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INTRODUCTION

“It is hard to be a biblical literalist if one actually reads the Bible ... when read literally it only multiply the questions and anxieties”
(Spong 2009:58)

1.1 SETTING THE SCENE
A simple literal reading the New Testament clearly shows that we have to study the New Testament to understand it. When one reads the New Testament several “contradictions” or “discrepancies” immediately come to the fore. Let us look first at a few examples\(^1\). From these examples it is clear that the study of the New Testament is not an easy and straightforward matter.

1.1.1 Factual differences
1.1.1.1 The miracles (signs) of Jesus in John
In John Jesus’ first miracle takes place in John 2:1-11 (water into wine): “This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory; and his disciples believed in him” (Jn 2:11; RSV). Then we read in John 2:23: “Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs which he did” (Jn 2:23; RSV). Then we read in John 4:46-54 about the story of Jesus’ healing of the son of an official: “This was now the second sign that Jesus did when he had come from Judea to Galilee” (Joh 4:54; RSV).

How is this possible, if Jesus did many signs (miracles) while being in Jerusalem, as stated in John 2:23?

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\(^1\) The examples used in this Section are taken from the work of Bart Ehrman, *Jesus, interrupted: Revealing the hidden contradictions in the Bible (and why we don’t know about them)*, New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2009.
1.1.1.2  The cleansing of the temple
In Mark, Matthew and Luke Jesus’ cleansing of the temple takes place a week before he dies during his first visit to the temple and at the end of his public career (Mk 11:15-19//Mt 21:12-17//Lk 19:45-48). In John this act of Jesus takes place right at the beginning of his public career (Jh 2:13-22).

Can both these two narratives be historical?

1.1.1.3  The farewell speeches of Jesus with his disciples (Jh 13-17)
Look at the following three verses from John:

“Simon Peter said to him, ‘Lord, where are you going?’ Jesus answered, ‘Where I am going you cannot follow me now; but you shall follow afterward’” (Joh 13:36; RSV).

“Thomas said to him, ‘Lord, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way?’” (Jn 14:5; RSV).

“But now I am going to him who sent me; yet none of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’” (Jn 16:5; RSV).

What happened here? Did Jesus have a short memory? Did he forget about the earlier questions of the disciples?

1.1.1.4  The death of Jesus
To make sense of Mark’s dating of the crucifixion some important background information is first necessary. In the days of Jesus the Passover, held annually, was the most important Jewish festival. It was instituted to commemorate the events of the Exodus that had occurred centuries earlier, in the time of Moses, as recounted in the Old Testament book of Exodus (Exodus 5-15). According to that account the children of Israel had been enslaved in Egypt for four hundred years, but God heard their cries and raised up for them a savior, Moses. Moses was sent to the Pharaoh and demanded, speaking for God that he “let my people go.” But the Pharaoh had a hard heart and refused. In order to persuade him, God empowered Moses to send
ten horrible plagues against the Egyptians, the last of which was the most awful: every firstborn Egyptian child and animal would be killed by the angel of death.

The Israelites were given instructions to avoid having their own children slain. Each family was to sacrifice a lamb, take some of its blood, and spread it on the doorposts and lintel of the house where they lived. Then, when the angel of death arrived that night, he would see the blood on the door and “pass over” that Israelite house, moving on to houses without the blood, to murder a firstborn child. In Jesus’ day, Jews from around the world would come to Jerusalem to celebrate the event. On the day before the celebratory meal was eaten, Jews would bring a lamb to the Jerusalem temple, or more likely purchase one there, and have it slaughtered by the priests. They would then take it home to prepare the meal. This happened on the Day of Preparation for the Passover. Now the only confusing aspect of this celebration involves the way ancient Jews told time – the same way modern Jews do. Even today the “Sabbath” is Saturday, but it begins on Friday night, when it gets dark. That is because in traditional Judaism the new day begins at nightfall, with the evening. (That’s why, in the book of Genesis, when God creates the heavens and the earth, we’re told that “there was evening and morning, the first day”; a day consisted of night and day, not day and night.) And so the Sabbath begins Friday night – and in fact every day begins with nightfall.

And so, on the Day of Preparation the lamb was slaughtered and the meal was prepared in the afternoon. The meal was eaten that night, which was actually the beginning of the next day: Passover day. The Passover day, then, began with the evening meal and lasted approximately twenty-four hours, through the morning and afternoon of the next day, after which would begin the day after Passover = Sabbath; see Ehrman 2009:23-29).

Thus, the feast of the Passover consisted of:
Lamb slaughtered and the preparation of the meal: The Day of Preparation (Wednesday evening – Thursday afternoon = Thursday)
Eating of the Passover meal: Passover (Thursday evening – Friday afternoon)
Day after Passover (Friday evening – Saturday afternoon = Saturday)
Let us now turn to Mark’s account of Jesus’ death.
The Day of Preparation (Wednesday evening – Thursday afternoon = Thursday)

“And on the first day of Unleavened Bread, when they sacrificed the Passover lamb, his disciples said to him, ‘Where will you have us go and prepare for you to eat the Passover?’ And he sent two of his disciples, and said to them, ‘Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him, and wherever he enters, say to the householder’, The Teacher says, ‘Where is my guest room, where I am to eat the Passover with my disciples?’ And he will show you a large upper room furnished and ready; there prepare for us.’ And the disciples set out and went to the city, and found it as he had told them; and they prepared the Passover” (Mk 14:12-16).

Eating of the Passover meal: Passover (Thursday evening – Friday afternoon)

“And when it was evening he came with the twelve. And as they were at table eating …” (Mk 14:17).

Jesus dies on the day of Passover

“And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, ‘Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?’ which means, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Mar 15:34; RSV).

“And when evening had come, since it was the day before the sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself looking for the kingdom of God, took courage and went to Pilate, and asked for the body of Jesus” (Mk 15:42-43; RSV).

Now compare John’s description of the death of Jesus with that of Mark:

The Day of Preparation (Wednesday evening – Thursday afternoon = Thursday)

“Now it was the day of Preparation of the Passover; it was about the sixth hour. He said to the Jews, ‘Behold your King!’ They cried out, ‘Away with him, away with him, crucify him!’ Pilate said to them, ‘Shall I crucify your King?’ The chief priests answered, ‘We have no king but Caesar.’ Then he handed him over to them to be crucified. So they took Jesus, and he went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called the place of a skull, which is called in Hebrew Golgotha. There they crucified
him, and with him two others, one on either side, and Jesus between them” (Jn 19:14-18; RSV).

**Eating of the Passover meal: Passover (Thursday evening – Friday afternoon)**

“Since it was the day before the Sabbath, in order to prevent the bodies from remaining on the cross on the Sabbath, the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away” (Jn 19:31; RSV).

What are the results of this comparison? In Mark Jesus’ disciples prepare the Passover meal on the Thursday afternoon (the Day of Preparation), Jesus and his disciples ate the Passover meal on Thursday evening (Passover), and Jesus is crucified on Passover (Friday morning at nine). He is taken from the cross during Friday afternoon. In John Jesus is crucified on the Day of Preparation (Thursday) at noon, and hangs on the cross until the Friday afternoon of Passover when he is taken of the cross before the Sabbath (Friday evening).

**Why this difference? Look at the following two verses from John:**

“The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, ‘Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world’” (Jn 1:29; RSV)!

“… and he looked at Jesus as he walked, and said, ‘Behold, the Lamb of God’” (Jn 1:36; RSV)!

As the Lamb of God (who died for our sins), John’s Jesus had to die on the Day of Preparation, the day on which the lambs were slaughtered. In other words, John has changed a historical datum in order to make a theological point: Jesus is the sacrificial lamb. And to convey this theological point, John had to create a discrepancy between his account and that of Mark.

The issue at stake is a very simple and basic one which can be expressed in a seemingly unambiguous question: When did Jesus die? That is, on what day, and at what time of day, was Jesus crucified? It turns out that the answer differs, depending on which Gospel you read.
We can thus conclude:

- There are discrepancies in the books of the New Testament.
- Some of these discrepancies cannot be reconciled.
- It is impossible that both Mark’s and John’s accounts are historically accurate, since they contradict each other on the question of when Jesus died.
- To understand what each author is trying to say, we have to look at the details of each account – and by no means treat one account as if it were saying the same thing as another account. John is different from Mark on a key, if seemingly minor, point. If we want to understand what John is saying about Jesus, we cannot reconcile the discrepancy, or we miss his point (Ehrman 2009:28-29).

1.1.1.5 The birth of Jesus

When was Jesus born?

According to Matthew 2:1, Jesus was born during the reign of Herod the Great, that is, before 4 BCE (the year Herod died). According to Luke 2:1-2, Jesus was born shortly after the census of Quirinius (decreed by the Roman emperor Augustus). From available historical sources (Josephus and Tacitus) we know that Quirinius became the governor of Syria in 6 CE. This means that Jesus, according to Luke, was born not earlier than 6 CE.

Jesus’ hometown

According to Matthew 2:1 Jesus’ parents lived in Bethlehem (the town in which Jesus was born). They then flee and travel to Egypt (Mt 2:14), and after their return settle down in Nazareth (Mt 2:23). According to Luke 2:4 the parents of Jesus lived in Nazareth, went to Bethlehem for Jesus’ birth, and after visiting Jerusalem (Lk 2:22) went back to their hometown (Lk 2:39).

Which was Jesus’ hometown? You decide.
Reason for the departure from their hometown

According to Matthew Herod’s plan to kill every male child two years and younger is the reason for Jesus’ parents leaving their hometown (Bethlehem). In Luke the reason for leaving their hometown (Nazareth) is the census of Quirinius.

Can both reasons be true?

More differences between the infancy narratives of Matthew and Luke

According to Matthew, after Jesus is born wise men come from the east, following a star that has led them to Jerusalem, where they ask about where the King of the Jews is to be born (Mt 2:1-12). After his birth Joseph, Mary, and Jesus flee and travel to Egypt (Mt 2:13-15). Later, in Egypt, Joseph learns in a dream that Herod has died, and now they can return. But when they discover that Archelaus, Herod’s son, is the ruler of Judea, they decide not to go back, but instead go to the northern district of Galilee, to the town of Nazareth. This then is where Jesus is raised. Luke recounts nothing about these events.

In Luke’s story of Jesus’ birth shepherds in the field are visited by an angelic host who tells them that the Messiah has been born in Bethlehem; they go and worship the child (Lk 2:8-20). Eight days later, Jesus is circumcised. Jesus is then presented to God in the temple, and his parents offer the sacrifice prescribed for this occasion by the Law of Moses. Jesus is recognized there as the Messiah by a righteous and devout man named Simeon and by an elderly and pious widow, Anna. When Joseph and Mary have finished “everything required by the Law of the Lord” concerning the birth of their firstborn, they return to Nazareth, where Jesus is raised. Matthew says nothing about these events.

