

## 12 The Bible: The New Testament

The various books collected in the New Testament represent a very unusual set of data. There is no other moment of ancient history so well documented, no life as fully reported as that of Jesus. Even the Church, after these initial texts (everything in the New Testament was written before A.D. 100), returns to normal near silence for at least a century.

Jesus (the name is really Yeshua, a form of Joshua) wrote nothing, like Socrates. Judging from the silence of the four Gospels, he spent much of his life in unspectacular normality. Then, when he was about 30, he began to speak out, reading the Hebrew Scriptures during the services in the synagogues (Jewish church buildings) so that we may assume that he had studied Hebrew somewhere. He began to travel and teach in the region of Galilee, in the north quite a long way from Jerusalem, where the village people were particularly devout Jews, often living very poor lives rather than mingle with the pagan world. A group of men and women (disciples) formed round him and followed him. Some had been influenced by his cousin John the Baptist who had preached beside the Jordan but had then been imprisoned and executed by Herod Antipas. His execution seems almost to have been the sign for Jesus to start proclaiming in turn that the Kingdom of God was near.

Jesus is shown as a man with no house of his own, of great kindness, which he showed by healing those who were sick and crazy with despair, feeding those who hungered to see God's love. At last, going up to Jerusalem, he was seen as a threat by the powerful religious leaders there. They had him executed by the Romans some three years after he first began teaching in Galilee.

In the Gospels, Jesus is not shown founding a church organization or a new religion. His concern is to renew the Jewish understanding of God and the Law. It is only after his death that the really new declaration comes: "Jesus is Lord, Messiah." His followers, who had called Jesus "Teacher," set out with the message of his Resurrection, saying that he had been seen alive after his death, that his tomb was empty, that he had been taken up into heaven and had sent the Holy Spirit as the sign of God's enduring active presence with them.

The Jews had been looking for a Kingdom, for the coming of the powerful Messianic King shown in Apocalyptic writings. Now Jesus had experienced weakness, failure and death, which was not what the Messiah was expected to do. Yet the "Gospel" (Good News; in Greek and Latin *evangelium*) arose out of this. The death of Jesus became the supreme victory of God's love. Jesus was the Christ (Greek for Messiah, the Anointed).

Very quickly the first believers found that other people were interested in their message, not only Jews. The whole world seemed full of people thirsting for an encounter between the divine and the human. The Jews had divided the world into Jews and Gentiles, they believed that they had been specially chosen by God. The first Christians realized that this division had been superseded. Jesus had only spoken Aramaic, the first Christians used the international Greek language.

The Letters (often called Epistles) written by Paul are the oldest texts of the New Testament. Paul probably never saw Jesus alive, and when he first heard about the people preaching his resurrection, his reaction was hostile, he helped have them arrested. Paul (at that time called Saul), was a Jewish scholar (Pharisee) from Tarsus who had studied under one of the great teachers of the Law, Gamaliel. On his way to Damascus to attack the Christians there he had a vision, an experience of meeting the Risen Lord who identified himself to him with the words "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting." From that moment, Paul became a believer, and the main messenger of the Good News beyond the Jewish cultural circle.

The Acts of the Apostles, composed by Paul's companion Luke tells mainly his story, of Paul's missionary service leading him ultimately from Jerusalem to Rome, where he was killed. It is remarkable that this main witness to Jesus as Christ had never seen him or heard him teach. The message of Paul, and the other Apostles, was not so much that taught by Jesus in Galilee as the proclamation that in Jesus the whole of humanity was being offered a new relationship with God as their father. A strong sense of universal brotherhood existed in the early community of the Christian church, which was marked by a spirit of sharing and mutual care. From almost the first day, they used the ordinary Greek language. One of their main words was *agape*, a Greek word meaning love, to which Jesus's life had

given a new depth of meaning. In Latin, Jerome translated this word as *caritas* (which became in English “charity”) which is best expressed by the English “My dear,” remembering that something dear can only be had at great expense. The original Latin ‘*carus*, expensive’ has just that double meaning.

The other followers of Jesus no doubt also went out preaching the same message, but of their lives we know little or nothing. Even the most important of the Apostles, Simon Peter (his name means Rock; Jesus gave it to him), is only a shadow compared to Paul. Peter could understand that non-Jews might want to believe in Jesus; it was Paul who saw that they did not have to become Jews, that baptism and the fellowship of the Church was enough. Thus while numbers of Jews became Christian Jews, other Jews rejected them and attacked them. Meanwhile, more and more non-Jews found that they wanted to follow the Apostles’ teaching about Jesus who had sometimes called himself the Son of Man but who, as Christ, was the Son of God. The word Christian was coined in Antioch as a joke.

The division between Jews and Gentiles underlies many of the letters of Paul, especially the more difficult ones, such as that to the Romans. Paul is having to work out the theory to cover the facts, to see in a new way the relationship between the Jewish Law (expressed in the ‘Old’ Testament) and the Gospel. The most important word for him in this is freedom, and it sums up his own experience; freedom as opposed to slavery, the holiness that the Old Testament demanded impossibly is now available as a free gift (the original meaning of the word grace) of love offered to all. For Paul as for John, love and life are the same thing, and both have their roots in Christ. Paul’s teaching about love is expressed in that most famous chapter 13 of the first letter to the Corinthians, but his concern for the unity of the Christian communities, as well as his intense service of Christ, all are expressions of his vision of love.

The early Christians were in a complex relationship with Time and History. The Resurrection of Jesus was a radical challenge to any idea of continuum, because death is normally the end of an individual’s life and here it was not. The Resurrection was seen as a new reality. The Risen Lord would not die again, his body seen with wounded hands and feet when he showed himself to the disciples had not simply “come back to life” for a while. Eternity and time seemed now to coincide.

