

## RESOURCES FOR READING THE BIBLE

### **The Moravian Understanding of the Nature of Scripture.**

Each church has some statement about the nature of Scripture and its authority. Such statements often are helpful in our study and use of Scripture. Many of the insights of this book on Reading the Bible are informed by the views held in the Moravian Church (Unitas Fratrum) which were worked out over the 540 years of its history. The Moravian Unity (international) Synod held in Tanzania in 1995 revised the section on Scripture in the *Ground of the Unity*, a Moravian doctrinal statement adopted in 1957. This statement best represents its tradition and practice. The commentary is by the author and not a part of the *Ground*.

#### § 4. God's Word and Doctrine

The Triune God as revealed in the Holy Scripture of the Old and New Testaments is the only source of our life and salvation; and this Scripture is the sole standard of the doctrine and faith of the Unitas Fratrum and therefore shapes our life.

Commentary: God is the source of life and salvation. Scripture reveals God and is the sole standard of the understandings we develop about belief and provides standards and resources to shape our living.

The Unitas Fratrum recognizes the Word of the Cross as the center of Holy Scripture and of all preaching of the Gospel and it sees its primary mission, and its reason for being, to consist in bearing witness to this joyful message. We ask our Lord for power never to stray from this.

Commentary: The message of the cross is central because it expresses not only the love and sacrifice of God, but the way that God is in the world and therefore the way we are in the world. God has chosen incarnation and service and rejected the use of coercive power. Christ has chosen to forever bear the marks of his wounds as long as we bear our human woundedness. Thus spirituality is always incarnate, the church is cross-like in its combination of humanness and cultural-historical conditioning with spirituality. But this is a joyful message for the Creator of the world and of every soul joins us in the struggles of our life. We are not saved out of the world, but in the world.

The Unitas Fratrum takes part in the continual search for sound doctrine. In interpreting Scripture and in the communication of doctrine in the Church, we look to two millennia of ecumenical Christian tradition and the wisdom of our Moravian forebears in the faith to guide us as we pray for fuller understanding

and ever clearer proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. But just as the Holy Scripture does not contain any doctrinal system, so the *Unitas Fratrum* also has not developed any of its own because it knows that the mystery of Jesus Christ, which is attested to in the Bible, cannot be comprehended completely by any human mind or expressed completely in any human statement. Also it is true that through the Holy Spirit the recognition of God's will for salvation in the Bible is revealed completely and clearly.

Commentary: The Bible does not contain a system of doctrine. What is truly its "system" is the person of Christ who includes all that Scripture would say in himself. This is also the "mystery of Christ" for the truth which is in him is beyond full comprehension. We as humans only know in limited ways that which transcends us (as Paul indicates in I Cor. 13:9ff). But the will of God for salvation is clear in the Bible and if we have Christ we have all we need. And the Spirit helps us to know what is essential. Two thousand years of Christian tradition and wisdom also help us both to understand Scripture and to proclaim the meaning of the Gospel.

## Old Testament

The Old Testament which most Protestants use today is due to a decision made during the Reformation to eliminate books which were part of the Old Testament up to the time of the Reformation and to return to the number and form of books in the *Hebrew Old Testament* (determined by Palestinian Judaism by the end of the 1st century AD). The books eliminated we now call the *OT Apocrypha* (a word that means "secret" or "hidden"). Up to the Reformation the church used an Old Testament which was patterned after the *Septuagint* (the Greek translation of the OT made by Jews in Egypt, but taken over by the early church and consequently rejected by Judaism). The *Septuagint* was the basis for the *Vulgate Latin* translation made by Jerome in the 4th century, which Latin version became the primary Bible used by the Western church which used Latin. This larger Old Testament, patterned after the *Septuagint*, was the Old Testament of much of the earliest church as it moved into a Greek speaking world and away from its original Palestinian-Jewish roots. The *Septuagint* is frequently quoted in the NT (80% of the OT quotations in the NT are from the *Septuagint*), although there is still some quotation from the *Hebrew Old Testament* and from *Aramaic Targums* (Aramaic translations of the Old Testament) which at the time of Jesus and Paul were only oral, to be written down and formalized in the 2nd century AD. To properly appreciate the Old Testament it is important to understand the transitions through which it went and to know that different Christians used it in different forms.

Also, up until recently the earliest evidence we had for the *Hebrew OT* was a scroll possessed by the Samaritans, dated about 1,000 AD. Since a group of scholars called the Masoretes had gone over the OT manuscripts and established a standard Hebrew text about the sixth cent. AD, we had little idea as to what the Hebrew text might have been like at the time of Jesus and Paul. It was only with the discovery of the *Dead Sea Scrolls*

that we have been able to see that the Hebrew text of the Old Testament did exist in differing forms.

All of this explains why some OT texts quoted in the New Testament are difficult to locate in the OT which we use today.