Can both these stories be historical?

1.1.1.6 Jesus’ baptism

What did the voice at Jesus’ baptism say?

It depends on which account you read:
“And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens opened and the Spirit descending upon him like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, ‘Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased’” (Mk 1:10-11; RSV) – the voice speaks to Jesus.

“And when Jesus was baptized, he went up immediately from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and alighting on him; and lo, a voice from heaven, saying, ‘This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased’” (Mt 3:16-17; RSV) – the voice speaks to John the Baptist and the crowd.

“Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form, as a dove, and a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my son, today I have begotten you’” (Lk 3:21-22; RSV).

Is it possible to make a choice in this regard?

Where was Jesus the day after he was baptized?
According to Mark, Jesus was driven out to the wilderness for forty days:

“The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. And he was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered to him” (Mk 1:12-13; RSV).

This, however, is not John’s point of view:

“The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, ‘Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!’” (Jn 1:29; RSV).

“The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples; and he looked at Jesus as he walked, and said, ‘Behold, the Lamb of God!’” (Jn 1:35-36; RSV).

Can both these stories be historical?
1.1.1.7  **Was Jaïrus’ daughter already dead when the ruler of the synagogue came to Jesus for help?**

Mark says no:

“Then came one of the rulers of the synagogue, Jaïrus by name; and seeing him, he fell at his feet, and besought him, saying, ‘My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well, and live’” (Mk 5:22-23; RSV).

This story is interrupted by the narrative of the woman who had had a flow of blood for twelve years, (Mk 5:25-34; RSV). The narrative of the Jaïrus’ daughter then continues:

“While he was still speaking, there came from the ruler's house some who said, ‘Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the Teacher any further?’” (Mk 5:35; RSV)?

But Matthew says yes, she was already dead:

“While he was thus speaking to them, behold, a ruler came in and knelt before him, saying, ‘My daughter has just died; but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live’” (Mt 9:18; RSV).

1.1.1.8  **How long did Jesus’ ministry last?**

Let us first look at Mark’s point of view: “One Sabbath he was going through the grain fields; and as they made their way his disciples began to pluck heads of grain” (Mk 2:23; RSV). This must have taken place in the fall, at the time of the harvest. In Mark 11 we read that Jesus arrives in Jerusalem: “And when they drew near to Jerusalem, to Bethphage and Bethany, at the Mount of Olives …” (Mk 11:1; RSV). When did this happen? “It was now two days before the Passover and the feast of Unleavened Bread” (Mk 14:1; RSV). Passover is in the spring. Jesus’ ministry, according to Mark (and Matthew and Luke) thus lasted only six months (from harvest time [fall] to spring).

Only a few months? Does not everyone know that Jesus' ministry lasted three years? Actually, the idea that it lasted three years comes not from the Synoptic
Gospels – Mark, Matthew, and Luke – but from the last Gospel, John. On three separate occasions John refers to different Passover celebrations:

“The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem” (Joh 2:13; RSV).

“Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand” (Joh 6:4; RSV).

“Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and many went up from the country to Jerusalem before the Passover, to purify themselves” (Joh 11:55; RSV).

These three Passovers (each a year apart) would seem to indicate that the ministry must have lasted at least three years.

So, how long did Jesus’ public ministry last? The answer will depend on which gospel you read.

1.1.1.9 Judas’ motive in betraying Jesus

In Mark it seems that Judas betrayed Jesus because of greed: “Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went to the chief priests in order to betray him to them. And when they heard it they were glad, and promised to give him money. And he sought an opportunity to betray him” (Mk 14:10-11; RSV).

According to Matthew he did it for the money: “Then one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, ‘What will you give me if I deliver him to you?’ And they paid him thirty pieces of silver” (Mt 26:14-15; RSV).

Luke again, is of the opinion that the devil was behind it: “Then Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot, who was of the number of the twelve; he went away and conferred with the chief priests and officers how he might betray him to them” (Lk 22:3-4; RSV).
And in John, Judas is typified as being the devil himself: “Jesus answered them, ‘Did I not choose you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil?’ He spoke of Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the twelve, was to betray him” (Joh 6:70-71; RSV).

Was it out of greed (Mk), for the money (Mt), because the devil was behind it all (Lk), or because Judas himself was the devil (Jn)?

1.1.1.10 **How did Judas die?**

Let us look first at Matthew’s version: “When Judas, is betrayer, saw that he was condemned, he repented and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders, saying, ‘I have sinned in betraying innocent blood.’ They said, ‘What is that to us? See to it yourself.’ And throwing down the pieces of silver in the temple, he departed; and he went and hanged himself. But the chief priests, taking the pieces of silver, said, ‘It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, since they are blood money.’ So they took counsel, and bought with them the potter’s field, to bury strangers in. Therefore that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day. Then was fulfilled what had been spoken by the prophet Jeremiah, saying, ‘And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him on whom a price had been set by some of the sons of Israel, and they gave them for the potter’s field, as the Lord directed me’” (Mt 27:3-10; RSV).

Luke (in Luke-Acts), however, has a different version of these events: “(Now this man bought a field with the reward of his wickedness; and falling headlong he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out. And it became known to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the field was called in their language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood)” (Ac 1:18-19; RSV)

How did Judas die? Did he hang himself (Mt), or did he fell “headlong” and “burst open in the middle” so that “his bowels gushed out” (Ac)? Who bought the piece of land: the Jewish chief priests (Mt) or Judas himself (Ac)? Why was the piece of land called “Field of Blood”; because it was purchased with Judas’s blood money (Mt) or because Judas bled all over it when he “burst open in the middle” and bled all over it (Ac)?
1.1.1.11 The resurrection narratives

Nowhere are the differences among the Gospels more clear than in the accounts of Jesus’ resurrection. Who actually went to the tomb on Easter Sunday? Was it Mary alone (John 20:1)? Mary and another Mary (Matthew 28:1)? Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome (Mark 16:1)? Or women who had accompanied Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem – possibly Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and “other women” (Lk 24:1; see also Lk 23:55)?

Decide for yourself. Here are the verses:

“And when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week they went to the tomb when the sun had risen” (Mk 16:1-2; RSV).

“Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the sepulchre” (Mt 28:1; RSV).

“But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices which they had prepared…. Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them who told this to the apostles” (Lk 24:1, 10; RSV).

“Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tom” (Jn 20:1; RSV).

The stone in front of the tomb

Was Jesus’ tomb still closed when the women arrived, or was the stone already rolled away? Again, the answer will depend on which Gospel you read: “And very early on the first day of the week they went to the tomb when the sun had risen. And they were saying to one another, ‘Who will roll away the stone for us from the door of the tomb’” (Mk 16:2-3; RSV)?
“Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the sepulchre. And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone, and sat upon it” (Mt 28:1-2; RSV)

When the women/Maria arrived at the grave, whom or what did they see there?

“And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe; and they were amazed” (Mk 16:5; RSV).

“But the angel said to the women, ‘Do not be afraid; for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified’” (Mt 28:5; RSV).

“While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel; and as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, ‘Why do you seek the living among the dead?’” (Lk 24:4-5; RSV).

Was it a young man (Mk), an angel (Mt), or two men (Lk)? Indeed not an easy question to answer!

At the grave, what were the women told?

“And he said to them, ‘Do not be amazed; you seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen, he is not here; see the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him, as he told you’. And they went out and fled from the tomb; for trembling and astonishment had come upon them; and they said nothing to any one, for they were afraid” (Mk 16:6-8; RSV).

“Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and on the third day rise” (Lk 24:6-7; RSV).

Did the women say nothing (Mk), or indeed something (Lk)? If they did say something, what did they report? Here are the possible answers:
“So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples” (Mat 28:8; RSV).

If they did tell someone, whom did they tell? The eleven disciples (Matthew 28:8)? The eleven disciples and other people (Lk 24:8)? Simon, Peter and another unnamed disciple (John 20:2)? And what did the disciples do in response? Did they have no response because Jesus himself immediately appeared to them (Matthew 20:9)? Did they not believe the women because it seemed to be “an idle tale” (Lk 24:11)? Or did they go to the tomb to see for themselves (John 20:3)?

1.1.1.12 Other differences in the passion narratives
When Jesus entered Jerusalem during the Triumphal Entry, how many animals did he ride? Mark and Matthew give two different answers to this question:

“And they brought the colt to Jesus, and threw their garments on it; and he sat upon it” (Mk 11:7; RSV).

“The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; they brought the ass and the colt, and put their garments on them, and he sat thereon” (Mt 21:6-7; RSV).

What did Jesus tell the high priest when questioned at his trial?
Again we have two different answers to this question:

“But he was silent and made no answer. Again the high priest asked him, ‘Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?’ And Jesus said, ‘I am; and you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven’” (Mk 14:61-62; RSV).

“If you are the Christ, tell us.’ But he said to them, ‘If I tell you, you will not believe; and if I ask you, you will not answer. But from now on the Son of man shall be seated at the right hand of the power of God’” (Lk 22:67-69; RSV).
When was the curtain in the Temple ripped?

“And Jesus uttered a loud cry, and breathed his last. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom” (Mk 15:37-38; RSV).

“It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, while the sun's light failed; and the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, ‘Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit!’ And having said this he breathed his last” (Lk 23:44-46; RSV).

Was it before Jesus died (Lk), or after he died (Mk)?

What did the centurion say when Jesus died?

“And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that he thus breathed his last, he said, ‘Truly this man was the Son of God’” (Mk 15:39; RSV)!

“Now when the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God, and said, ‘Certainly this man was innocent’” (Lk 23:47; RSV)!

The difference is clear. What do you think this difference means?

1.1.1.13 Discrepancies involving the life and writings of Paul

After his conversion, did Paul go directly to Jerusalem to confer with those who were apostles before him? Take a look at the following verses from Paul’s own writing (Gl) and that of Acts.

“But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and had called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia; and again I returned to Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas, and remained with him fifteen days. But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother. (In what I am writing to you, before God, I do not lie!”; Gl 1:15-20; RSV)
“And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized, and took food and was strengthened. For several days he was with the disciples at Damascus” (Ac 9:18-19; RSV).

“And when he had come to Jerusalem he attempted to join the disciples; and they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple” (Ac 9:26; RSV).

“But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who spoke to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus. So he went in and out among them at Jerusalem” (Ac 9:27-28; RSV).

On all counts Acts seems to be at odds with Paul. Did Paul spend time with other Christians immediately (Acts) or not (Paul)? Did he go straight to Jerusalem (Acts) or not (Paul)? Did he meet with the group of apostles (Acts) or just with Peter and James (Paul)?

Paul says no (Gl), and Acts says yes.

**Did the churches in Judea know Paul?**

Paul (Gl) again answers no, while the answer of Acts is yes:

“And I was still not known by sight to the churches of Christ in Judea; they only heard it said, ‘He who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy’” (Gl 1:22-23; RSV).

