

Purpose

- To introduce the New Testament
- To begin our study of the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John)

Materials

- Bibles

Background Information

THE NEW TESTAMENT

Remember our Bible is divided into two parts. We have been studying in the part called the Old Testament. We are now switching gears and going to the New Testament. The Old Testament gave us the history and the prophecy. The New Testament tells how this prophecy is fulfilled and tells us about the life of Jesus and what happened after He died on the cross.

The New Testament consists of 27 books and was first written in Greek. Like the Old Testament, some books are named for people who wrote them (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John and others). Some books were named for their content (Acts), while others were letters written by Jesus' followers (1 Corinthians, Ephesians). All the original books of the New Testament have disappeared. What we rely upon today are the copies that have survived over the years.

When the New Testament opens, Rome ruled the world of Europe and North Africa. The language they spoke was Greek, and the emperors ruled the land. The people of Israel were waiting for the Messiah, their king.

THE GOSPELS

The first four books are called the Gospels, consisting of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. The word gospel means good news, and this word was used in several ways. Many gospels were written but only four were recognized by the early Christians as trustworthy accounts. The Gospels are not biographies of Jesus, but they are accurate accounts of Jesus' life and death. The gospel writers wrote these to inform Jesus' followers of his life, but they also wanted the readers to come to believe in Jesus. They intended to convert us. They carefully selected events, miracles and the teachings of Jesus, and then arranged them in such a way that we would be drawn to Jesus as Lord.

Do you think we really need four accounts? Couldn't one person have written one story and have included everything? The reason we have four is

to give us four different perspectives of Jesus. Imagine you and three friends go to visit COSI in Columbus. You all see the same exhibits, but when asked about it, each account would be different.

The early Christians recognized that there was really only one gospel story, but each writer brought his own perspective to the story and had a particular audience in mind:

- Matthew – This was written to the Jewish audience. Matthew’s goal was to present Jesus as the true king of Israel, the redeemer God had promised. Matthew was a tax collector who became one of the twelve disciples. His book connects the story of the Old Testament with the story of the New Testament. This helps us understand how the life and teachings of Jesus build on what had come before. Matthew was able to record the truth about Jesus, because he had spent at least two years as one of His closest followers. This fact is pretty amazing when you realize his job before Jesus was collecting taxes. In Jesus’ day, tax collectors were the lowest of the low. They did the dirty work for the Roman people. You had to pay for the right to become a tax collector, and in turn could charge what you wanted to make a living for yourself. People looked upon Matthew as a thief and a traitor to his own people. Jesus saw something more in Matthew. Jesus knew he was ready to exchange his love of money for a new a new love. When Jesus said, “Follow me”. Matthew left it all and went with Him.
- Mark – Mark wrote to the Roman audience. Reading Mark is like watching a fast-paced, action-packed video. Mark appeals to the doers-to people who are busy, on the move, leading the charge in a high-powered world. The difference lies in that the hero of Mark’s story is a servant. Mark shows Jesus as a servant of the Lord, the obedient son of the Father, running to do whatever God says. As you read Mark, notice the phrases he uses, “immediately”, “at once”, “without delay”. Mark tells us urgently that this is important stuff, and we’d better listen. Mark is like a CNN reporter. He doesn’t write, he reports. He wants us to feel like we are right there, on the scene. This style worked for the Romans, because they were not deeply intellectual. They were impressed more with actions than with ideas. It is interesting to note that Mark never mentioned himself by name in this book, but all early Christians agreed that this was written by an associate of the apostle Peter. Mark began his Christian ministry several years after Jesus’ resurrection. It is interesting that the first gospel written was done by someone who did not witness these happenings. He just heard about them from Peter.
- Luke – Luke wrote to the Greek audience. Luke is the only non-Jewish New Testament writer. Luke was a prominent doctor who wrote the “authorized” biography of Jesus. Because of his medical background, he produced a carefully written, meticulously researched record of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection. His book is filled with details and human-interest stories. Luke takes us closer to Jesus the

humanitarian and the man than any other gospel writer. He showed Jesus as a man moved to compassion by human suffering, who loved to be around children. He showed us that Jesus was not just a God pretending to be human; he was a real human being. Luke, like Mark, did not come to believe in Jesus until several years after the resurrection. Luke's gospel is the longest book in the New Testament, but it is easier to follow than many of the shorter books.

- John – John wrote to the new Christians and the ones who were searching. John, a fisherman, was one of the twelve disciples. He was probably Jesus' closest friend. Within this group of twelve disciples, John was one of the three who often asked to go with Him in times of need. John never referred to himself by name; he called himself the disciple whom Jesus loved. John was the last gospel to be written. The other three gospels had been in circulation for several years, and knew their writings well. Because of this, John wrote to add to his unique perspective and to fill in some of the details not recorded by the other writers. For instance, there are no parables in John's gospel, but he recorded several speeches that Jesus made. The earlier gospels focused on Jesus and the crowds that followed, while John focused on encounters that Jesus had with individuals. Instead of simply repeating what had already been written, John gives us intimate conversations with Jesus. John wanted everyone to know who Jesus was. Even today, anyone can pick up John's book and understand its message.

Interesting note—Mark was the first gospel written. Then Matthew and Luke were written, and John was last. Matthew, Mark and Luke all bring similar features in their accounts of Jesus. They tell of parables, miracles and usually, the same events. John has a very different style. Matthew and Luke borrow a lot from Mark's Gospel. Matthew includes almost the entire gospel of Mark's, but arranges the events differently. About 30% of Matthew's gospel is found nowhere else in the Bible. Luke has almost 50% original material, and about 90% of John's gospel cannot be found in the other three.

Procedure

- Read this carefully and keep in your folder for reference.
- Check out 14-1, 14-2, 14-3, 14-4 put them in your folder, you will need them later.
- Do 14-5 for fun.