## Old Testament History

The Books of the Old Testament should be seen against the background of major historical epochs. Since this history covers a long time, it may seem very complicated for the reader. It may be best just to refer to this when one reads various books in the OT. It would be good to develop a basic knowledge of the history, but what is below is only an outline. At least one should have some familiarity with the **identity stories** marked below with an fs. There is a summary of this in the “Basic Story” just previous to this section.

### Prehistory:

Creation - with particular attention to the role of humans in life

19th cent. BC - Period of the *Patriarchs* especially Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Esau

**Middle to late 13th cent.** - *Exodus* from slavery in Egypt and settlement of Canaan, the Promised Land, Moses, Joshua and the Judges

**Much of the first five OT books deal with this period.** These five books are the **Law** or the **Torah** (teaching). They are sometimes called the **Pentateuch** from a Greek word for five. For Judaism this was the most important part and central revelation in the Old Testament.

\*\*[These early stories constitute the **identity stories** by which Israel, and later the church, understood itself. Even Islam had them in some form.

-God created the world. Humans (Adam- “man” and Eve- “mother”) were given a special place, but introduced distortions into life because they failed to obey God and so were excluded from the ideal garden of Eden. They have two children and Cain slays Abel.

-God makes a new covenant with Noah after the flood in an attempt to remake the world and solve its problems.

-Humans build the Tower of Babel. God scatters them and creates different languages.

-Abraham was called to go to a “promised land” and become the father of a great nation. God makes a covenant with him which makes him father of Jews, later Christians and Muslims. Abraham was tested when called upon to sacrifice his only son Isaac, but God provides a substitute animal.

-The Twelve tribes of Israel settle in Egypt. They are later enslaved there.

-Under Moses the Jews are delivered from Egypt (the Exodus) and the Law and a covenant are given at Mt. Sinai.

-The Jews settle (conquer) the promised land under Joshua.

Christians in the NT saw these events as symbolizing what God would do in Christ.]

1020-925 BC **United Kingdom** (Saul, David, Solomon)

For some time the Jews consisted of a loose federation of tribes led by “judges” and prophets such as Samuel. With the rise of Philistine power it became necessary to develop centralized government in the form of a king. Saul was the first and in his successor’s time, David, the power of the Israelite kingdom is

consolidated and Jerusalem is established as capital. Solomon builds upon this with great building projects and improvement of commerce, but increase in taxation. He builds the Temple. The kingdom of David's time becomes the ideal time of Jewish history. With Solomon's death the kingdom splits, the David monarchy continuing only in the south.

- 925 **Divided Kingdom** (Israel in the North and Judah in the South)
- 721 **Fall of Israel** (North) to Assyria      **Prophets often spoke to these**
- 586 **Fall of Jerusalem** (Judah) to Babylon      **historical tragedies**  
**Babylonian Captivity** - many Jews exiled in Babylon form the beginning of a long-lasting Jewish community. Judaism develops focused on the Law and a concern for maintaining identity, using the Synagogue and learning to live without the Temple
- 538 **Persian Rule**  
 Jews permitted to return to Judah 538  
 Temple rebuilt 520-515      **Some prophets deal with this restoration**  
 Some prophetic books are an accumulation of materials from various periods. Isaiah was a prophet of the 8th cent. to whose prophecies (chpts. 1-39) were added materials from the Persian period (Chpts. 40-66)  
 Ezra (458) and Nehemiah (445) provide leadership for the return. Judaism is concerned about maintaining its identity and purity.
- 330-301 **Greek Rule**  
 336-323 Alexander the Great
- 301-198 **Ptolemaic control**  
 Egyptian remnant of Alexander's Kingdom. Fairly tolerant rule of Palestine. Large Jewish community in Alexandria begins translation of OT into Greek.
- 198-168 **Seleucid/Syrian control**      **Most OT material written by this time**  
 Syrian remnant of Alexander's Kingdom  
 Tried to Hellenize Jews and eliminate distinctives of Judaism.  
 168 Desecration of Jewish Temple under Antiochus IV
- 167 **Revolt of the Jews** (Maccabees)      **Book of Daniel deals with this**  
 163 Jerusalem retaken by Jews
- 166-63 **Maccabean/Hasmonean Jewish Dynasty**  
 About a hundred years of Jewish rule after a long time of control by others. The Jews annex surrounding areas.
- 63ff **Roman Rule** starts, Herodian family and Roman Governors rule Palestine  
 Jesus born 4 BC and crucified about 30 AD
- 66-72 AD **Jewish Revolt** against the Romans and Jerusalem destroyed
- 90 AD **Synod of Jamnia** establishes the third section of the OT, the **Writings**, as part of the OT which up to the time of Jesus was officially the **Law and Prophets**. Thus the essential compass of the Palestinian canon of the OT or Hebrew Scriptures was determined.