“And Saul was consenting to his death. And on that day a great persecution arose against the church in Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the region of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. Devout men buried Stephen, and made great lamentation over him. But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison” (Ac 8:1-3; RSV).
“But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem” (Ac 9:1-2; RSV).

Why this constant difference between Paul and Acts?

Did Paul go to Athens alone?
Again Paul and Acts disagree: Paul says no, and Acts says yes:

“Therefore when we could bear it no longer, we were willing to be left behind at Athens alone, and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's servant in the gospel of Christ, to establish you in your faith and to exhort you, that no one be moved by these afflictions. You yourselves know that this is to be our lot” (1 Th 3:1-3; RSV).

Then the brethren immediately sent Paul off on his way to the sea, but Silas and Timothy remained there. Those who conducted Paul brought him as far as Athens; and receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible, they departed. Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols (Ac 17:14-16; RSV).

Again: Why this constant difference between Paul and Acts?

How many trips did Paul make to Jerusalem?
“Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas, and remained with him fifteen days” (Gl 1:18; RSV).

“Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me” (Gl 2:1; RSV).

“And when he had come to Jerusalem he attempted to join the disciples; and they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple” (Ac 9:26; RSV).
“And the disciples determined, every one according to his ability, to send relief to the brethren who lived in Judea; and they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul” (Ac 11:29-30; RSV).

“And when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question. So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, reporting the conversion of the Gentiles, and they gave great joy to all the brethren. When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they declared all that God had done with them” (Ac 15:2-4; RSV).

According to Paul, he only went twice to Jerusalem (Gl 1:18; 2:1). According to Acts, Paul visited Jerusalem at three different occasions (Ac 9, 11, 15). Yet again: Why this constant difference between Paul and Acts?

1.1.2 Theological differences in the New Testament
1.1.2.1 The death of Jesus in Mark and Luke

The death of Jesus in Mark

“In Mark’s version of the story (Mark 15:16-39), Jesus is condemned to death by Pontius Pilate, mocked and beaten by the Roman soldiers, and taken off to be crucified. Simon of Cyrene carries his cross. Jesus says nothing the entire time. The soldiers crucify Jesus, and he still says nothing. Both of the robbers being crucified with him mock him. Those passing by mock him. The Jewish leaders mock him. Jesus is silent until the very end, when he utters the wretched cry, ‘Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani,’ which Mark translates from the Aramaic for his readers as, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’ Someone gives Jesus a sponge with sour wine to drink. He breathes his last and dies. Immediately two things happen: the curtain in the Temple is ripped in half, and the centurion looking on acknowledges ‘Truly this man was the Son of God.’ This is a powerful and moving scene, filled with emotion and pathos. Jesus is silent the entire time, as if in shock, until his cry at the end, echoing Psalm 22. I take his question to God to be a genuine one. He genuinely wants to know why God has left him like this … Jesus has been rejected by everyone: betrayed by one of his own, denied three times by his closest follower,
abandoned by all his disciples, rejected by the Jewish leaders, condemned by the Roman authorities, mocked by the priests, the passersby, and even by the two others being crucified with him. At the end he even feels forsaken by God Himself. Jesus is absolutely in the depths of despair and heart-wrenching anguish, and that’s how he dies. Mark is trying to say something by this portrayal. He doesn’t want his readers to take solace in the fact that God was really there providing Jesus with physical comfort. He dies, in agony, unsure of the reason he must die.

But the reader knows the reason. Right after Jesus dies the curtain rips in half and the centurion makes his confession. The curtain ripping in half shows that with the death of Jesus, God is made available to his people directly and not through the Jewish priests’ sacrifices in the Temple. Jesus’ death has brought an atonement (see Mark 10:45). And someone realizes it right off the bat: not Jesus’ closest followers or the Jewish onlookers but the pagan soldier who has just crucified him. Jesus’ death brings salvation, and it is gentiles who are going to recognize it. This is not a disinterested account of what ‘really’ happened when Jesus died. It is theology put in the form of a narrative.

Historical scholars have long thought that Mark is not only explaining the significance of Jesus’ death in this account but also quite possibly writing with a particular audience in mind, an audience of later followers of Jesus who also have experienced persecution and suffering at the hands of authorities who are opposed to God. Like Jesus, his followers may not know why they are experiencing such pain and misery. But Mark tells these Christians they can rest assured: even though they may not see why they are suffering, God knows, and God is working behind the scenes to make suffering redemptive. God’s purposes are worked precisely through suffering, not by avoiding it, even when those purposes are not obvious at the moment. Mark’s version of the death of Jesus thus provides a model for understanding the persecution of the Christians.” (Ehrman 2009:65-67)

The death of Jesus in Luke

“Luke’s account is also very interesting, thoughtful, and moving, but it is very different indeed (Luke 23:26-49). It is not just that there are discrepancies in some of
their details; the differences are bigger than that. They affect the very way the story is told and, as a result, the way the story is to be interpreted.

In Luke as in Mark, Jesus is betrayed by Judas, denied by Peter, rejected by the Jewish leaders, and condemned by Pontius Pilate, but he is not mocked and beaten by Pilate’s soldiers. Only Luke tells the story of Pilate trying to get King Herod of Galilee – the son of the King Herod from the birth stories – to deal with Jesus, and it is Herod’s soldiers who mock Jesus before Pilate finds him guilty. This is a discrepancy, but it doesn’t affect the overall reading of the difference between the two accounts that I’m highlighting here.

In Luke, Jesus is taken off to be executed, and Simon of Cyrene is compelled to carry his cross. But Jesus is not silent on the way to his crucifixion. En route he sees a number of women wailing over what is happening to him, and he turns to them and says, ‘Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children’ (Luke 23:28). He goes on to prophesy the coming destruction that they will face. Jesus does not appear to be in shock over what is happening to him. He is more concerned with others around him than with his own fate.

Moreover, Jesus is not silent while being nailed to the cross, as in Mark. Instead he prays, ‘Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they are doing’ (Luke 23:34). Jesus appears to have close communion with God and is concerned more for those who are doing this to him than for himself. Jesus is mocked by the Jewish leaders and the Roman soldiers, but explicitly not by both men being crucified with him, unlike in Mark. Instead, one of them mocks Jesus but the other rebukes the first for doing so, insisting that whereas they deserve what they are getting, Jesus has done nothing wrong (remember that Luke stresses Jesus’ complete innocence). He then asks of Jesus, ‘Remember me when you come into your kingdom.’ And Jesus gives the compelling reply, ‘Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise’ (23:42-43). In this account Jesus is not at all confused about what is happening to him or why. He is completely calm and in control of the situation; he knows what is about to occur, and he knows what will happen afterward: he will wake up in God’s paradise, and this criminal will be there with him. This is a far cry from the Jesus of Mark, who felt forsaken to the end.
Darkness comes over the land and the Temple curtain is ripped while Jesus is still alive, in contrast to Mark. Here the torn curtain must not indicate that Jesus’ death brings atonement – since he has not died yet. Instead it shows that his death is ‘the hour of darkness,’ as he says earlier in the Gospel (23:53), and it marks the judgment of God against the Jewish people. The ripped curtain here appears to indicate that God is rejecting the Jewish system of worship, symbolized by the Temple.

Most significant of all, rather than uttering a cry expressing his sense of total abandonment at the end (‘Why have you forsaken me?’), in Luke, Jesus prays to God in a loud voice, saying, ‘Father into your hands I commend my spirit.’ He then breathes his last and dies (23:46). This is not a Jesus who feels forsaken by God and wonders why he is going through this pain of desertion and death. It is a Jesus who feels God’s presence with him and is comforted by the fact that God is on his side. He is fully cognizant of what is happening to him and why, and he commits himself to the loving care of his heavenly Father, confident of what is to happen next. The centurion then confirms what Jesus himself knew full well, ‘Surely this man was innocent.’

It is hard to stress strongly enough the differences between these two portrayals of Jesus’ death. Earlier I pointed out that scholars have sometimes suggested that Mark’s account was written in part to provide hope for those suffering persecution, to let them know that, appearances notwithstanding, God was at work behind suffering to achieve his redemptive purposes. What might Luke’s purpose have been in modifying Mark’s account, so that Jesus no longer dies in agony and despair?

Some critical interpreters have suggested that Luke may also be writing for Christians experiencing persecution, but his message to those suffering for the faith is different from Mark’s. Rather than stressing that God is at work behind the scenes, even though it doesn’t seem like it, Luka may be showing Christians a model of how they, too, can suffer – like Jesus, the perfect martyr, who goes to his death confident of his own innocence, assured by God’s palpable presence in his life, calm and in control of the situation. Knowing that suffering is necessary for the rewards of Paradise and that it will soon be over, leading to a blessed existence in the life to
come. The two authors may be addressing similar situations, but they are conveying very different messages, both about how Jesus died and about how his followers can face persecution.” (Ehrman 2009:67-69)

Why did Jesus die?
The death of Jesus is central to both Paul and to each of the Gospel writers. But why did he die? And what relation did his death have to salvation? The answer depends on which author you read.

Let Mark speak first: “For the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many’ (Mk 10:45; RSV). Mark is clear that Jesus’ death brought about atonement for sin. The death of Jesus ransoms others from the debt they owe to God because of sin; it is an atoning sacrifice. This is also the reason why in Mark the curtain in the Temple is ripped in half immediately after Jesus died; the ‘evidence’ that Jesus’ death brought atonement and that all people now have access to God.

What does Luke has to say on this point? In Luke the ripping of the curtain occurs while Jesus is still alive. The ripping of the curtain no longer signifies the atoning significance of Jesus’ death but the judgment of God on the temple of the Jews, a symbolic statement that it will be destroyed. So what is the reason for Jesus’ death in Luke? The matter becomes clearer in Luke’s second volume, the book of Acts, where the apostles preach about the salvation that has come in Christ in order to convert others to the faith. In none of these missionary sermons is there a single word about Jesus’ death being atonement. Instead, the constant message is that people are guilty for rejecting the one sent from God and having him killed. The death of the innocent one (Jesus) should make people repent of their sins and turn to God, so he can forgive them.

“Let all the house of Israel therefore knows assuredly that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.’ Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Brethren, what shall we do?’ And Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the
name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Ac 2:36-38; RSV)

“And now, brethren, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ should suffer, he thus fulfilled. Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord” (Ac 3:17-19; RSV).

Luke’s view is that salvation comes not through an atoning sacrifice but by forgiveness that comes from repentance.

But aren’t atonement and forgiveness the same thing? Not at all. It’s like this. Suppose you owe me a hundred rand but can’t pay. There are a couple of ways the problem could be solved. Someone else (a friend, your brother, your parents) could pay the hundred rand for you. That would be like atonement: someone else pays your penalty. Or, instead of that, I could simply say, ‘Never mind, I don’t need the money.’ That would be like forgiveness, in which no one pays and God simply forgives the debt” (see Ehrman 2009:95-96).