One possible answer was the Apocalyptic imagery popular among the Jews; this would be the end of the world, all history would soon cease and the Kingdom of God would be revealed to all for ever. This is expressed in the New Testament in the last book, called “Apocalypse” or “Revelations”, as well as in certain parts of the Gospels in Jesus’s teaching. Paul also seems to expect that the End will soon come.

Only the End did not come, history went on, with children being born and people dying. The Church grew larger and spread across the Roman Empire. The years passed and the old Apostles were killed or died or just disappeared from sight. The city of Jerusalem was captured and destroyed by the Roman general (later emperor) Titus in 70. Several years before this, the Jerusalem Christians had fled the city, as the Jewish rejection of Rome and its culture became increasingly fanatical. There was no longer a Church community in Jerusalem able to point out the places where Jesus had died and been buried. Out of this arose a need for the four texts we call the Gospels, in order to preserve a clear picture of the life of Jesus.

### The Four Gospels

Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, are the names given traditionally to the writers of these four texts. Mark and Luke are both named in Paul’s letters and in the Acts of the Apostles as companions of Paul, they were not Apostles, Luke at least was not even a Jew by birth, they had not seen Jesus, probably. Matthew is traditionally identified with Levi, a Jewish tax-gatherer who was called by Jesus and whose life was changed; but it seems unlikely that the person responsible for composing the Gospel bearing his name had ever seen and heard Jesus. It is entirely based on previous written texts and received ideas about him. John is shown as one of the disciples from the earliest days, the brother of James, one of the sons of a fisherman called Zebedee; but it again seems very unlikely that he himself wrote the Gospel bearing his name, although it almost certainly derives from his teaching.

Looking at the texts themselves, we find in each Gospel the same basic structure. At the end of

each is a detailed description of the last few days of Jesus's life, his crucifixion and death. This is followed by an evocation of the Resurrection, and is preceded by long chapters telling about his words and deeds during the time of his "active ministry." Each Gospel begins with mention of Jesus's visit to John the Baptist beside the Jordan. At the beginning of each Gospel except Mark there is some kind of prelude, either portraying the birth of Jesus (Matthew, Luke) or outlining the subject of the whole work (John).

The chapters describing Jesus's teaching and actions combine descriptive narratives and "sayings", usually short, even proverbial in style. Very quickly Jesus is seen in conflict with the Jewish religious experts called Doctors, Scribes, Pharisees, who hate him partly because he makes them look foolish in debates.

Comparing the texts in detail, we realize that Matthew, Luke, and Mark have exactly the same words in many places, although sometimes sections are in a different order. Matthew and Luke have many sayings of Jesus not found in Mark, and each of them has narratives and sayings not found anywhere else. But nowhere do we get the impression of an eye-witness changing the other texts because his memory of the actual event was different. Rather the differences show writers reading existing texts, thinking about the idea of Jesus they are trying to express, then adapting the earlier stories and sayings. The Gospels are images of the church's teaching about Jesus as Christ, not biographical memoirs of a long-dead master.

Matthew, Mark and Luke are usually called the "Synoptic Gospels" because they are so close to each other, they agree word-for-word much of the time. The Gospel according to John is very different in its style and contents. Where the Synoptics have brief sayings and anecdotic stories, flashing from one to the other with little linkage, John tells a few stories at length, usually beginning with an action of Jesus which leads into a long explanation of its meaning, or a discussion with the "Jews." Sometimes we find an event related in all four Gospels, such as the Feeding of the Five Thousand, but John gives it deeper meaning by linking it to a great sermon on the Bread of Life. John tells only a few stories where the Synoptics heap up many.

## Matthew

Long thought to be the first Gospel, the source of the other Synoptics, (but almost certainly in fact depending on Mark) Matthew's Gospel is the longest and the most strongly Jewish of all. It assumes that its readers will know about Jewish customs. It is often similar to Paul in its concerns and vision. It has a clear structure:

1. Infancy Narratives, with the familiar stories of the visit of the Wise Men ("Three Kings") from the East, the Massacre of the Innocents (children of Bethlehem) by Herod, the "Flight into Egypt." These stories are clearly symbolic, each of them based on a passage from the Old Testament which Jesus is found to "fulfill."

2. The Kingdom Appears: Jesus and John the Baptist, the temptations, the first disciples, leading up to the marvellous "Sermon on the Mount" (chapters 5-7) in which Jesus, like a new Moses, proclaims the freedom of the Good News. This begins with the "Beatitudes", (5:1-23), the eight promises that begin "Blessed":

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up a mountain and sat down.  
His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them, saying:  
"Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.  
Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.  
Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.  
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,  
for they will be filled.  
Blessed are the merciful for they will be shown mercy.  
Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.  
Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the children of God.  
Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake,

for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven.”

In the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew groups many of the most radically “spiritual” of Jesus’ sayings, including the command to “turn the other cheek” (5:39), opposing the rigid Law with a new humanity.

3. The Saving Kingdom: Ten Miracles (chapters 8-9) show Jesus’ healing power, then he speaks of his Mission.

4. The Mystery of the Kingdom: There is opposition and division (chapters 11-12), then Jesus speaks in Parables (chapter 13) to express the hidden nature of the Kingdom.

5. The Disciples as the Kingdom: in Matthew (chapters 14-18), the Church is seen as a living Community which is also a living parable of the Kingdom, expressed in sharing and harmony.

6. Judgement: In Matthew, more than any other Gospel, Jesus speaks the language of Apocalypse when faced with the Jewish rejection of his message (chapters 19-25). These chapters are marked with urgency, not hatred. They are far from soft sentimentality.