## Our Old Testament

Our present Old Testament is translation of the Hebrew-Palestinian OT, though the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Church also make use of materials from the Septuagint Greek OT and most Protestant Bibles now also include these materials in a separate section called the Old Testament Apocrypha.

Genesis - Creation, the ancestors/patriarchs of Israel, journey of Israelites into Egypt.

Exodus - Israelites delivered from bondage in Egypt, journey to Sinai where covenant is made and they receive the commandments.

Leviticus - Priestly material which deals with religious practices and the need to maintain holiness.

Numbers - Israelite journey in the wilderness.

Deuteronomy - the "second law" or reinterpretation of Moses' teaching, expressed as Moses' farewell address to the people.

Joshua - Story of the conquest of the Promised Land

Judges - The exploits of tribal and national heroes in continuing the conquest.

Ruth - Story of a Moabite woman who marries a Hebrew and how on her husband's death she shares the fortunes of her husband's people. She is great-grandmother of King David.

I and II Samuel - Originally one book. The stories of Samuel, Saul and David and the beginnings of the Hebrew monarchy.

I and II Kings - Originally one book and a continuation of Samuel. It begins with King Solomon and it covers from the middle of the ninth century to the middle of the sixth. It tells the story of the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah resulting from the split after Solomon and tells of the conquest of Israel by Assyria and Judah by Babylon.

I and II Chronicles - Originally one book, often considered a part of a larger work which included Ezra and Nehemiah. Idealized presentations of David and Solomon.

Ezra - Originally Ezra-Nehemiah were a single book and a continuation of Chronicles. The story of the return of the Jews from Babylonian Exile and the restoration of Jewish religion and Jerusalem.

Nehemiah - Return of Nehemiah from Babylon to govern Judah, rebuild walls of Jerusalem, and reestablish Jewish religion.

Esther - A story set in the Persian period to describe the origin of the Jewish festival of Purim. Jews are saved from persecution by Esther, a Jew, who marries the Persian king.

Job - A story of a righteous man who is tested by extreme suffering and through struggles keeps his faith.

Psalms - The hymnal of ancient Israel. Many were composed for Temple worship.

Proverbs - A collection of moral and religious instruction taught in circles of wise men.

Ecclesiastes - Reflections of a wise man on the meaning of existence and the good one can find in life. He sees life somewhat pessimistically as “vanity.” This and Proverbs belong to a type of literature classified as “Wisdom Literature.”

Song of Solomon - A collection of love poems.

Isaiah - Message of 8th cent. prophet to Israel, to which later prophecies from the sixth cent. added (chpts. 40-66)

Jeremiah - Prophecies against Judah and Jerusalem - late 7th to early 6th cent.

Lamentations - Laments over the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians.

Ezekiel Prophecies by Ezekiel, a priest, before and after the fall of Jerusalem in the 6th cent.

Daniel - Stories and dream visions described as taking place during the Babylonian Exile and predicting the ultimate victory of God and God’s people. The genre of this book is Apocalyptic which was to become an important type of literature and thought in Judaism and Christianity. Apocalyptic literature used visions as a vehicle and predicted the course of the future and God’s ultimate victory. The book of Revelation in the NT is Apocalyptic.

Hosea - Prophecies God’s love and demonstrates it out by marrying a prostitute. Prophet to Israel.

Joel - A prophet of about the 4th century who viewed a plague of locusts as the Day of God’s judgment.

Amos - 8th cent. prophet against Israel and her neighbors. Calls for justice.

Obadiah - A very short book dealing with return of Jewish exiles and punishment of neighboring Edomites.

Jonah - A narrative about a prophet called to preach repentance to Nineveh, a non-Jewish city. He tries to flee God, is caught in a storm and swallowed by a fish and eventually goes to Nineveh. He then objects when Nineveh does repent.

Micah - A contemporary of Isaiah who prophesied concerning Judah and Samaria, judging the failures of these nations from the perspective of a villager.

Nahum - Late 7th cent., a poem celebrating the destruction of Nineveh and Assyrian power.

Habakkuk - Late 7th cent., struggles over why wicked flourish and righteous suffer. Concludes that the righteous shall live by faith.

Zephaniah - Late 7th cent., judgment on Judah and surrounding countries, but hope for those who wait patiently for the Lord.

Haggai - In 520 BC Haggai exhorts the governor and high priest to rebuild the Temple.

Zechariah - at time of Haggai also exhorted rebuilding of Temple, employing the style of night visions and dialogues with God.

Malachi - About 500-450 BC he calls on Jews to be faithful to God's covenant and speaks of the Day of the Lord and the return of the prophet Elijah.

### **Old Testament Apocrypha**

These books were produced in the period from second century BC to first century AD, the period known as the *Intertestamental Period* or the period between the Old and New Testaments. Many of them were in the Greek version of the Old Testament in some form. They represent the views of Judaism at the time the New Testament came into being and so are important for those who would understand the Jewish background of the New Testament. The average Christian reader will need to think about whether he or she wishes to or has the time to read these books. A good way to start is to read II Esdras and Ecclesiasticus to sample two important types of Jewish thought, Apocalyptic and Wisdom literature.