1.1.2.2 When did Jesus become the Son of God?
The New Testament answers this question in four ways:

Before his birth
“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God…. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father” (Jn 1:1,14; RSV).

“But when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law” (Gal 4:4; RSV).

At his birth
“And the angel said to her, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God’” (Lk 1:35; RSV).
At his baptism
“In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens opened and the Spirit descending upon him like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, ‘Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased’” (Mk 1:9-11; RSV).

“Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form, as a dove, and a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my son, today I have begotten you’” (Lk 3:21-22; RSV).

At his resurrection
“And we bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus; as also it is written in the second psalm, ‘Thou art my Son, today I have begotten thee’” (Ac 13:32-33; RSV).

“[T]he gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rm 1:3-4; RSV).

“[W]ho, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which 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” (Phlp 2:6-11; RSV).

Indeed difficult!

1.2 THE AIM OF NEW TESTAMENT SCHOLARSHIP
When one looks at the above “contradictions” in the New Testament, the simplest answer to the question what it is that New Testament Scholarship entails, would be to
say that it refers to the scientific study of the New Testament. And, in the case of a faculty attached to and affiliated with a church, one would have to add that the study of the New Testament has the eventual aim of attaining results that would advance the faith of the church.

1.3 THE SUB DISCIPLINES OF NEW TESTAMENT SCHOLARSHIP

Merely mentioning the scientific study of the New Testament, however, is insufficient for the reason that it fails to suggest the many facets – contiguous with a variety of sub disciplines – of this science. In fact, it entails the following areas of investigation: the language of the New Testament; its political-, economical- and cultural-historical milieu, introduction, hermeneutics, theology, and the history of the earliest church. Each of these sub disciplines, without which the scientific study of the New Testament would not be possible, proceeds according to its own principles and methods and thus constitutes, in a certain sense, a science of its own. However, even though they, to a high degree, function independently and separately from one another, they would miss their actual purpose if they did not, all of them, pursue the common goal of communicating, as clearly and effectively as possible, the message of the New Testament to the church and the world.

The different subdisciplines of the study of the New Testament look as follows:

The language of the New Testament

The political-, economical- and cultural-historic milieu of the New Testament

Introductory studies

- General introduction
  - Canonicity
    - Historical question of the canon
    - Fundamental question of the canon
  - Textual research (the history of the text)
    - Textual production and -reproduction
    - Textual criticism
• Particular introduction
  ▪ External aspects
    o the writer and his circumstances (also called the authenticity question)
    o the original readers and their circumstances
    o the reason for and purpose of the writing
    o the time and place of writing
  ▪ Internal aspects
    o literary identification
    o the history of the origins of the text (if any)
    o language and style
    o unity
    o integrity
    o construction
    o relationship with other New Testament or related contemporary literature

Hermeneutics
• Theory of understanding/hermeneutics
  ▪ Epistemology
    o Premodern
    o Modern
    o Postmodern
• Exegesis (interpretation)
  ▪ Theory of exegesis
    o Epistemological paradigms
      ✓ Historical or diachronic approach (interested in the author and the origins, or the process of origination, of a text [genetic paradigm]
      Reading strategies: formal, (earlier) literary, traditional and editorial criticism
      ✓ Text-immanent or synchronic approach (interested in the text as such, or the final product in the event that the text represents the final stage of a whole process)
Reading strategies: French structuralism, Russian formalism, the Amsterdam school, narratology (narrative theory), South African discourse analysis and the so-called new rhetoric
✓ Reader-oriented exegetical approach

Reading strategies: reception theory/aesthetics, materialistic and feminist exegesis, speech act theory and deconstruction
✓ Social-scientific analysis (social-scientific criticism)
  • The practice of exegesis (application of theory in practice)

Theology

The history of early Christianity

1.4 THE STUDY OF SCRIPTURE (CRITICAL INVESTIGATION) AND FAITH
We know the New Testament as part of the book of the church, die Bible. But we also know it as a book in its own right which, for us, is the Word of God – but the word of God in human words, as it is expressed habitually. To say “word of God in human words”, is to express the fact that the New Testament is – through and through – a human book which was brought into being by humans while we, nevertheless, believe that God was engaged in this process and that He revealed Himself and His glory in it. It has never been possible – and it is not possible now – to say just how God was involved in this process. Normally we distinguish in this regard between mechanical – and organical inspiration.

Under mechanical inspiration is understood that God, through His Spirit, physically dictated every sentence, word, full stop, comma and capital letter to the writers of the Bible. In a sense the writers of the Bible functioned as robots, and had no input whatsoever in the writing of the different documents of the Bible. They were mere “channels” used by God, totally passive in the writing down of the different documents.
Organical inspiration, on the other hand, take as cue that God used people to write the Bible. Each and every writer of the Biblical documents wrote the different documents down, driven by the Spirit, in terms of their own cultural and social location and circumstances, as well as their linguistic abilities and insight (see again the expression “word of God in human words”). In this regarded it is also important to take note of the fact that we therefore most frequently have to do in the Bible with what can be called “metaphorical speech” – the saying of the “unsayable” in sayable words (see e.g. Jn 14).

To understand the inspiration of the Bible as organically inspirited, however, is not enough, since it only tries to explain the process of the writing of the different documents. The inspiration of the Word entail more – it also has to do with the way in which the early church used the available writings, the decisions to make use of certain books by excluding several other available writings, (the so-called non-canonical books), the process of the finalization of the canon, and the current use of the Bible in
academics, church and personal devotion. WE should therefore rather speak of dialectical or functional inspiration.

It is also not possible to claim that this New Testament is the word of God in a way that is prior to, or independent from, the testimony of the New Testament itself. It can only become evident if and when the New Testament attests it to be so. In order to let this happen, the New Testament must be subjected to rigorous and thorough investigation, to the same scientific investigation as any similar document from the past. The New Testament is not a holy book. There is for this reason not a holier, or less profane, method by means of which it must or can be interrogated than is the case for any other book. We also do not believe in the New Testament; we believe in the God of whom the New Testament bears witness. And, so as to learn as well as possible what this testimony entails, we must not recoil from critical investigation. We have no other choice; each of us has the responsibility to inquire into the substance of the New Testament, something which becomes ever clearer as we continue to pose our questions to the New Testament with an open mind. Or, to put it more correctly: the more we really open ourselves to what the New Testament might say to us. But what the New Testament might say to us can never become a completed piece of testimony or a revelation. We, and each new generation, can at most entertain the expectation of learning at least something of this testimony which will be different in each new situation.

1.5 THE NEW TESTAMENT: A LIBRARY CONSISTING OF TWENTY SEVEN BOOKS

To say that the New Testament is a book is to look at it from a particular vantage point and distance. If we look at it more closely, it quickly becomes evident that it is in fact more correct to refer to it as a library with twenty-seven books. And if we look at these books, some of which are larger and others smaller in volume, it also becomes clear what variety they represent and how different they, in many respects, are from one another. Why does this variety occur and what is the reason for the differences we find when dealing with the same subject matter? Does this have anything to do with the circumstances of the books’ origin, with tendencies within the earliest faith communities, with independent perceptions, with influences from the outside, with the destiny of the books themselves, or with the possibility that books were taken up in this
library which do not fit into it, while others which do belong there have not been taken up? All these questions and many more, have served as impetus for the various sub disciplines which make up New Testament Scholarship. And it is to these that we need to pay attention next.
STUDY UNIT 2

THE LANGUAGE OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

The first thing with which one is confronted when one approaches a text is the language in which it was written. Knowledge of the specific language concerned can unfold the subject matter or the world of the text to the reader, while it would obviously remain a closed book if one were not to know this language. For the reason that it is also through the language of the New Testament that we are introduced to it, we can with full justification say that it is not possible to speak of New Testament Scholarship in the strict sense if it is not built on and accompanied by a well-grounded knowledge of the language of the New Testament.

Very early on, it became clear to people with knowledge of classical Greek (Attic) that the vast majority of the documents of the New Testament were written in a Greek that was noticeably different from classical Greek. For a long time the naïve view existed that this was an unusual type of Greek which should be explained in terms of the revelatory character of the New Testament, a Holy Spirit Greek, as some typified it.

The research carried out by Adolf Deissmann in the first years of the twentieth century, however, brought an end to this view. By studying numerous papyri from the time of the New Testament, he determined that the language of the New Testament agreed to a great extent with the Greek that was spoken and written in the Hellenistic milieu of the time. In 325 BCE Alexander the Great (336-323 BC), also known as Alexander III, the king of Macedonia, conquered the “whole world” as it was known by the Greeks (from Greece in the west to India in the east). This occupation brought with it the Greek culture, and very soon everybody spoke Greek. As is the case with the Afrikaans-language (that evolved from different languages [German, Dutch and Germanic]), the Greek that came to be spoken was a product of the different languages and Greek dialects that were spoken in the area that was under the jurisdiction of Alexander III. The product was koinē, the lingua franca of the Hellenistic world (the literal transcription of the Greek word koinē means “that what is common”).
Alexander the Great defeats Darius III at Issus in 333 BCE to conquer Persia

Die empire of Alexander the Great just before his death in 325 BCE

But this does not yet fully account for the question of the Greek of the New Testament. For a number of the documents to a greater or lesser extent also exhibit Semitic influence, a phenomenon which gave rise to the incorrect assumption that some of these documents were translations of Aramaic originals. Some documents, like Mark, also have a few Latinisms. One might add here the fact that the character of the Greek differs from document to document – and, in some cases, considerably. The Epistle to the Hebrews, which reveals a comparatively strong classical Greek influence, probably contains the best Greek of the documents, while Revelation exhibits the worst Greek.
This clearly indicates that responsible study of the New Testament not only requires knowledge of Greek, but especially also knowledge of the Greek of the New Testament. This Greek, quite apart from the extent to which it differs from document to document, also exhibits a very particular character – and the student of the New Testament must ascertain exactly what this is. This can only happen if the student is, in a structured way, equipped with knowledge of this Greek quite early on in his or her training.
According to all indications, the earliest Christians were not people who in a sectarian way lived in isolation from the world, as if they were on an island. Even if they no longer have participated in particular religious or other practices in their past and in their milieu, they apparently did continue to live as ordinary people in their societies, except in such cases when they were ostracised socially as a consequence of their Christian faith. In any event, they were still exposed to the influences, tendencies and powers which emanated from their world, in other words, from the first-century Graeco-Roman and Jewish world of the Mediterranean.