7. The Passion (suffering and death) and Resurrection (Chapters 26-28).

## Mark

For a long time, it was thought that Mark only offered a simplified version of Matthew, with loss of order and no special vision. This is not now accepted. In the twentieth century, with its taste for the fragmented, the rough-hewn, Mark is found more interesting because often more suggestive and open. He also shows considerable doubt about the ability of the disciples to understand and believe in Jesus (“Oh you of little faith!” Jesus keeps exclaiming).

The author of this Gospel is probably the creator of the literary form we call “Gospel”; before him the Church had only collections of “sayings of Jesus” with little or no narrative. In Mark we have detailed descriptions and also explanations of the Jewish background that suggest he was writing for a non-Jewish (gentile) church community. Tradition points to Rome. The whole Gospel is structured on the journey of Jesus towards his suffering and death which are a direct response to his life. Mark, writing for non Jews, does not stress the Christ / Messiah aspect; Jesus is “the Holy One of God” and even “Son of God”, as well as the suffering “Son of Man.” These terms are easier for ordinary people; yet Mark stresses that Jesus was rejected, not understood, and that he even tried to keep his identity a secret. This may be in part a warning that Jesus’s message is not to be understood apart from his death and Resurrection.

The structure of Mark’s account of Jesus’ life and sayings is quite simple:

1. Jesus makes himself known (chapters 1-8:30) and people respond by faith or rejection; conflict arises although he teaches using parables and performs miracles.

2. Jesus accepts suffering (chapters 8:31-16:8) by turning towards Jerusalem although he “knows” what will happen.

The style of Mark is vivid and sober, he likes to use the word “at once” to imply the dynamic power of the Gospel life. Strangely, the Gospel ends with no story of the disciples meeting with the Risen Lord. What seems to have been the original end at 16:8 leaves the women full of doubt and fear at the message of the angel in the empty tomb. Perhaps a final section was lost at a very early stage? Later writers created a number of extra endings which they added to Mark, using the other Gospels for inspiration.

## Luke

From the very earliest witnesses we find a clear opinion that this Gospel was written by the “Luke the beloved physician” named by Paul in Colossians 4:14; he is reported to have been a Syrian from Antioch, to have accompanied Paul on his journeys until his death in Rome, after which Luke wrote his Gospel and also the Acts of the Apostles.

Luke was not a Jew, but his Greek style shows how well he knew the Septuagint; he was educated and his Greek is poetic. His Gospel is based on Mark, whom he follows closely, but corrects in many details. The saying of Jesus reported in Luke’s chapters 9-18 are not in Mark, the stories and parables found there are also mostly also found in Matthew, but not grouped together there. This extra material that Matthew and Luke seem to have added to Mark in different ways, mostly sayings of Jesus without narrative, is usually called “Q” (German “Quelle” meaning “source”).

Luke sets out with a clear vision of his double task: the Gospel traces the journey of Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem, the “Christ event” culminating in his death and Resurrection. For Luke, this climax in Jerusalem is a turning-point in human history, as it shows God fulfilling his promises “to Abraham and his descendants for ever.” While it is an end, it also marks a new beginning. Therefore the second half of Luke’s story, the Acts of the Apostles, records the spread of the Gospel from Jerusalem to Rome. Rome is the symbol of “the whole world”, Luke’s vision of the Risen Christ’s presence in ongoing human history is universal.

(1) The Prologue or the Infancy Narratives, (chapters 1-2): telling in parallel the birth of John the Baptist and that of Jesus, with the wonderful events preceding both. Luke is alone in relating the events found in this section, with their rich Old Testament echoes. Mary, the mother of Jesus, plays an essential role, as if Luke had listened to her recollections. She is shown as the ultimate faithful representative or ‘remnant’ of Israel and at the same time the first believer of the universal Christian Church, of which she is a symbolic prefiguration.

Luke even includes poetry, modelled in part on Old Testament canticles such as the songs of Moses (Exodus 15) or Hannah (I Samuel 2). Mary, Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, and Simeon, express the praises of God in lyrics that are still sung by many Christians in their daily worship (songs often still called by their Latin names the “Magnificat” (1:46-55), the “Benedictus” (1:68-79), and the “Nunc dimittis” (2:29-32). It is in Luke that the shepherds hear the story of Jesus’s birth from the angels and come to worship in the stable where the child is lying in a manger.

At the end of the section, the 12-year-old Jesus is found by his parents discussing with the teachers in the Temple at Jerusalem; his ministry begins here. The Temple plays a central role in the Prologue: first the birth of John is announced to the unbelieving Zechariah there; then Simeon and Anna welcome the new-born Jesus with songs and prophecy; finally Jesus aged 12 is shown feeling at home there.

(2) The journey : the whole of Luke’s Gospel is organized as a journey away from, then back toward, Jerusalem. Jesus grows up and Luke begins the story of Jesus’ public ministry with journeys through Galilee (chapters 3 - 9:50). In this section, Luke follows the pattern found in Mark, but removes those aspects of Jesus’s words and responses which might confuse educated non Jews, such as his “anger” at the way his disciples are ‘slow to believe’.

In Chapter 9 there comes a turning-point. Jesus’s words and deeds demand a response of faith; he feeds the 5000 and Peter confesses “You are the Christ”. Jesus is declared to be the Son by the voice speaking from the cloud at his mysterious Transfiguration. Yet on coming down from the mountain Jesus finds his disciples unable to heal a child; his response is to express impatience with the unbelief of the whole generation. Immediately after, he begins to speak of his coming death, which the disciples cannot understand, and in verse 51 Luke says he ‘resolutely’ set out for Jerusalem, clearly knowing what is to happen there. Faith and rejection are shown to be the two poles of response to his person and his message.

(3) The Pilgrimage: Chapters 9:51-19:27 take us with Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem. They include all the Q material not in Mark.