I Esdras (or III Esdras) - includes some of II Chron., Ezra, and some of Nehemiah

II Esdras - a Jewish "Apocalypse" which has been Christianized; a series of revelations from the angel Uriel to Ezra

Tobit - Tobit, blind and poor, and Sarah, haunted by demons, are helped by the angel Raphael.

Judith - Judith seduces the Assyrian general Holofernes and beheads him.

Esther with additions which supply a religious element lacking in the original.

The Wisdom of Solomon - about Wisdom and the way she (personified Wisdom) has worked in Jewish history.

Ecclesiasticus, or the Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach - the teachings of a Jewish teacher of wisdom. Sirach's grandson translates it into Greek for Jews in Egypt.

Baruch - presented as by Baruch, secretary to Jeremiah.

The Letter of Jeremiah - presented as a letter to Jews about to be taken captive in Babylon

The Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three young Men - additions to Daniel 3, the story of three young men cast into a furnace

Susanna - addition to Daniel - Susanna is cleared of a false charge of adultery.

Bell and the Dragon - addition to Daniel to discredit heathen worship.

The Prayer of Manasseh - a classic of penitential devotion.

I Maccabees - a history from the time of Alexander the Great to the Maccabean revolution against the Seleucid rulers in Syria who tried to eliminate Jewish religion

II Maccabees - an abridgment of a five vol. history, now lost, covering somewhat the same period as I Maccabees but with strong theological interests. He celebrates the deeds of the martyrs from Syrian/Seleucid persecution.

## The New Testament

See the Historical Outline of Early Christianity which follows for historical information. The fact that the New Testament contains fewer books than the Old and that it covers a very short period of history (no more than 75 years) means that it will be easier to become acquainted with than the Old Testament. Basically the New Testament contains stories (Gospels) about Jesus and what he taught as the starting point of telling the Christian story. Then there is the book of Acts, the only history of the early church included, which takes the Christian story from the resurrection of Jesus through the spread and mission of the early church until it arrives in Rome. Paul is the primary character of Acts. Then much of the rest consists of correspondence of significant persons to churches or individuals, the largest amount being from Paul. The New Testament concludes with the book of Revelation, a prediction of the future and God's ultimate victory strongly influenced by Jewish Apocalyptic thought.

*Gospels* (Stories of Jesus' life and teaching preserving tradition which was the foundation for the preaching and teaching of the early church. These were placed first even though the letters of Paul were earlier.

**Matthew:** Jesus is the Jewish Messiah and descended from David and Abraham (1:1). Particularly he is like a new Moses giving a new Law from a new mountain (5-7, Sermon on Mount). The mission of the church is to make disciples and teach them to observe Jesus' commandments (28:18-20).

**Mark:** Mark presents the beginning of the Gospel ("beginning" is a word that in Greek means basic principles or content and not just beginning in time) (1:1). Jesus comes to be a servant, rejecting the use of power. He came not to be served, but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many. (10:43-45) Mark has no infancy narrative and no resurrection narratives, though he has an announcement of the resurrection to the women at the tomb.

**Luke:** As a conscious historian Luke writes that "Theophilus" (a "lover of God") may know the truth concerning information previously received about Jesus (1:1-4). Jesus sets forth his mission in the Nazareth synagogue where he quotes from Isaiah (4:16-19) indicating that he would make changes in the problems of the world. The Spirit of God was upon him to preach good news to the poor, proclaim release to captives, preach recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those oppressed, to proclaim that the time has come when God would change things ("the acceptable year of the Lord"). Much of this happens in the stories Luke narrates. Luke and Matthew have stories of Jesus' infancy, but they are quite different. Luke, as well as John, includes much material about the role of women in the ministry of Jesus.

**John:** John expresses his theme in 20:31: "these (things) are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name." The theme of Jesus as a bringer of life often appears. The final

editor of the Gospel in 21:24 says that the beloved disciple had written about the events which he includes and that this disciple was very close to Jesus (13:23) and therefore knew well what Jesus was about. Instead of an infancy narrative describing historical events he has a highly theological Prologue. Jesus is presented as the Son of Man who came down from heaven and he speaks openly about the heavenly things he knows, something he does not seem to do in the other Gospels.

### *Church History*

Acts - is placed after the Gospels to tell what happened when the Gospel about Jesus was preached. It is a companion volume to the Gospel of Luke and by the same author. Since it is largely about Paul and his missions it provides a natural background for the Pauline Letters. Acts begins just after Jesus' resurrection and continues the story to about 62 AD. It leaves out a lot of early Christian history the author felt did not contribute to his purposes. It emphasizes the continuing work of the Spirit, which came upon Jesus, Mary and others, in the church.