As an advanced agrarian society⁴, first-century Palestine was part of the Roman Empire from 63 BCE. The Empire was presided over by the emperor bearing the title pater patriae (Father of the Fatherland) – was an aristocratic society, divided into the haves (rulers) and the have-notes (the ruled). The ruling class (elite) comprised of only 1 to 2 percent of the population and lived in the cities while the rest of the population, the peasants (the ruled), lived in hamlets, villages and towns (see Oakman in Herzog 2005:58). No middle class existed. Although comprising only 1 to 2 percent of the population, the elite controlled most of the wealth (one-half up to two-thirds) by controlling the land, its produce and the peasants whose labor created the produce.³ As such, the elite shaped “the social experience of the empire’s inhabitants, determined the ‘quality’ of life, exercised power, controlled wealth, and enjoyed high status” (Carter 2006:3; see also Hanson & Oakman 1998:69). In the words of Horsley (1993:5): “The relation between empire and subjected people is

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² For a short summary of the salient attributes of an advanced agrarian society, see Hanson & Oakman (1998:14). The difference between an (simple) agrarian and an advanced agrarian society is that the latter is more advanced in certain aspects of technology and production, for example the use of iron tools.

³ “The Roman Empire was … an (advanced – EvE) agrarian society. Its wealth and power was based in land. The elite did not rule by democratic elections. In part they ruled by hereditary control of the empire’s primary recourses of land and labour. They owned its land and consumed some 65 percent of its production. They exploited cheap labor with slaves and tenants farmers. They lived at the expense of nonelites. Local, regional and imperial elites imposed tributes, taxes, and rents, extracting wealth from nonelites by taxing the production, distribution, and consumption of goods” (Carter 2006:3).
one of power”. All matters of importance were in the hands of the elite, and no legitimate channel for political participation by the peasantry existed” (see also Horsley 1993:11).

Rome, the Herodian elite, as well as the aristocratic elite in Jerusalem, controlled the land, its yield, its distribution, and its cultivators by extracting taxes, tribute and rents – an act of domination that subordinated the peasants against their will. The peasantry was exposed to three levels of tribute taking (see Oakman 1986:65). The Roman tribute consisted of two basic forms: the tributum soli (land tax) and the tributum capitis (poll tax). As such, Rome claims to rule the land, the bodies who worked the land4, as well as its yield5 (see Fiensy 1991:99-101). Non-payment of taxes was seen as rebellion “because it refused recognition of Rome’s sovereignty over land, sea, labor, and production” (Horsley 1993:6; see also Carter 2006:4). Next in line in the Galilee was Herod Antipas with the Herodian aristocracy centered in Sepphoris and Tiberius. Antipas collected tribute especially to support his rule and to finance his extravagant building projects (the building of Tiberius and the rebuilding of Sepphoris). Finally, the temple aristocracy also took their share in the form of tithes and offerings to support the temple as well as Roman rule6. Even the peasants of the Galilee were subjected to this demand, although they lived outside the jurisdiction of Judaea7. In short: Rome assessed its tribute and then left Herod and the temple elite free to exploit the land to whatever degree they saw fit, “a pattern often found in aristocratic empires and colonial powers” (Herzog 2005:52). From the side of the ruled, however, it was seen

4 Because of this, regular census was a necessity, as can be deduced form Luke 2:1-3.

5 In the words of Malina (2001:27): “In the imperial system the essential application of power was to benefit elites and their retainers by the further acquisition of land and its products – vegetable, animal, and human”.

6 The peasantry in the Galilee, in all likelihood, could not meet all the demands for taxes, tribute, tithes and offerings. To survive, Herzog (2005:54) opines, they most probably were forced to withhold their tithes from the temple to survive, since they were unable to avoid Roman and Herodian taxes and tribute. The temple responded by labeling the peasants of the land as indebted and unclean, which, of course, heightened the tension and conflict between the temple elite and the Galilean peasantry.

7 Although there are some debate on the precise amount of tribute and taxes the peasantry was subjected to, most estimates run from 35 to 50 percent. The appropriation of the so-called surplus of the harvest already left the peasant with nothing more than a subsistence living, from which this percentage of tribute and taxes then was deducted. This left the peasantry in a situation where their level of subsistence functioned in a very narrow margin (see Fiensy 1991:103; Herzog 2005:53).
as “brutal compulsion and oppression” (Oakman 1986:59; Hanson & Oakman 1998:16).

First-century Palestine, being part of the Roman Empire, was also subjected to the fact that the Roman Empire was legionary in character. The elite ruled by coercion, using the Roman army, and any kind of rebellion were met by ruthless military retaliation (see Horsley 1993:6). To exercise sovereignty, enforce submission and intimidate anyone that contemplated revolt, “coercive diplomacy” was practiced, that is, the presence and thus visibility of legions throughout the empire (see Horsley 1993:8; Carter 2006:4). These armies were costly (food, clothing, housing and equipment), but taxes and special levies extracted from the ruled covered these costs. Put boldly: the ruled paid to be ruled over.

Another salient feature of advanced agrarian societies is what Lenski (1966:214-219) has called “the proprietary theory of the state”: the rulers treated controlled (conquered) land as their personal estate to confiscate, distribute, redistribute and disperse as he deems fit (Herzog 2005:55). This was also the case in Judaea. Although the land (ideologically speaking) belonged to peasant smallholders who inherited their ancestral plots, the priestly elite added peasant land to their estates by investing in loans (using the wealth they accrued in the temple) to the poor at up to 60% with the clear intention of foreclosing on their debtors when they could not repay their debts (Goodman 1982:426). Rising indebtedness, however, not only lead to the lost of land that was the base of the peasant’s subsistence – it also lead to the loss of the peasant’s place in the traditional social structure (see Horsley 1993:11). Each foreclosing heightened the tension between the ruling elite and the peasant smallholders, the rulers and the ruled. The ruling class, however, established an ideology that blamed the failure of the peasants (their inability to pay back the loans and to cope with their situation) for their practices.9

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8 When Herod the Great came into power he redistributed the land under his control to aristocrats loyal to him. The “Herodians” referred to in the gospels (e.g., Mk 3:6) probably refers to this political faction of aristocratic elite loyal to Herod and, of course, dependent on Herod’s patronage (see Herzog 2005:55).

9 This ideology is described by Ryan (1976, in Herzog 2005:145-146) as “blaming the victim”. This ideology masked those portions of the Torah like the debt code (e.g., the Jubilee) and mystified the source of the exploitation of the peasantry (see Herzog 2005:146).
Patron-client relationships were part and parcel of advanced agrarian societies. The ruler stood in patron-client relationships with other elites by dispensing patronage in the form of land and political positions, expecting personal loyalty and support of his political program from them. Herod Antipas, for example, ruled over the Galilee by grace of his patron Caesar Augustus, promoting Rome’s interests. Elites also entered into patron-client relationship with the poor and the peasantry. These relationships benefited the rulers in terms of the accumulation of honor and status, and from the side of the peasantry it enabled them to secure something more than just subsistence living. The purpose of patron-client relationships was to exercise power over others, a core value of advanced agrarian societies (see Herzog 2005:55; Hanson & Oakman 1998:72).

Since rulers in advanced agrarian societies usually came into power through the using of force (Horsley 1993:5), “they use different kinds of legitimization to justify their rule and declare their divine right to rule” (Herzog 2005:56). This was done, first and foremost, by claiming the favor of the gods. Rome’s imperial theology claimed that Rome was chosen by the gods, especially Jupiter, to rule an “empire without end” (Virgil, Aeneid 1.278-279; see Carter 2006:7). This imperial theology was under girded and legitimized especially with the imperial cult (temples, images, rituals and personnel that honored the emperor)\(^\text{10}\). To legitimize their power further, the elite controlled various forms of communication, such as the designs of coins, the building of monuments and the construction of various other buildings such as temples (Carter 2006:4). “Temples … provide divine sanction and blessing, leaving the impression that a ruler has come to power by the will of the gods or a mandate from heaven” (Herzog 2005:153). Development – in the form of the building of cities, roads and aqueducts – was another form of legitimization, since it gave the impression of prosperity (although it was built with forced labor). Another form of legitimization was to favor traditional or local forms of legitimation such as employing “indirect rule” and allowing the use of temples or cults/religions. Indirect rule had the advantage in that it “provided a bridge of legitimation that enabled an empire to

\(^{10}\) Although participation in the imperial cult was voluntary (Carter 2006:7), Rome expected a daily sacrifice for the emperor in the Jerusalem temple (Horsley 1993:8). The fact that daily prayers and sacrifices were offered for the emperor in the temple is a clear indication that the priestly elite saw themselves as client of their patron, the emperor. This is also the reason why the temple elite, when conflict arose between Judeans and their Roman patrons, continually took the side of Rome (see Horsley 1993:110).
divide and rule” (Horsley 1993:9): popular resentment was deflected to the local aristocracy (e.g., the temple elite in Judaea), while the imperial rulers remained remote or “invisible”, seemingly not involved. The favoring of the use of temples or cults/religions produced stability and reinforced certain traditions that were of value for the rulers. This was nothing more than a tool to separate the peasants from the wealth they produced in a “legitimate” way (Herzog 2005:153). Herod Antipas, allowing the temple to claim tithes and offerings on his subjected people (the peasants in the Galilee), can serve as an ample example. With regard to the relationship between the temple elite and the Galilean peasantry, the “Great Tradition” offered an interpretation of the Torah in service of the priestly elites (ruling class) emphasizing purity and tithing, a reading that legitimized their economic exploitation of the Galilean peasantry (see Herzog 2005:59). Even the major pilgrimage festivals were ideologically employed by the temple elite: through liturgy and ritual the Great Tradition was rehearsed and preserved, with the view to renew the ties of the peasantry with the temple, its sacrificial system, tithes and offerings (see Herzog 2005:60).

Anyone who possesses knowledge of this world will soon realise the extent to which the New Testament, as a product of its times and its milieu, is a reflection of this world and its structures, whether in the sphere of the family, politics, economics, the cult, teaching or justice.

The first Christian communities simply carried over some of the practices and beliefs of this first-century society into their new faith, others were incorporated involuntarily, while still others were taken over consciously and were used to conceptualise and communicate the meaning of the Christ events as clearly as possible both inside and outside of the church.

In view of the above, if one is to develop a better understanding of the New Testament and the earliest church(es), it will obviously be necessary to have a wide-ranging knowledge of the cultural-historical basis from which Christianity arose and in which it underwent its earliest stages of development. This will enable one to view the New Testament as a whole, and its various documents in particular, in perspective, and to hear something of what these texts from an ancient and far-removed world want to tell
us. Our understanding of these texts will quite simply be incomplete and anachronistic if we do not, in the first instance, read them in the context, and against the background, of the world in which they came into being. So much of the dynamism, so many of the nuances, motifs and perspectives which are to be found in these texts will simply not be observable if they are not viewed in terms of the knowledge which a study of the world of the New Testament grants us.