(4) The Fulfillment: Chapter 19:28 show Jesus going ahead of his disciples up to Jerusalem, where he ‘purifies’ the Temple and speaks his final teaching in Chapter 21. These last days of Jesus

culminate in the last supper, and the agony in the garden. These are a prelude to his trial, crucifixion and death, which are followed by stories of the his disciples' encounters with the Risen Christ, ending with his Ascension into Heaven, leaving his disciples with the mission to "preach the Good News to the whole world." This is point where the Acts of the Apostles begins. It relates the spread of the Gospel from Jerusalem (Ascension and Pentecost) to Rome.

Luke tells a number of stories not found in the other Gospels. The Infancy Narratives are very different in their style from what follows. Among the parables of Jesus, that of the Good Samaritan (10:25-37), and that called "the Prodigal Son" (15:11-32), really the parable of "the Forgiving Father," are both only found in Luke, and are the most familiar as well as the most universal of the parables. Among the Resurrection appearances of Jesus, Luke's story of the journey to Emmaus (24:13-35), where the unrecognized Lord instructs two sorrowful disciples, is most meaningful for many. In each of these passages we sense Luke's great narrative skill, his ability to select those details which will speak to all, and his readiness to encapsulate essential Gospel truths in stories developed from perhaps only a vague suggestion in his sources (something we also find in John).

Luke's vision of humanity is central in the social doctrine of the Christian church in the 20th century. In Luke, the Gospel is very clearly intended in a special way for the poor and the weak; the rich are so corrupted and distracted by their wealth, Jesus suggests, that unless they give it away in helping the poor, they will not enter the Kingdom. Jesus in Luke stresses the need for concrete gestures of mercy and kindness in daily life, rather than formal religious obligations. Where Matthew has long passages heralding the Apocalypse, Luke is obviously not at all convinced that the world is about to come to an end. Luke is the evangelist of the active "Christian Life", yet Jesus is shown escaping from the crowds, seeking contemplation in silence and praying in quiet places.

#### Luke 1:46 - 55 The Magnificat (Song of Mary)

And Mary said: "My soul glorifies the Lord  
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,  
for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant.  
From now all generations will call me blessed,  
for the Mighty One has done great things for me -- holy is his name.  
His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation.  
He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;  
he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.  
He has brought down rulers from their thrones  
but has lifted up the humble.  
He has filled the hungry with good things  
but has sent the rich away empty.  
He has helped his servant Israel, remembering his mercy,  
as he promised to our fathers,  
to Abraham and his descendants for ever."

#### Luke 6:17 - 42 : Jesus Teaches

17 He went down with them and stood on a level place. A large crowd of his disciples was there and a great number of people from all over Judea, from Jerusalem, and from the coast of Tyre and Sidon, 18 who had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. Those troubled by evil spirits were cured, 19 and the people all tried to touch him, because power was coming from him and healing them all.

#### The Beatitudes

Looking at his disciples, he said:  
 “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.  
 Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied.  
 Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.  
 Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man.  
 “Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their fathers treated the prophets.  
 “But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort.  
 Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry.  
 Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep.  
 Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for that is how their fathers treated the false prophets.  
 “But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic. Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you.  
 “If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full. But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked.  
 Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”

#### Luke 9:18 - 36 : The Confession of Peter

18 Once when Jesus was praying in private and his disciples were with him, he asked them, “Who do the crowds say I am?” 19 They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, that one of the prophets of long ago has come back to life.” 20 “But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?” Peter answered, “The Christ of God.” 21 Jesus strictly warned them not to tell this to anyone. 22 And he said, “The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.”

23 Then he said to them all: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. 24 For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it. 25 What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self?

26 If anyone is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels. 27 I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God.”

#### The Transfiguration

28 About eight days after Jesus said this, he took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray. 29 As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. 30 Two men, Moses and Elijah, 31 appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus. They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem.

32 Peter and his companions were very sleepy, but when they became fully awake, they saw his

glory and the two men standing with him. 33 As the men were leaving Jesus, Peter said to him, "Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters - - one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." (He did not know what he was saying.) 34 While he was speaking, a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. 35 A voice came from the cloud, saying, "This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him." 36 When the voice had spoken, they found that Jesus was alone. The disciples kept this to themselves, and told no one at that time what they had seen.

#### Luke 10:25 - 42 The Parable of the Good Samaritan

25 On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" 26 "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?" 27 He answered: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind' ; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" 28 "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live." 29 But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

30 In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. 31 A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. 32 So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33 But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. 34 He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him.

35 The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.' 36 "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" 37 The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

38 As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. 39 She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. 40 But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" 41 "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, 42 but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

#### Luke 15:1 - 31

1 Now the tax collectors and "sinners" were all gathering around to hear him. 2 But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." Then Jesus told them this parable:

4 "Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? 5 And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders 6 and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.' 7 I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.

8 "Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Does she not light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? 9 And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.' 10 In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

#### The Parable of the Loving Father and the Prodigal Son



11 Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. 12 The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them. 13 "Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. 14 After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. 15 So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. 16 He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. 17 "When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! 18 I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.'

20 So he got up and went to his father. "But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. 21 "The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' 22 "But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. 23 Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. 24 For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate.

25 "Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. 26 So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. 27 'Your brother has come,' he replied, 'and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.' 28 "The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. 29 But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. 30 But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!'

31 "'My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. 32 But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.'"

Luke 22:14 - 46; 23:32 - 47 Jesus' Last Hours

### The Last Supper

14 When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table. 15 And he said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. 16 For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God." 17 After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, "Take this and divide it among you. 18 For I tell you I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." 19 And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me." 20 In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you. 21 But the hand of him who is going to betray me is with mine on the table. 22 The Son of Man will go as it has been decreed, but woe to that man who betrays him." 23 They began to question among themselves which of them it might be who would do this.

24 Also a dispute arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest. 25 Jesus said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. 26 But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. 27 For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves.