*Paul's Letters* (they seem to be arranged in terms of size and importance rather than chronologically)

Romans - a later Pauline letter written to explain his theology to Christians in Rome where he hoped to visit. This is his most formal theological exposition.

I Corinthians - Paul deals with a series of problems in Corinth where he started a church on his second mission journey. There are many problems: disunity, immorality, differences over eating food offered to idols, spiritual gifts and what constitutes legitimate spiritual experience, the nature of the resurrection, etc. There are some problems in the text of I Corinthians. The material on women being veiled (11:3-16) and denying women open participation in the life of the church (14:34-36), the material in 11:27-32 on people dying because they partook of the Lord's Supper unworthily, and 14:22 which seems to contradict the logic of the passage in which it exists, all of these seem possibly later additions.

II Corinthians - There were really four Corinthian letters of which we have only two though many think one of the lost letters was really II Cor. 10-13 which was added to II Cor.. It deals with some resolution of problems at Corinth, an understanding of the nature of the Christian life and the effect of the body on this, the collection which Paul was taking for Jerusalem, and Paul's own experience of the limits of life and the blessings of God (see 11-12).

Galatians - A major work describing Paul's theology in the context of challenges to his theology in the churches he started in Galatia on his first missionary journey. Chapters 1-2 are especially valuable because of all the autobiographical materials they contain. It is intensely argumentative because it is written to deal with conflict and opposition.

Ephesians - A letter about the new life in Christ and the way Jews and Gentiles have been brought together in Christ. It contains a Household Code, particularly in 5-6, dealing with how persons in the household should behave: husbands, wives, parents, children, slaves, masters. There is a similar section in Colossians and I Peter. In Ephes. 6 there is the famous passage about putting on spiritual armor. Many think that Paul may not have written this letter.

Philippians - A letter from prison containing the great hymn of 2:5-11 dealing with how Christ emptied himself and assumed the form of a servant. 3:2ff is often considered another letter because of its change of tone.

Colossians - Colossians also contains a famous Christ hymn in 1:15-20 about Christ as the image of the invisible God. In chapter 2:8-15 Paul presents the meaning of Christ's death and resurrection in terms of his conquest of humanness (flesh) and cosmic powers, a different religious language especially suited to Gentiles rather than Jews. In 3-4 there is a Household Code.

I Thessalonians - Paul writes to Christians at Thessalonica out of concern for their suffering and possible misinterpretation of the second coming and the resurrection.

II Thessalonians - Scholars have long noted that this is different in style and thought than I Thess. The Thessalonian letters have three names on them as writers: Paul, Silas, and Timothy. Some think Silas wrote this letter. It sounds as if it is very influenced by Apocalyptic thought, such as in Revelation.

I Timothy - This is written to Timothy to encourage his ministry. However, it seems to have a number of later additions: a very negative attitude towards women, very stringent qualifications for ministers, and an order of widows with a novitiate. Much of this does not sound like it could come from the time of Paul.

II Timothy - A rather sad letter written while Paul was in prison anticipating death.

Titus - A letter to Titus about handling congregational problems.

Philemon - A letter to Philemon about taking back and forgiving a runaway slave.

Hebrews - Traditionally this was assigned to Paul but its thought is quite different from any Pauline letter. Many of its images are drawn from priestly Judaism and Jesus is seen as a high priest who went into the heavenly temple to offer himself as a sin-offering. Chapters 11-12 contains the passage on the great cloud of witnesses who surround the Christian life and encourage the Christian to run his/her race with perseverance.

*Catholic or General Epistles*

James - A sermon in the form of a letter stressing the importance of the Christian life. It is like a Christian piece of Wisdom literature. Tradition says it was written by James, brother of Jesus.

I Peter - One of the greatest, but lesser known, letters in the NT. Peter writes to Gentile converts struggling with their Christian identity and the living of the Christian life. The Household Code of 2:11ff is the only one written to advise Christians on how to relate to non-Christians. Its images are very Jewish and it indicates a very simple stage in the development of the organization of the church and its ministry. It is interesting to explore how the issues of Peter presented in the Gospels are resolved here in his letter.

II Peter - usually considered not by Peter and the latest book in the New Testament (first half of the second century). It undergirds faith in the second coming of Christ and warns against false teachers.

I John - When reading the Gospel of John and I John we gain the impression that a particular Christian community lies behind them (note use of "we" and "our" in Jn. 21:24, I John 1:1-4). This community had a strong emphasis on experience of Jesus and of the Spirit which resulted in some viewing Jesus as a purely spiritual being, denying that he really was also human and that his death had any meaning. This group left this community (see 2:18-25). This little theological treatise (not really a letter) was written to argue that Jesus did come in the flesh and that his death provides forgiveness of sins. Because the community had just experienced serious differences, there is a strong call to members to love one another.

II John - a very short letter concerned with many of the same issues in I John.

