different from that behind the other gospels; earlier account of Jesus' passion, the empty tomb and resurrection appearances of Jesus.
 - Was strong attempt to present an understanding of Jesus as divine Son of God.
 - This is a different kind of gospel; John has the deepest theology as well as the longest and most dramatic accounts. Most symbolic of gospels, moving through the familiar, mysterious world of water, wine, blood, bread, life, light. His emphasis is on the already now rather than the not yet in history of Jesus' saving work. Attention paid to spiritual significance of apparently routine ordinary happenings
 - More forcefully than in others the mature faith of the church shines forth,. In John Jesus speaks with the majesty and assurance of one already raised to the right hand of the father, from the beginning of his public life. He is in command.
 - Differences from other gospels:
 - Jesus' words no longer focus on the kingdom of God or use proverbs and parables. Instead he speaks in symbolic
 - John presents ministry of Jesus over three years
 - He puts the death of Jesus on the day of preparation before Passover
 - He does not mention exorcism among the healings
 - In John the disciples recognize Jesus as Messiah from the beginning, while in other gospels this is the climax of Jesus' ministry in Galilee.