### The Agony in the Garden

39 Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him. 40 On

reaching the place, he said to them, "Pray that you will not fall into temptation." 41 He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, 42 "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." 43 An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. 44 And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. 45 When he rose from prayer and went back to the disciples, he found them asleep, exhausted from sorrow. 46 "Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray so that you will not fall into temptation."

### Jesus on Calvary

32 Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. 33 When they came to the place called the Skull, there they crucified him, along with the criminals -- one on his right, the other on his left. 34 Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And they divided up his clothes by casting lots. 35 The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, the Chosen One." 36 The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar 37 and said, "If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself." 38 There was a written notice above him, which read: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS. 39 One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!" 40 But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence? 41 We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong." 42 Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." 43 Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."

44 It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour, 45 for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. 46 Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When he had said this, he breathed his last. 47 The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, "Surely this was a righteous man."

### Luke 24:13 - 35 The Resurrection : Emmaus

13 Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. 14 They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. 15 As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; 16 but they were kept from recognizing him.

17 He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?" They stood still, their faces downcast. 18 One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there in these days?" 19 "What things?" he asked. "About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. 20 The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; 21 but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. 22 In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning 23 but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. 24 Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see."

25 He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! 26 Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?"

27 And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

28 As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus acted as if he were going farther. 29 But they urged him strongly, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them. 30 When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. 31 Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight.

32 They asked each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?” 33 They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together 34 and saying, “It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.” 35 Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.

John

The most deeply thoughtful of the Gospels, and in its intensity the most poetic, John’s Gospel is most remarkable for its use of symbols. John does not follow the style of the Synoptics, with their short, fragmented sayings, although he may have known them. He takes a few actions of Jesus and exploits them to illuminate the nature of Jesus by developing the debates or the preaching which accompany them.

The relationship between the son of Zebedee and the author of this Gospel, traditionally composed at Ephesus, is not clear. The Greek is simple, correct, but the underlying thought is not Greek. John uses words in a very particular way, exploiting their associations to the full. Bread, water, light, life, see, truth, know, believe, love are seemingly universal words, but they are given essentially new meaning by John. Father, Son, Spirit, Word (Logos), I am, glory, commandment, are equally important, and can only be fully understood by readers familiar with the Old Testament.

Indeed, John’s Gospel is full of the Old Testament, and John was an Apostle among the Jews, but by the universality of its imagery and message it can be read by all. Yet it demands explanation, more than any other Gospel, and completion by contact with the church community. At the same time, John is the key to deep understanding of the Jesus shown in the other Gospels, he develops and explains things that are only hinted at in them. For example, the relationship between Jesus and God, or the meaning of the feeding of the Five Thousand, or the parallels between Jesus and Moses, or the relationship between the Kingdom of God and this present world. Without John’s stress on love in his Gospel and Letters, Christianity might have developed in much more rigid ways.

The structure of John’s Gospel is not always clearly articulated:

1. The New Beginning: This opening section begins with a Prologue:

In the beginning was the Word (Logos),  
and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.  
He was in the beginning with God.  
Through him all things were made,  
and without him was nothing made that has been made.  
In him was life, and the life was the Light of men  
The light shines in the darkness,  
but the darkness has not comprehended it.  
There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John He came as a witness to testify  
concerning that Light  
so that through him all might believe.  
He was not the Light he came to bear witness to the Light;  
that was the true Light that light-ens every one who comes into the world.  
He was in the world,  
and the world was made by him,  
and the world knew him not;  
he came to his own,  
and his own received him not.  
Yet to all who did receive him,  
to those who believed in his name,  
he gave power to become children of God;  
they were born, not of blood,

nor of the will of the flesh,  
nor of the will of a man but of God.  
And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us  
and we have seen his Glory,  
Glory of the Only Begotten of the Father,  
full of grace and truth.

This introduces the witness of John the Baptist (chapter 1), then comes the Marriage at Cana, the 'Beginning of Signs' where there is no more wine, and by the mere presence of Jesus water is changed to wine; the Temple is purified (chapter 2), Jesus baptized by John, the Spirit (chapter 3), the gift of Living Water (chapter 4).

2. The Works of God: Healing (chapter 5), Feeding with the Bread of Life (chapter 6), Light in darkness (chapter 7-8), Sight given to the blind (chapter 9), The Good Shepherd (chapter 10). During this section, the opposition to Jesus grows, "the Jews" reject him.

3. Preparation for Glory: Jesus raises Lazarus, is anointed for death (chapter 11), enters Jerusalem and is eagerly sought for by Greeks, rejected by Jews, he foresees his death (chapter 12).

4. The Hour of Glory: the public works are now finished, Jesus sits down with his friends to eat the Last Supper; he washes their feet (chapter 13), he comforts them by including them in his divine life (chapter 14), he expresses this life in the image of the vine and the commandment to love one another as he has loved them (chapter 15-16):

"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit -- fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. This is my command: Love each other.

Then Jesus goes out into the garden and prays, offering his life to God and praying for the unity of all who will believe (chapter 17).

"My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

"Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.

"Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them."

5. The Glory: Jesus is arrested, tried and executed (chapters 18-19); risen from the dead, he is seen by his disciples in ways which confirm his continuing love for them (chapter 20-21).

The Acts of the Apostles

In Acts, Luke applies to the early history of the Christian church the same techniques as he had used in his Gospel, telling events in such a way as to bring out their symbolic, inner meaning, and relating them to parts of the Old Testament. Acts is not a simple historical record. It is, however, one of the most remarkable long travel documents of the period, and gives much information about life in the Eastern parts of the Roman Empire.

The starting point is the coming of the Holy Spirit into the church community on the day of the Jewish festival called Pentecost, fifty days after Passover. The uniting force in the Gospel was the person of Jesus, now “taken up” into “heaven”; the unlocated Spirit acts in the same way, guiding the church from within. Historically, Luke was to be proved right in his rejection of imminent eschatology (the end of the age) in favour of on-going history.