III John - A call for hospitality for Christian missionaries and a criticism of one who opposes the author and his representatives.

Jude - Warns against false teachers and urges acceptance of the faith "once and for all delivered to the saints."

*An Apocalypse* (*Apokalupsis* in Greek and *Revelatio* in Latin mean "revelation")

Revelation - A piece of Christian apocalyptic literature beginning with letters to seven Christian churches in Asia Minor and continuing with visions about heaven and the impending end of the world. There is little disagreement that John on the Island of Patmos wrote the first three chapters, including the letters; but except for the last chapters the rest sounds very Jewish and Jesus has little significance. The name of Jesus is not even mentioned in chapters 4-11. We know that apocalypses often were used and added to by those who later used them. The final form of the book comes from the end of the first century (the time of John), but most historical allusions in the book seem to come from the period of the war of the Jews against the Romans in 66-73 AD. Revelation is placed at the end of the New Testament because of the way it deals with the end of time and the second coming

of Jesus. The material in the book speaks of Jesus as coming again in the 1st century. Because it is placed in the NT with literature which disagrees with some of it's views, it needs to be qualified by the other books. It has some wonderful images.

## Historical Outline of Early Christianity

### 6 B.C. to 30 A.D. THE LIFE OF JESUS

- 6-4 B.C. -Jesus is born in Bethlehem of Judaea.  
 -Most of Jesus life, until about 30 years of age, is then spent in Nazareth of Galilee. We have little information about this period.

### 28-30 A.D.-Jesus' Public Ministry

- 28 -Jesus' Baptism in the Jordan River, Temptation and the beginning of his public ministry - in Judaea.  
 28-29 -The Galilean Ministry - largely to the north and west of the Sea of Galilee. This was the longest period of his ministry and the Synoptic Gospels are primarily concerned with this period.  
 29 -The Northern Ministry - in areas of Tyre and Sidon, Decapolis and Caesarea Philippi, areas largely non-Jewish. Treated briefly in Matt. & Mk. only.  
 30 -The Later Ministry - Some of the Gospels indicate this as being primarily in Jerusalem, Judaea. Luke and John indicate that Jesus may also have gone into Samaria and Peraea. The last portion of this takes place at Passover time and includes such events as: triumphal entry, cleansing of the Temple, Last Supper, Gethsemane and Jesus' betrayal, his trials, crucifixion, death, burial and resurrection.

### 30-62 PARTIAL HISTORY OF THE EARLY CHURCH AS DESCRIBED IN ACTS

- (Acts presents a very limited description of the development of early Christianity. Chapters 1-12 center primarily on the history of the Jerusalem Church, dealing with some spread of Christianity within Palestine. Chaps. 13-28 treat primarily the activities and mission enterprises of Paul. Through Paul's efforts Christianity is taken to Cyprus, Asia Minor, Greece and Rome. However, we know that Christianity preceded Paul to Rome and that during his lifetime it spread to northern Asia Minor where he did not go. Of the activities of the other leaders of the early church we know little.)
- 30 -Pentecost-Spiritual experience by which the church understood itself to be empowered for its mission.
- 30-31 -Martyrdom of Stephen and Conversion of Saul (Paul) -The church spreads because of its missions and the scattering of Christians through persecution.
- 47-48 -Paul's First Missionary Journey into Cyprus and lower Galatia. First church Council is held on his return
- 49-52 -Paul's Second Missionary Journey into Asia Minor, Macedonia and Achaia, with a long stay at Corinth.
- 53-57 -Paul's Third Missionary Journey into Asia Minor (with a long stay at Ephesus), Macedonia and Achaia.

## Christian Literature

Jesus produced no literature, but taught his disciples according to Jewish practice where they preserved teachings in memory.

During this period the information about Jesus' life and teachings is preserved primarily in the memory of the church and the remaining eyewitnesses to Jesus life - e.g. I Cor. 11:23-26, 15:3-8; discussed in Luke 1:1-4.

Letter to Galatians

First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians

I Cor., later additions on women  
 2 letters, put together into II Cor.  
 Romans