This will also enable us to evaluate earliest Christianity as it really was and, in this way, to attain insight into what can be viewed as the basic principles of our Christian faith. Or, to put the matter differently: Which concepts were really new and unique in earliest Christianity? Which ones were, as far as their form is concerned, not unique but given new content? What was simply taken, in unchanged form, from the milieu and made part of the makeup of Christianity?
STUDY UNIT 4
INTRODUCTORY STUDIES

Introductory studies to the New Testament consist of two sub divisions, namely general and specific introduction. The term general introduction to (also called canonicity of the New Testament) indicates the subsection of New Testament studies that concerns itself with the question as to the origin, the collection (canonicity history) and tradition (textual research) of the twenty-seven books which make up the New Testament. The term specific introduction, on the other hand, concerns itself with introductory questions that pertain to each document of the New Testament: the writer and his circumstances (also called the authenticity question), the original readers and their circumstances, the reason for and purpose of the writing and the time and place of writing (external aspects), as well the specific document’s literary identification, the history of the origins of the text (if any), language and style, unity, integrity, construction and relationship with other New Testament or related contemporary literature (internal aspects).

As indicated above, the sub division general introduction consist of two further subdivisions, that is, canonicity and textual research, that are respectively divided into the historical question of the canon and fundamental question of the canon (canonicity) and textual production and -reproduction and textual criticism (textual research). Canonicity thus entails, on the one hand, a historical investigation into the circumstances of the coming into being of each of these documents separately, into the reasons for and the process of their canonisation (the historical question of the canon), and a fundamental investigation through which, time and again, the validity of earlier assumptions should be adjudicated and through which new and different answers might have to be reached (fundamental question of the canon). Textual research, in its turn, is interested in the vagaries of the transmission of the texts of the New Testament through the ages, first in handwritten and later in printed form (the history of the text).

Introductory scholars differ on the sequence in which the various sections or areas of introductory studies should be dealt with in an investigation. Some want to emphasise the history of either the canon or the text. The idea here is that the investigator must first be enabled to determine which documents should form the object of his or her
investigation and therefore, at the same time, should know which documents enjoyed full acceptance from the very beginning, which were controversial for a while, and which were rejected, and for which reasons (canonicity history). With the field of study delineated in this way and illuminated to a fuller extent, a study is then, as a second step, undertaken into the transmission of the text(s) of these documents, separately and together, in order eventually, by means of the data that were found in this way, to come to the best possible construction of the text with which one intends working (textual research). Only then is the individual study of each individual document deemed possible and meaningful (specific introduction).

Another sequence which is propagated is that the history of the textual tradition be first considered (textual research), then the origins of the specific documents and then the process of canon formation (canonicity history). A third way of dealing with the matter is to begin with the specific documents (textual research), then to move to the history of their canonisation (canonicity history), and to end with the question as to their transmission in the tradition. The rationale here is that in this way the sequence is more or less followed in which the processes of the origination of the specific documents, their canonisation and their transmission historically followed on one another.

A rigid choice for one or the other of these above-mentioned sequences of investigation cannot finally be made. The reason for this is that the work that is done in each of these areas of investigation is in some way or another related to the others and is also influenced by the results which are attained by the others. Consequently, an equal number of arguments can be made for this or that sequence.

Aside from these three areas of investigation which may be distinguished in introductory studies, a distinction is usually also made between a “general” and a “specific” introduction. The former refers to the study of the question of the canon and the transmission of the text, while the latter refers to the introductory questions which are relevant to each specific document. What this means is that, while the study carried out into the canon and textual transmission touches on matters which affect the New Testament as a whole, the investigation into the origins and the nature of the specific documents obviously implies a rendering specific of the question.
4.1 GENERAL INTRODUCTION

4.1.1 Canonicity

The process of the forming of the canon

In the early church there were lots of Christians in lots of places who fully believed that other books were to be accepted as Scripture; conversely, some of the books that eventually made it into the canon were rejected by church leaders in different parts of the church, sometimes for centuries. In some parts of the church, the Apocalypse of John (the book of Revelation) was flat out rejected as containing false teaching, whereas the Apocalypse of Peter, which eventually did not make it in, was accepted. There were some Christians who accepted the Gospel of Peter and some who rejected the Gospel of John. There were some Christians who accepted a truncated version of the Gospel of Luke (without its first two chapters), and others who accepted the now non-canonical Gospel of Thomas. Some Christians rejected the three Pastoral Epistles of 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus, which eventually made it in, and others accepted the Epistle of Barnabas, which did not.

In the first few centuries of the church, lots of different Christian groups espoused a wide range of theological and ecclesiastical views. These different groups were completely at odds with each other over some of the most fundamental issues: How many Gods are there? Was Jesus human? Was he divine? Is the material world inherently good or evil? Does salvation come to the human body, or does it come by escaping the body? Does Jesus’ death have anything to do with salvation?

The problem in the development of the canon of Scripture was that each and every one of the competitive groups of Christians – each of them insisting they were right, each trying to win converts – had sacred books that authorized their points of view. And most of these books claimed to be written by apostles. Who was right? The canon that emerged from these debates represented the books favored by the group that ended up winning. It did not happen overnight. In fact, it took centuries. To put the process of canonization into its proper context, we need to know something about the wild diversity of the early Christian movement during its early centuries. You might think that from the beginning, Christianity was always basically one thing: a religion descended from Jesus, as interpreted by Paul, leading to the church of the Middle Ages on down to the present. But things were not at all that simple. About a
hundred fifty years after Jesus’ death we find a wide range of different Christian
groups claiming to represent the views of Jesus and his disciples but having
completely divergent perspectives, far more divergent than anything even that made
it into the New Testament. A few of these groups were the Ebionites, the
Marcionites, various groups of Gnostics and the Proto-Orthodox Christians (see
Study-unit 7).

**Some non canonical scriptures**
All of the Christian groups had books that were considered sacred Scripture. Most of
the books revered at one time or another by one group or another have not survived,
but dozens did survive or were rediscovered in modern times. Here is a choice
sampling of the literature that was revered in the early centuries of the church but
that didn’t get into the canon.

**The Gospel of the Ebionites**
“There may have been more than one Christian group called Ebionites. Three
Gospels have come down to us that appear to have been used by various Ebionite
groups. One is the truncated version of the Gospel of Matthew mentioned earlier.
Another is known simply as the Gospel of the Ebionites. It no longer survives intact,
but we know about it through the quotations of a fourth-century heresy hunter;
Epiphanius. What he tells us is quite intriguing. Apparently this group of Ebionites
believed that Jesus was the perfect sacrifice for sins, which meant that the Jewish
sacrifices in the Temple were no longer required. And so they were Jews who no
longer believed in Jewish sacrifice; they did, however, keep the other aspects of the
law.

In the ancient world, about the only time a person would eat meat was when an
animal had been ritually slaughtered by a priest, as a sacrifice to the gods or to God.
Since this particular group of Ebionites no longer believed in sacrifice, they became,
on principle, vegetarians. This choice of food is reflected in the way they told their
Gospel traditions. For example, when the disciples ask Jesus where they are to
prepare the Passover meal for him, in this Gospel he replies, ‘I have no desire to eat
the meat of this Passover lamb with you.’ Even more interesting is that in this
Gospel, John the Baptist’s diet apparently changed. In the canonical Gospels he is
said to have subsisted on locusts and wild honey. By changing one letter in the Greek word ‘locust’ (which is, after all, a meat), the Ebionite Gospel stated that John was eating pancakes and wild honey – a much better choice, some of us might think.” (see Ehrman 2009:199-201).

The Coptic Gospel of Thomas

“Among all the archaeological discoveries of non-canonical texts in modern times, none is more significant than the Gospel of Thomas, found among the Gnostic Gospels at Nag Hammadi. Like the other books found at the same time, it is written in Coptic, an ancient Egyptian language. It is significant both because of its unusual character and because of its relative antiquity: it is one of the earliest non-canonical Gospels yet discovered and most likely dates from just a few decades after the Gospel of John.

Unlike the Gospels of the New Testament, which narrate the words and deeds of Jesus up to his death and resurrection, the Gospel of Thomas contains only a group of sayings of Jesus. Altogether the Gospel presents 114 discrete sayings. Most are introduced with the words “And Jesus said ...” Many of these sayings are similar to teachings of Jesus in the Gospels of the New Testament. For example, one finds here the parable of the mustard seed and the saying of the blind leading the blind, in slightly different forms. But around half of the sayings, depending on how you count, are unlike the canonical accounts. Most of these unique sayings sound bizarre to people raised on biblical accounts of Jesus' teaching. For example, here it is recounted that he said, “The dead are not alive, and the living will not die. In the days when you consumed what is dead, you made it what is alive. When you come to dwell in the light, what will you do? On the day when you were one you became two. But when you become two, what will you do (Saying 11)?

What is one to make of the unusual sayings of the Gospel of Thomas? For the past ten or fifteen years there have been heated scholarly discussions on just this point, with some scholars thinking that these sayings make the most sense if placed within the thought-world of some form of early Christian Gnosticism, and others arguing that they are not Gnostic at all. I myself take the former view. These sayings do not promote the Gnostic myth, but that does not mean they are not best understood
gnostically, just as a lot of Marxist writings do not lay out the tenets of Marxism. A gnostic framework explains a lot of this Gospel.

In it Jesus indicates that his hearers have a spark of the divine that had a heavenly origin. This world we live in is a cesspool of suffering that he calls a corpse. A person’s inner being (the light within) has tragically fallen into this material world and become entrapped here (sunk into ‘poverty’), and in that condition has become forgetful of its origin (become ‘drunk’). It needs to be reawakened learning the truth of both this world and its own heavenly origin. Jesus is the one who conveys this truth, Once the spirit within is the truth, it will strip off this material body (symbolized as cloth to be removed) and escape this world, returning to the divine whence it came.

The most striking feature of the Coptic Gospel of Thomas is it does not narrate Jesus’ death and resurrection. Salvation does come by believing in Jesus’ death but by understanding his sec teachings: ‘Whoever finds the interpretation of these sayings not taste death’ (Saying 1”; Ehrman 2009:201-203).
The thirteen leather-bound papyrus codices found at Nag Hammadi

A Codex found at Nag Hammadi, Egypt

The last page of the Coptic manuscript of the Gospel of Thomas
The title "peuaggelion pkata Thomas" is at the end
The Acts of Thecla (see Appendix 1)

According to the proto-orthodox theologian and apologist Tertullian, the church leader who forged the Acts of Thecla was caught the act and severely disciplined by being removed from his posit of authority. This unhappy result does not appear to have had effect on the success of his endeavor. Stories about Thecla continue to circulate long after the book had first been put into publication sometime in the second half of the second century. For centuries after that, Thecla was a household name throughout parts of Christendom, and in some places she vied with the Blessed Virgin Mary herself as the most revered saint.