For Luke, the first, Jerusalem church community, with its generosity and sharing, its eager gatherings of prayer and fellowship, was the model for others to follow; characteristically, the Jerusalem church (chapters 2 and 4) is very attentive to the needs of the poor.

In the first part of Acts, especially, there are long passages of apostolic preaching. These sermons by Peter, especially, are centered on the proclamation of Jesus as the Messiah in the Jewish context. The Jews either believe or reject this message, culminating in the lynching of Stephen the first martyr (chapter 8) and the mission to Samaria.

In chapter 9, Acts relates the conversion of Paul in dramatic terms and his ministry begins just as, in chapter 10, Peter becomes convinced by a vision that the Gospel is for all mankind, gentiles as well as Jews. In chapter 12, there is suspense when Peter is arrested, and the story of his mysterious release by an angel is full of delightful details.

Chapters 13-14 tell of Paul’s first missionary journey, with few clear details. Paul seems to have spent 13 years travelling in the time symbolized by this story. The main point is to show the different problems faced by Paul in preaching to Jews and to pagan gentiles (who are much more open, but more inclined to wrong ideas). This leads to chapter 15, the meeting (“Council”) held in Jerusalem at which the “great” apostles Peter and James are seen approving the mission of Paul to the gentiles. Luke does not have room for the great theological debate about the Law found in Paul’s letters, he expresses its outcome in this narrative.

Paul then sets out again, in response to a dream, and in chapter 16:10 the narrative suddenly changes into “we”, “From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace.” Four times in Acts (here and in chapters 20, 21, 27) descriptions of journeys use this form, implying that the narrator was with Paul. The most vivid moments come in chapter 27, the description of the shipwreck on Malta, one of the most gripping narratives in the New Testament.

In chapter 17, Paul arrives in Athens, and is shown trying rather unsuccessfully to adapt his message to the philosophy majors of the University during his speeches, that to the Areopagus in particular being based on the trial of Socrates. Luke probably realized that Athens, symbolizing Greek culture, was a major symbol for something not yet achieved, the synthesis of the Christian and the philosophical. So too, in chapter 19, there is a symbolic conflict at Ephesus between the Gospel and the old paganism.

From chapter 21, Paul sets out on his journey to death, a structure paralleling Luke’s Gospel. Paul is arrested after a riot in the Temple at Jerusalem; as a Roman citizen he demands trial, but the story is told with many speeches in which Paul is shown proclaiming the Gospel, even while he is being lynched. In chapter 25, Paul appeals to Rome, fearing that he will be sent back to Jerusalem and killed. He continues to justify himself, now before the highest authorities he can meet, as a peaceful citizen who hopes for more from Rome than from Jerusalem.

After the episode of the shipwreck (chapter 27), in the last chapter Luke brings Paul to the gates of Rome, accompanied by a crowd of Christians come out to welcome him. His “prison” is a house he rented and he is shown preaching to all. Luke does not mention that during these two years Paul wrote the Letters to the Philippians, to the Ephesians, to the Colossians, and to Philemon. There Luke stops his account. In actual fact, it seems that Paul was released after two years, went to Spain, back to Crete and Greece, and was finally put into a prison in Rome from which he wrote the second Letter to Timothy, sure that his death was near.

## The Epistles

Most of the Letters contained in the New Testament are open letters written by Paul to the Christian churches in the cities and areas he had visited: Rome, Corinth (2 letters), Galatia, Ephesus, Philippi, Colossae, Thessalonica (2 letters). Other letters are addressed to individuals: to Timothy (2 letters), Titus and Philemon. They deal with many different questions arising at the time he was writing, some very general, some quite specific to that church or individual. There was no idea that they would be collected together, or that they would still be read every day by Christians 2000 years later.

Within the Epistles, some of the most familiar texts are: Romans chapter 8 (about the relationship of man and Christ by the Spirit), I Corinthians 13 (the "Hymn to Charity"), and 15 (about the Resurrection), Philippians 2:1-11 (on Christ's self-emptying). Ephesians is the most densely poetic of all Paul's writings.

**Romans:** The main theme of this epistle, written by Paul in Corinth before leaving for Rome in 57-8, is the meaning of "Salvation", the relationship between faith and God's justice, between God and us. In a second section (chapters 12-15), Paul discusses the moral consequences of his ideas. The discovery of salvation as a pure gift of God's grace, and the need for each person to respond by faith, made this the fundamental text for the Reformers of the 16th century, Luther in particular. It is not constructed logically, and is often difficult to read. Especially hard are the passages dealing with the Jewish people.

**I Corinthians:** This epistle was written because Paul, in Ephesus about 57, had heard of serious conflicts and divisions among the Corinthian Christians. The main themes of the letter are dictated by this situation, Paul discusses the various problems that have arisen, (chapters 1-6), then tries to suggest some solutions, both in detail and in general, as he moves towards a new vision of what the Christian community is (chapters 11-14), and of the hope it lives by because of Christ's Resurrection (chapter 15). The Hymn to Love of chapter 13 is the most well-known part of any Epistle :

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing. Love is patient love is kind. Love does not envy, it does not boast it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part; but when the perfect comes, the imperfect disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man I put childish ways behind me. Now we see as in a glass, darkly; but then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall fully know, even as I am fully known.

And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

**II Corinthians:** Perhaps the most emotional of all the epistles; Paul is faced with a grave crisis of confidence and he tries to regain the trust of the Corinthians by reminding them of his service in the church, his past history and the past relationships they had. He mentions the needs of the church in Jerusalem, now in great poverty and needing their help, but most of the letter is a personal challenge to enemies who had destroyed his authority. It is intensely personal in tone and tells us much about Paul himself. It reflects the turmoil of journeys, visits, reports, frustrations, delays, that made up Paul's life.