57-59	-Paul arrested in Jerusalem and imprisoned in Caesarea for two years.	Philippians, Ephesians, Colossians and Philemon
59-62	-Paul is taken to Rome for trial and is held there under guard for two years.	
62-100	-This was in many ways a crisis period for the early church. All of the Apostles are dead by the end of this period and Jesus had not returned as many in the early church expected. Jerusalem falls to the Roman armies and the center of the church in Jerusalem disappears, its viewpoints to live on only in certain Jewish Christian groups. The destruction of Judaism and a Jewish-Christian hostility begins which can be traced in the N.T. materials and Jewish tradition. Christianity continues its expansion into the urban centers of the ancient world and begins a process of clarification and formation of belief and development and strengthening of its ministries and organization. Not only are conflicts with Judaism apparent, but also with non-Jewish religions and the government and even within Christianity. Of course, some of the above can even be noted in the previous period.	
64	-Death of Peter at Rome during persecution under Nero which followed burning of Rome.	I Peter
62-68	-Paul - Paul died during this period, but it is unclear when. The "Pastoral letters" and other N.T. information indicate that Paul may have carried on further work in the Mediterranean Area (Crete, Asia Minor, Macedonia) and returned to Rome where he was put to death. He also earlier indicated a desire to go to Spain.	Pastorals - I & II Timothy and Titus would have been written here if they are connected with Paul, I Tim. shows signs of later additions.
70	-Destruction of Jerusalem and conclusion of the Jewish revolt against Rome (another serious revolt was to take place in the 2nd cent.)	
65-90	-New Testament Gospels written. This was made imperative by the needs of the church and the death of most of those who had known Jesus.	Earliest form of Luke and the book of Acts 62-64 (originally companion volumes), earlier Gospel used in John (Jn. 21:24); Mark-65 Matt., final forms of John and Luke 70-90
90	-Persecution of Christians under Domitian	Revelation
100-180	-This is a period on which we have a paucity of information. We have some information for this period in what are known as the Apostolic Fathers whose literature some felt should be included in the New Testament (Clement of Rome-96; Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch-ca. 115; Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna-d. 156; Papias, Bishop of Hierapolis). A few N.T. books were written in this period. The Apostles Creed was probably formed by early 2nd cent. We also know of severe struggles with particular forms of early Christianity: Gnosticism: Here Marcion of Rome is representative. The humanity of Jesus was rejected. A selection was made of Christian literature which fitted his views (probably the first conscious N.T.). He rejected the	II Peter, Jude (other N.T. books not mentioned are difficult to date, but were probably written in the last quarter of the 1st Cent.)  Apostolic Fathers, including such as: I and II Clement Teaching of the 12 Letter of Barnabas Shepherd of Hermas Seven letters of Ignatius Letter of Polycarp to the Philippians and Martyrdom

material world and the Jewish background of Christianity, including the O.T.  
 Montanism: A movement in Asia Minor which emphasized the nearness of Christ's coming and spiritual inspiration.

of Polycarp

Some of the material called the N.T. Apocrypha originated during this period: Gospels, Acts, Letters and Apocalypses reflecting the variant views and interests of various groups.

185 -Here, with Irenaeus, Bishop in Gaul, we enter a period of greater historical information. Christianity has spread to Egypt, North Africa, Italy, Gaul, Germany and Spain.

313 -The Roman Emperor Constantine, after years of some severe Roman persecution of Christianity, provides for the toleration and recognition of Christianity. By this time Christianity has spread throughout the empire.

367 -Letter of Athanasius recognizing a Canon of our 27 N.T. books.

Though many N.T. books were accepted by the 2nd Cent., others took much longer.

325 and 451 -Councils of Nicaea and Chalcedon - formulation of a definition of the nature of Christ - true God and true man.

[Throughout the history of the Christian church communal forms or statements of faith were developed which expressed the faith of the community. A very simple one is "Jesus is Lord" which appears in the NT (I Cor. 12:3) and was likely the baptismal confession in the early church. We also find other formulations of faith, such as II Tim. 2:11-13, Col. 1:15-20, Phil. 2:5-11. The *Apostles Creed* developed by the second century, but most likely did not come from the Apostles. This Creed included three *articles*, or paragraphs. Often these paragraphs are talked about as "articles". The *first* deals with *God the Father* who is creator, the *second* deals with *the Son* primarily in the form of a narrative paragraph about his life, and then the *third* includes everything else. The *first item in the third article is the Holy Spirit* and so often in the interpretation of this third article all the other items are somehow connected with the Spirit. They include the church, communion of the saints, forgiveness of sins, resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Connected with the Church of Rome, it was not accepted by the eastern or Orthodox Churches.

The next major creed was that of Nicaea (325) and Constantinople (381) which we usually know as the *Nicene Creed*. Here more attention was given to the *second article* and the further definition of the nature of Christ, seeking to respond to the debates about Jesus going on at that time. He is now described as true God and true human, one substance with the Father, creator of all things, though the narrative material about his life is retained. The *third article* now contains more information about the Spirit, who proceeds from the Father and is worshipped along with the Father and Son. At the Third Council of Toledo (589) a phrase (called *filioque* meaning in Latin "and from the son") was added in the West to indicate that the Spirit proceeded from the Son as well as the Father, something which helped to cause the separation of Eastern and Western Christianity by the 11th century. These two Creeds became standard expressions of faith in Christianity. They are considered *ecumenical* because they really belong to the whole church.]

### **Some Possible Favorite NT Passages**

*Look down the list and see what speaks to you. Then read the passage.*

Matthew 5-7 Sermon on the Mount - a collection of Jesus' sayings expressing the way Christians in the Matthaean community understood the Christian life. 6:25-33 Don't be anxious about life. Seek God's kingdom first.