But the forger did not make up his stories out of whole cloth. He evidently drew on oral traditions then in circulation concerning apostle Paul and his most famous female convert. The Acts of Thecla tell the history of their association.

Thecla is said to have been a wealthy young upper-class woman engaged to be married to one of the leading men of the city. Thecla lives next door to the house where the Christians meet, and when Paul comes to town he preaches there, a sermon that Thecla can hear from her upstairs window. She sits enraptured for days on end. At this occasion Paul preaches the gospel of sexual renunciation: people should remain celibate and will thereby inherit the kingdom of God.

Thecla is persuaded by this message to convert, much to the consternation of her fiancé, who was anticipating a long and happy married life together. She breaks off the engagement and becomes a follower of Paul, which leads to a number of very strange and intriguing episodes in which Thecla is threatened with martyrdom, only to escape by the supernatural intervention of God. Possibly the most memorable incident occurs when she is thrown to the wild beasts for embracing the Christian faith; desperate to be baptized before her ultimate demise (Paul had put off baptizing her), she leaps into a vat of “man-eating seals” and baptizes herself in the name of Jesus. God sends down a thunderbolt to kill the seals, she escapes, and more adventures ensue.

The Acts of Thecla is now found in a collection of traditions about Paul’s missionary escapades known broadly as the Acts of Paul.
**Third Corinthians** (see Appendix 2)

Also in the Acts of Paul are two non-canonical letters, one written to the apostle by his converts in Corinth and the other the reply written by him. This exchange is called 3 Corinthians, to differentiate it from 1 and 2 Corinthians in the New Testament.

The occasion for the correspondence is spelled out in the Corinthians’ letter, where they say that two Christian teachers, Simon and Cleobius, have arrived in town and have been teaching that God is not the creator of the world, that the Jewish prophets are not from God, that Jesus did not come in the flesh, and that the flesh of believers will not be raised at the resurrection. (These teachings seem to reflect some kind of Gnostic point of view.) What are the Corinthians to make of such teachings?

Paul responds by addressing himself to the heretical views one by one, showing that they do not accord with the truth of the Gospel. He emphasizes that the material world is indeed the Creation of the one God, who spoke through the prophets and has now sent Jesus into the world in the flesh “so that he might set free all flesh through his flesh, and might raise us from the dead as fleshly beings.”

This is a proto-orthodox, antignostic production. Not well known to most Christians in the West, it had a remarkable reception in other pans of the world. In Armenia and parts of Syria it was accepted as canonical Scripture, even though, as well known to scholars, it was written at least a century after Paul’s death.

**The Letter of Barnabas** (see Appendix 3)

According to both Paul and the book of Acts, one of his close apostolic companions was a man named Barnabas, about whom we are otherwise poorly informed. About seventy years after both Paul and Barnabas died, some anonymous author wrote a “letter” – actually more of a theological treatise – that eventually came to be attributed to Barnabas, no doubt in order to promote its reputation among Christian readers. Some proto-orthodox Christians were quite insistent that the book belonged in the canon of Scripture, and it is found among the New Testament writings in our earliest complete manuscript of the New Testament, known as the Codex Sinaiticus, dating from the middle of the fourth century.
Christians of modern times might express some relief that Barnabas was not eventually included among the books of sacred writ. Even more than the books that did get into the New Testament, this letter is virulently and unashamedly anti-Jewish in its views. In fact, it is largely a discussion of the Jewish religion and the Jewish Scripture.

Its overarching theme is that Jews are not the people of God because they rejected the covenant that God made with Moses on Mount Sinai, for down below they were making and worshipping the golden calf. As a result, God rejected them. The laws he gave Moses were misinterpreted by the Jewish people, who were not the covenantal people at all. And they are still misinterpreted by them since they think the laws given to Moses were meant to be taken literally. They were actually symbolic laws meant to direct people about how to live. For example, the prohibition on eating pork did not mean that one could not eat any pork; it really meant not to live like pigs. Moreover, according to Barnabas these laws look forward to Jesus, whose followers are the true people of God.

In short, says Barnabas, the Old Testament is not a Jewish book. It is a Christian book. And the covenant God made with the Jewish ancestors is not a covenant for the Jews. It is a covenant for the followers of Jesus.

**The Apocalypse of Peter** (see Appendix 4)

Another book considered canonical in some proto-orthodox circles was the Apocalypse (or Revelation) of Peter. This book cannot be found in any of the surviving manuscripts of the New Testament, but is mentioned as belonging, or potentially belonging, to the canon in several early church writings. Whatever its canonical status, it is an intriguing narrative, the first surviving account from early Christianity of someone being given a guided tour of heaven and hell.

Most of us are familiar with this motif from Dante’s Divine Comedy. Dante did not make up the idea, however; he had lots of predecessors, and so far as we can tell from the written record, the Apocalypse of Peter was the first. The account begins with Jesus talking to his disciples on the Mount of Olives, discussing with them what would happen at the end of all things (Mark 13; Matthew
24-25). Peter asks Jesus about the afterlife, and Jesus begins to explain it all to him. At this point it is not completely clear whether Jesus’ explanation is so graphic that Peter can visualize what he is describing or whether Jesus takes him on an actual tour. But the reader is treated to a vivid description of both the realm of the blessed, in heaven, and the realm of the damned, in hell.

By far the most interesting part of the tour is the description of hell. It is a bit difficult to describe at any length the ecstasies of the blessed: they are, after all, extremely happy, and there’s only so much one can say about it. It is quite easy, on the other hand, to let one’s imagination roam when portraying the various torments of the damned. And this book is nothing if not imaginative.

Those being eternally tormented are punished appropriately for the sin they most often committed while living Habitual liars are hanged by their tongues over eternal flames; women who braided their hair to make themselves attractive to men in order to seduce them are hanged by their hair over the fires; the men who gave in to their seductions are hanged by . . . a different body part. As one might expect, the men cry out, “We did not know that we should come to eternal punishment!”

And so it goes. The point of the narrative is quite clear: anyone who wants to enjoy the blessings of heaven and escape the torments of hell needs to live a proper, moral, and upright life. Otherwise the flames of hell are waiting.

The Coptic Apocalypse of Peter (see Appendix 5)
There is another Apocalypse of Peter that is decidedly not pro-orthodox. Rather, it is a Gnostic text, discovered along with the Gospel of Thomas at Nag Hammadi, which provides a firsthand account of the crucifixion of Jesus. To those familiar with the accounts of the New Testament, this narrative will seem very bizarre indeed.

After Peter receives a secret revelation from Jesus, he has a vision that he cannot understand. He is standing on a hill talking with Jesus when he sees Jesus down below being arrested and then crucified. More peculiar still, he also sees a figure above the cross who is happy and laughing He asks Jesus, standing next to him, what it is he is seeing, and Jesus explains. The one the soldiers are crucifying is
merely his outer shell; the one above the cross is his true self, the spiritual being who cannot suffer.

This odd image is closely tied to the Gnostic understanding of Christ spelled out earlier, in which the man Jesus was temporarily inhabited by the divine Christ. Here the Christ is laughing precisely because the people crucifying him don’t understand what they are doing. They are simply killing the body, the clay vessel, that the divine being had inhabited, but they can’t hurt him, the real Christ. He is incorporeal and above all pain and suffering. And he finds the ignorance of his enemies hilarious.

It is no surprise that a text like this had no chance of making it into the proto-orthodox canon, since it celebrates a view of Christ that the prow-orthodox vigorously denounced as heretical.

For the first three and a half centuries the Christian Church had no complete and generally accepted Bible. First of all the idea of a two-part Bible, consisting of the Old and New Testaments had to take root. But even then for centuries there was no clarity as to the exact composition of this new unit of writings. True enough, unanimity over the great majority of the books in both the two Testaments was reached fairly quickly, but regarding certain books there were divergent assessments. With regards to the New Testament, especially Hebrews, Revelations, and 2 Peter was only admitted to the canon at a very late stage. From the documents available to us, it is clear that it was not until the fourth century that the Church, after a long and sometimes very complex and complicated process, laid down definite guide-lines that resulted in the precise extent of the New Testament (consisting of 27 books), as we have it today.

From the sixth and seventh centuries, manuscripts containing books that were considered parts of the New Testament usually do not include anything besides canonical books, but this is not true of the 3rd, 4th and 5th centuries. We have a document from the 3rd century (p72; it was the seventy-second papyrus manuscript of the New Testament to be catalogued) which consist of the books of 1 and 2 Peter and Jude. The manuscript also contains a Gospel allegedly written by Jesus’ brother James, “The Nativity of Mary," more frequently known as the proto-Gospel of James; 3 Corinthians; and a homily by the church father Melito on the Passover. The Codex
Sinaiticus, from the fourth century, includes both the letter of Barnabas and the Shepherd of Hermas, and Codex Alexandrinus, a famous manuscript of the fifth century, includes as part of the New Testament the books of 1 and 2 Clement, allegedly written by the man Peter had appointed to be the bishop of Rome.

Moreover, the process of the finalization of the New Testament canon in the Western- and Eastern Church took different roads. With regards to the Western Church, the earliest list of the New Testament canon is that of the Canon of Muratori (circa 200 CE). This document, also called the Muratorian Fragment (after the name of the discoverer and first editor, L A Muratori, the librarian of the Bibliotheca Ambrosiana in Milan) was discovered in 1740. It is the oldest known canon or list of books of the New Testament, and was most probably written in Rome itself or in its environs about 180-200 CE; probably the original was in Greek, from which it was translated into Latin. The unknown author includes twenty-two of our twenty-seven books as canonical – all except Hebrews, James, I and 2 Peter, and 3 John. The canon consists of no mere list of the Scriptures, but of a survey, which supplies at the same time historical and other information regarding each book. The beginning is missing; the preserved text begins with the last line concerning the second Gospel and the notices, preserved entire, concerning the third and fourth Gospels. Then there are mentioned: Acts, the Pauline letters (including those to Philemon, Titus and Timothy; furthermore, the letter of Jude and 1 and 2 John, as well as Revelations and the Apocalypse of Peter, but with the remark that some will not allow the latter to be read in the church. Then mention is made of the Pastor of Hermas, which may be read anywhere but not in the divine service; and, finally, there are rejected false Scriptures, which were used by heretics. Two letters allegedly from Paul, those to the Alexandrians and the Laodiceans, which he indicates are forgeries made by the followers of Marcion, are rejected. He then mentions other forgeries written by other heretics, including some Gnostics.Interesting is the fact that 1 and 2 Peter, James and 3 John are excluded from this list. This shows that at the turn of the second century no finalization with regard to compilation of the canon has been reached.