**Galatians:** It is not clear who these Galatians were; there was a province called Galatia in Asia Minor, but it contained various peoples, not only the Celtic Galatians. The people to whom Paul is

writing seem to be gentiles (not Jews) who have become Christians but who have been told by some Jewish Christians that they should observe the Old Testament laws, and be circumcised. The epistle is therefore about the relationship between the Law of Moses and the salvation given by Christ. This epistle particularly celebrates the freedom which comes with faith in Christ; in style, Paul is following the lessons he learned at school with the Rabbis, and his arguments are not always easy to follow.

Ephesians: Not really a letter at all, but a magnificent theological discourse incorporating many phrases drawn from the young Church's worship, as well as from other letters by Paul. It was almost certainly not originally addressed to the Ephesians, or any particular church. It is often said that Paul may not be the author. The main sections of the text are prayer (chapters 1-3) and exhortation (chapters 4-6); the first part especially offers a vision of the Christian "mystery" that represents a vital step in the development of the doctrine of the Trinity (God is one, yet the unity is a fellowship of love involving Father, Son and Spirit). Unity is also the moral theme of the epistle, human unity linked to the establishment of Christ's kingdom.

Philippians: Probably written at Rome in 61-3, while Paul was in prison. The main theme of the epistle, written to Macedonian Christians, is joy and fellowship. Fellowship (Greek *koinonia*) is relationship with God and with other Christians, and joy is the result of union with Christ's suffering and Resurrection. The hymn to Christ in chapter 2:5-11 is particularly impressive. It sums up the nature of Christ's coming into the world as a "self-emptying", as it struggles with the paradox of his humiliation and his glory:

Let that mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus,  
Who, being in very nature God,  
did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,  
but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant,  
being made in human likeness.  
And being found in appearance as a man,  
he humbled himself and became obedient to death - -  
even death on a cross!  
Therefore God exalted him to the highest place  
and gave him the name that is above every name,  
that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,  
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father.

Colossians: Also written from prison, this Epistle is designed to warn the Christians of the (Turkish) city of Colossae against certain false ideas being taught them by some Jews, ideas involving dates and rules about food, as though such things could affect salvation. Here Paul discusses more fully than before his Christology, seeing in Jesus the cosmic fullness of Wisdom by whom all things were made. Salvation for the Christian is always collective, uniting the believer with all who believe.

I and II Thessalonians: Two sections of a single correspondence, written from Corinth in 50-2. Timothy has brought back news of the church in Thessalonica after a visit there, and Paul is replying to two questions about the Second Coming (Parousia) of Christ which they had sent to him. The question of the date of the Parousia, unknown to all, was bothering them, and the second letter was written to support what he had written in the first. In both, Paul seems to expect, or hope, that Christ will soon return in his realized kingdom.

I and II Timothy, Titus: These are also called the Pastoral Epistles, since the three letters deal with the way a pastor should live and teach in the church. There is some possibility that they were written for Paul by a secretary (Luke?), since the vocabulary is very different from that found in the Pauline epistles. Here we find the beginnings of the normal pastoral ministry of the church, modelled

on that of Jewish communities. In each local assembly (ekklesia) there is a council of elders (Greek presbyteroi, from which comes the word “priest”) and a single episkopos (president of a council, giving the English “bishop”). There are also diakonoi, deacons who serve the needs of the community in concrete ways, especially helping those who are poor or sick (the Greek root of “deacon” means “serve”, as also that of the Latin “minister”).

Philemon: Written at the same time as Colossians, to an individual member of the church at Colossae, Philemon, whose slave Onesimus (“useful”) has run away and has joined Paul. Paul has persuaded him to return, but writes asking the master to let Onesimus go, so that he can help Paul in his ministry. It is possible that Onesimus later became the bishop of Ephesus.

Hebrews: Like Ephesians, this is a theological work rather than a personal letter. It is influenced by the thought of the Hellenistic Jewish thinker Philo of Alexandria. It is not certain that Paul was the author, and the “Hebrews” of the title are not the non-Christian Jews. The contents show how Jesus is the fulfillment of all that the Old Testament writes about the Temple sacrifices, and contrasts the Old with the New, the Jerusalem Temple and the “real” altar in Heaven; always the superiority of Christ is stressed, and the argument leads into an exhortation to hope and endure (chapters 11-12).

James: A very Jewish text, full of homely wisdom on how to live a godly life, with little of the Pauline theology of faith and grace, James being anxious that Christians should put their love into practice. Probably written by the James called “the brother of the Lord” in Mark.

I Peter: A letter of encouragement, outlining the dignity of the Christian vocation for those faced with persecution. Probably written for Peter by a Greek-speaking secretary (Silvanus?).

II Peter: A letter written perhaps later, under the name of Peter but using the letter of Jude as an inspiration. The main question here is the delay in the return of Christ in his Parousia, implying that this letter is one of the last texts of the New Testament to have been written.

I, II, III John: Close to the Gospel of John in style, though not always identical in thought, the first letter is more general, theological and thoughtful. Its climax is the amazing affirmation: “God is love”. It is said that when John was a very old man, he could only repeat: “God is love; we should love one another.”

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.

This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.

If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God. And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him. There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, “I love God,” yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother. (I John 4)

The other two Johannine letters are private, more personal in style, although addressed to



communities rather than individuals.

Jude: Written, perhaps, by the brother of James, to warn a community of Jewish Christians against certain “false teachers” in their midst.

## Revelation

The Church has always claimed that the John who names himself as the author of this last book was the same as the author of the Gospel and Epistles; the great difference in style and language is then a problem that remains unsolved. The roots of Revelation in the Jewish Apocalyptic writings (Daniel and other writings not included in the Bible) explain the special features of its style.