11:25-30 Come to me all who labor and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you.

20:1-16 Generosity of God compared to a person who paid his workers the same wage, no matter how long they worked.

Mark 4:1-20 Parable of the Sower

9:1-13 Jesus' Transfiguration

9:14-29 Child healed. All things possible. Help my unbelief.

10:35-45 Whoever would be great must be servant.

12:28-34 The two great commandments: love God and love neighbor as self.

14:12-26 The Last Supper

Luke 1-2 Luke's narrative of Jesus infancy, including the story of John the Baptist's birth. This story is especially important for the way it portrays Mary as a model for the Christian life, as one who bears God's Spirit and is obedient to God. Luke mentions many women in his Gospel.

4:1-15 Jesus' temptation in the wilderness

4:16-30 Jesus in the Nazareth Synagogue describes his mission.

10:38-11:13 Mary and Martha and the "one thing needful" and Jesus' teaching on prayer.

15 Three parables: lost sheep, lost coin, lost son -- all about who matters to God.

24 Stories about Jesus' resurrection.

John 1:1-18 The Prologue to the Gospel identifying Jesus with the "Word" or "Wisdom" of God which preexisted his birth. It describes the meaning of Jesus which will be developed in the Gospel.

2:1-11 Jesus provides wine for a wedding.

3:1-21 The story of Nicodemus. Jesus indicates that we must enter a new life which is from above, be born of the Spirit.

4:1-45 Jesus discusses many things with a Samaritan woman who becomes an evangelist to her people.

5:1-18 The healing of a man sick for 38 years which broke the law about keeping the Sabbath.

6 Jesus feeds the 5,000. He is the Bread from Heaven.

9 The healing of a blind man which creates arguments about who Jesus is.

10:7-18 I am the good Shepherd.

11:1-44 The resurrection of Lazarus.

13:1-20 Jesus washes his disciples feet.

15:1-11 Jesus is the vine and we are the branches.

15:12-17 Command to love. You are not servants, but friends.

17:20-26 Jesus' prayer for the oneness of the church.

- 20 The resurrection appearances, with special emphasis on Mary Magdalene and Thomas.
- Acts 2 The story of Pentecost, the spiritual experience which helped the church to be born.  
10 Peter has a vision which directs him to the Roman centurion Cornelius and Cornelius also has a vision which leads him to expect Peter.
- Romans 1:8-17 Paul's description of his mission and the Gospel.  
3:19-31 All fall short, but God accepts and justifies us if we are ready to receive it in faith.  
7:7-8:4 The inner struggle and difficulty of doing good. Freedom from sin and death in Christ.  
8:28-39 Though life has many difficulties, God works for good in all of them and nothing can separate one from God's love in Christ.
- I Corinthians 1:10-31 Dealing with dissensions in the church. Since God chose us we cannot break relationships with each other.  
12 Spiritual gifts and the church as the body of Christ with many members.  
13 The still more excellent way of love.  
15 Evidence for and the meaning of Christ's resurrection.
- II Corinthians 1:3-7 God comforts us that we may comfort others.  
4:7-12 We have the treasure of God in our earthen vessels (our bodies, our humanness).  
11:21-12:10 Paul discusses his suffering and his religious experiences, and discovers that God's grace is sufficient for him in his weakness.
- Galatians 6:1-5 Restoring a person in a spirit of gentleness.
- Ephesians 1:3-10 God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in Christ.  
2:1-10 Made alive through God's grace, we are God's workmanship.  
6:10-20 Put on the armor of God.
- Philippians 2:1-11 Have Jesus' mind in you, do nothing from selfishness. Jesus humbled himself.  
4:8-9 Whatever is honorable, just -- think on this.
- Colossians 1:9-14 Prayer for strength and endurance for the Christian life.  
1:15-20 Christ is the image of the invisible God, reconciling all things.  
3:1-17 Put on the Christian life.
- Hebrews 11 Definition of faith, examples of faith.  
12:1-2 Run the race of life, surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses, looking to Jesus.
- James 1:22-25 Be doers of the word, not just hearers.
- I Peter 1:3-9 Born anew to a living hope and to an inheritance in heaven by Jesus' resurrection.  
3:12-18 Reverence Christ as Lord. Make a defense of the Gospel with gentleness. Don't be afraid.  
4:7-11 Use the gifts of God's varied grace.
- II Peter 1:3-11 Divine power has been granted you to become partakers of the divine nature.
- I John 1:5-10 Jesus cleanses us from all sin.  
3:1-3 God loves us and makes us God's children.  
4:13-21 God is love and who abides in love abides in God.
- Revelation 4-5 Vision of God and the Lamb in heaven.  
21:1-8 Vision of the new heaven and earth.

**Your Favorite Passages**

List the passages which have come to mean something to you and why (if you are aware of this)

PASSAGES

MEANING FOR ME