The main theme of this book, expressed in vivid and confusing images of cosmic collapse and conflict, is the victory promised to the Christians after their sufferings in this present world. It dramatizes the fact that Christ is risen and taken up into glory while we are still here, struggling. It presents then, in the form of an eschatological drama, (eschaton means the “last things”: death, judgement, heaven, hell) some ideas about the struggle in which God’s People are involved, and a declaration that the victory of Christ is the victory of his church, although this victory is not yet complete as human history continues.

One of the main themes of the Apocalypse is then judgement. In John’s Gospel already, judgement was a matter of death and life, and it occurred whenever people saw the Light, believed in the Truth, loved one another. The warfare described in Revelation is then a traditional expression of this same reality; people judge themselves by their choices. But these choices have cosmic dimensions since God is God, while evil and revolt are possible choices against him.

The “future” events shown here are reflections of present realities, this is not a description of coming days in a literal sense. The use of numerical symbolism and time schemes is an echo of Daniel and others, it has intellectual and symbolic significance, it is not some kind of magical doomsday forecast.

The great power of Revelation lies in the evocative force of some of its images, which have inspired many artists. Mostly, the imagery of Apocalypse is visual and dramatic; it may be cosmic (stars and sun) or mythical (dragons, angels), liturgical (throne, altar, incense) or symbolic (beasts full of eyes, a woman in birth-pains), destructive (the four horses, plagues, war) or consoling (no more tears, the heavenly Jeru-salem). The style is always solemn and full of echoes of the poetic passages of the Old Testament.

1. Introduction: Visions, encouragements and the Letters to the Seven Churches. (chapters 1-3). In each letter, encouragements and warnings mingle, introducing the theme of uncertainty about the ultimate faithfulness of many believers.

### 2. The Prophetic Drama

- a) Overture (chapters 4-5): the worship of God by all creation, the Lamb, victory.
- b) Preludes (chapters 6-1 1): the Seven Seals (6-7), the Seven Trumpets (8-9), the mystery of the Church in human history (10- II).
- c) The Struggle (chapters 12-20): The Dragon, the Woman and the Beasts (12-13), the Lamb and the 144,000, the judgement of blessings and harvest (14), the praise of the Lamb (15), the Seven Bowls (plagues) (16), the judgement of Babylon (17), the fall of Babylon and the heavenly triumph (18-19), Satan is overcome, the Millennium (thousand years) ends and Satan is released for a time, the resurrection of all (20).
- d) The New Creation (chapters 21-22): the new heavens and the new earth, the end of tears in the final Consolation, the new Jerusalem coming down from God like a bride for the Lamb, its beauty, appearance and size, its life. The end, final promises and warnings. “Maranatha” (Come Lord, the Lord is coming).

The influence of the Bible on a culture depends on its availability. Throughout the Middle Ages, church services, including the Bible readings, were mostly in Latin, a language that ordinary people could not understand. With the rise of the populist movements of the later 14th century, John Wycliffe and his followers were the first to organize translations into English of the Latin Vulgate, in 1380-2. Their teachings were not accepted by the church of the time, but the translations continued in use.

In 1525, the reformer Tyndal published a translation of the New Testament based on Erasmus's edition of the Greek, and in 1530 he published a translation of the Pentateuch (first five books of the Old Testament) from the Hebrew. The rest he left in manuscript when he was executed as a Lutheran heretic in 1536. Tyndal's translation served as the basis for the style and vocabulary of almost all later translations until the 20th century, he himself used Wycliffite versions as a guide.

Coverdale's Bible was published in 1536, based on the Vulgate, on Luther's Bible, and on Tyndal. He was the first to put the non-Hebrew books of the Old Testament in a separate section. This translation was unscholarly, but through it Tyndal's style passed into common use in the years of Henry VIII's and Archbishop Cranmer's early liturgical reform that led to the Books of Common Prayer of 1549 and 1552. At the end of the 20th century, the Church of England still often uses Coverdale's version of the Psalms for singing in its services.

In 1539, a version of the Bible commonly called the Great Bible appeared, combining Tyndal, Coverdale, and another version, the Matthew. This was authorized for use in church services and it continued in general use until 1568, 10 years after Elizabeth became queen. Almost at the same time, Taverner's Bible appeared, which first used the word "parable". During this time, the Reformation spread to England in the years of the child-king Edward VI (1547-53) and many editions of the Bible were published before his older half sister Mary followed him and tried to put the clock back.

While Mary Tudor tried to bring back the old Catholic religion, many theologians escaped to Geneva, where they prepared the Geneva Bible which was published in its final version in England in 1560, under Elizabeth. This was the Bible familiar to Shakespeare and it continued in general use until the Civil War (1640). It was printed in clear type, was quite small in size, and was the first English Bible with verse -numbers. It had notes that expressed Calvinist doctrines, and the Anglican bishops of Elizabeth did not like them. They therefore revised the Great Bible into the Bishop's Bible of 1568, which was "authorized for use in churches". It served as the basis for the "King James' Bible" of 1611.

Catholic scholars, escaping persecution under Elizabeth in France and Belgium, also made translations, of the New Testament in 1582, the Rheims Version, from the Vulgate, but following the older English versions in style. It also influenced the 1611 revision. In 1610, catholic scholars at Douay published a translation of the Vulgate Old Testament.

King James set up a commission of experts to prepare an official translation, based on all previous ones. This was published in 1611, and became known, for no special reason, as the Authorized Version. It remained in use until the present century, though a Revised Version was made in the late 19th century, followed by the American Standard Version in 1901 which was the basis for the Revised Standard Version of 1946-52. Since that, there have been innumerable other translations made. The quotations used in this chapter are almost all taken from the New International Version.