The Muratorian Canon is especially valuable if it really does come from the second century, because this would indicate that at least one proto-orthodox author was interested in knowing which books could be accepted as canonical Scripture; it
shows that there was a concern to eliminate from Scripture any forgeries or heretical documents; and it shows that there was already the acceptance in some circles of books that eventually were to become canonical, although a couple of other books were included as well.

The New Testament canon, as we have it today (consisting of 27 books), was only finalized in the Western Church at the Synod of Rome (382 CE), a decision that was reiterated at the Synods of Hippo Regius (393 CE) and Chartage (397 CE). In the Western Church it was especially Revelations, Hebrews and 2 Peter that was contested in becoming part of the New Testament canon.

Turning to the Eastern Church, the earliest canon list we have is the thirty-ninth Paschal letter of Athanasius (367 CE), consisting of the New Testament as we have it today.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>39th Paschal letter of Athanasius (367 CE)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Of the particular books and their number, which are accepted by the Church. From the thirty-ninth Letter of Holy Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria, on the Paschal festival; wherein he defines canonically what are the divine books which are accepted by the Church.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. They have fabricated books which they call books of tables, in which they shew stars, to which they give the names of Saints. And therein of a truth they have inflicted on themselves a double reproach: those who have written such books, because they have perfected themselves in a lying and contemptible science; and as to the ignorant and simple, they have led them astray by evil thoughts concerning the right faith established in all truth and upright in the presence of God.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. But since we have made mention of heretics as dead, but of ourselves as possessing the Divine Scriptures for salvation; and since I fear lest, as Paul wrote to the Corinthians, some few of the simple should be beguiled from their simplicity and purity, by the subtility of certain men, and should henceforth read other books — those called apocryphal — led astray by the similarity of their names with the true books; I beseech you to bear patiently, if I also write, by way of remembrance, of matters with which you are acquainted, influenced by the need and advantage of the Church.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 3. In proceeding to make mention of these things, I shall adopt, to commend my undertaking, the pattern of Luke the Evangelist, saying on my own account: 'Forasmuch as some have taken in hand,' to reduce into order for themselves the books termed apocryphal, and to mix them up with the divinely inspired Scripture, concerning which we have been fully persuaded, as they who from the beginning
were eyewitnesses and ministers of the Word, delivered to the fathers; it seemed good to me also, having been urged thereto by true brethren, and having learned from the beginning, to set before you the books included in the Canon, and handed down, and accredited as Divine; to the end that any one who has fallen into error may condemn those who have led him astray; and that he who has continued steadfast in purity may again rejoice, having these things brought to his remembrance.

4. There are, then, of the Old Testament, twenty-two books in number; for, as I have heard, it is handed down that this is the number of the letters among the Hebrews; their respective order and names being as follows. The first is Genesis, then Exodus, next Leviticus, after that Numbers, and then Deuteronomy. Following these there is Joshua, the son of Nun, then Judges, then Ruth. And again, after these four books of Kings, the first and second being reckoned as one book, and so likewise the third and fourth as one book. And again, the first and second of the Chronicles are reckoned as one book. Again Ezra, the first and second are similarly one book. After these there is the book of Psalms, then the Proverbs, next Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs. Job follows, then the Prophets, the twelve being reckoned as one book. Then Isaiah, one book, then Jeremiah with Baruch, Lamentations, and the epistle, one book; afterwards, Ezekiel and Daniel, each one book. Thus far constitutes the Old Testament.

5. Again it is not tedious to speak of the [books] of the New Testament. These are, the four Gospels, according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Afterwards, the Acts of the Apostles and Epistles (called Catholic), seven, viz. of James, one; of Peter, two; of John, three; after these, one of Jude. In addition, there are fourteen Epistles of Paul, written in this order. The first, to the Romans; then two to the Corinthians; after these, to the Galatians; next, to the Ephesians; then to the Philippians; then to the Colossians; after these, two to the Thessalonians, and that to the Hebrews; and again, two to Timothy; one to Titus; and lastly, that to Philemon. And besides, the Revelation of John.

6. These are fountains of salvation, that they who thirst may be satisfied with the living words they contain. In these alone is proclaimed the doctrine of godliness. Let no man add to these, neither let him take ought from these. For concerning these the Lord put to shame the Sadducees, and said, ‘Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures.’ And He reproved the Jews, saying, ‘Search the Scriptures, for these are they that testify of Me.

7. But for greater exactness I add this also, writing of necessity; that there are other books besides these not indeed included in the Canon, but appointed by the Fathers to be read by those who newly join us, and who wish for instruction in the word of godliness. The Wisdom of Solomom, and the Wisdom of Sirach, and Esther, and Judith, and Tobit, and that which is called the Teaching of the Apostles, and the Shepherd. But the former, my brethren, are included in the Canon, the latter being [merely] read; nor is there in any place a mention of apocryphal writings. But they are an invention of heretics, who write them when they choose, bestowing upon them their approbation, and assigning to them a date, that so, using them as ancient writings, they may find occasion to lead astray the simple.

Athanasius, writer of the 39th Paschal letter (367 CE)
The above named letter of Athanasius, however, did not mean that the canon in the Eastern Church was finalized in 367 CE. At the Concilium Constantinople (929 CE) several lists were presented for discussion and acceptance, and at the Concilium Quinisextum (692 CE) two list were on the agenda – one that included an one that excluded Revelations.

In the study of the canonicity of the New Testament, the following terms are normally used, and it is important that one understands what is meant by them:

- **Canon** (κανών): norm or standard. In describing the Bible as canon, the Church confesses that it accepts Holy Scripture as the only and ultimate norm for faith and life.
- **Canonical books**: books that belong to the canon, thus the books that make up the New Testament canon.
- **To canonize**: the church did not make certain books in the Bible canonical, but acknowledged them as canonical books.
- **Canonicity**: the normative, authoritative character of a writing or a group of writings on the basis of which it is acknowledges as part of the Biblical canon.
- **Pseudepigraphal**: a writing linked with the person and the authority of a prominent biblical character, thus claiming that person’s authority, but not actually written by him (e.g., the General or deutero-Pauline letters).
- **Apocryphal**: a writing linked with the person and the authority of a prominent biblical character, thus claiming that person’s authority, but because of its content was not included in the New Testament canon (e.g., the Gospels of Peter and Thomas).

The use of the term “canonicity” thus points to the fact that, in the question concerning the canon, research is carried out not only into the process of canon formation but also into the question of the criteria which should be applied in the determination of canonicity. This endeavor therefore has both a historical and a fundamental facet. From an historical point of view, the following factors can be listed as catalysts that hastened the need for a defined New Testament canon:
- Marcion (reduction of the canon)
- Montanism (expansion of the canon)
- The death of the apostles (as the true guarantors of the traditions about Jesus)
- The rise of Gnosticism (under Valentinus)
- The finalization of the canon of the Old Testament (at Jamnia in 135 CE)
- The self-identification of the church

**Gnosticism**

Gnosticism lays emphasis on the relationship between God and man. Salvation comes through a specific knowledge (gnosis), that is, the conviction/belief that this world is corrupt and malignant. This world is the creation of either a fallen angel of the one true God (demiurge) or a "lesser" god. Because this demiurge is not perfect (as the one true God is), the creation (and mankind as part of the creation), is inherently bad, and humankind is not able to save themselves. This world is the private sphere of the demiurge, and mankind is kept prisoner in this world. All humans, however, have a "spark of light" in themselves (a remnant of the one true God in the demiurge). The "redeemer" that comes from "above" (from the one true God), lights this spark within man (gives gnosiss), and after given the insight that this world is of the demiurge, returns back to the "above". Gnosis (knowledge) of the demiurge thus saves one from the demiurge and its powers. With this gnosiss man can live a true life, and also returns to the "above" at death. The parallel with this believe and the incarnation and ascension of Jesus Christ is obvious. Gnosticism has a negative point of view in regard to the body. Only the soul (where the spark of light is situated) is of importance. Gnostic writings (e.g., the Gospel of Thomas and the Gospel of Jude) therefore do not have as content a theology of the cross. A distinction must also be made between Christian and Jewish Gnosticism. The first understands the "redeemer" from above as Jesus Christ that came down and gave humankind the gnosiss so that they can be saved from the demiurge that created this world. In the case of the latter the demiurge is seen as the Creator God of Genesis who hides true knowledge from Adam and Eve. The serpent is the instrument that the true God uses to give Adam and Eve knowledge of right and wrong.

Historically, canonicity it is not only interested in the history of canonisation, from the earliest collections up to the so-called closing of the canon towards the end of the fourth century, but also in the history that the New Testament underwent subsequent to this and how it impacted on its canonicity. Questions are, moreover, not merely posed concerning the way in which the process of canonisation occurred, but also why it occurred in this why; in other words, which criteria were applied to determine canonicity. The following criteria can be identified which served to acknowledge a certain document as being part of the canon or not:

- Jesus Christ has to be the content of a document (the so-called Christum treibet-principle of Luther);
- The document must show a continuity with the Old Testament;
- Apostolic authorship;
• The “canon of faith” (*regula fidei*);
• The autopistia (self-authentication and inspiration) of the Holy Spirit;;
• The inner witness of the Holy Spirit; and
• The criterion of preaching.

The question concerning criteria is of interest particularly with regard to whether these remain valid given contemporary knowledge of the New Testament and, if not, what implications this might have for the canonicity of the New Testament or parts of it.

However, the purpose of the question concerning the canon is, as already indicated, not only historically to ask questions with regard to the criteria and motives of canon formation. It also has as purpose a *continual fundamental reflection* on the canonicity of the New Testament. For, in terms of the critical consideration of the New Testament, it is quite simply no longer deemed acceptable that decisions of the early church concerning canonicity be accepted without further ado as infallible and final before they are not tested thoroughly. One of the weightiest, if not indeed the weightiest, of the criteria for canonicity which were applied by the early church – namely apostolic authorship or status as eyewitness (or ‘ear witness’) – rested on hearsay traditions and cannot pass the test of scientific verification, as it in later years became evident. While all the documents of the New Testament were initially attributed either to an apostle or to a student or associate of an apostle, scientific investigation has brought to light that at most a quarter of them have an apostle as author (Paul).

Fundamental questions with which the canonicity of the New Testament is confronted, and which it should attempt to answer, may in essence be reduced to one question: whether the canon should be viewed and treated as “open” or as “closed”. In this case, “open” is understood as meaning that the twenty-seven documents need not be taken as the final number, in either of two directions (inside and outside), while “closed” means that in no respect might documents be added or taken away. But there is also an intermediary position that is taken up by some, and this is the view that even thought the canon is *de facto* (materially) closed, it should *de iure* (in principle) be considered open. Put differently, this amounts to the idea that, even though the canon has been closed off in practice, and is therefore accepted as being closed, it should in
principle be viewed as open; this is to say that its closed status should in principle be viewed as a debatable point.

There is a further question concerning the canon, even if it is accepted that it must be taken to be “closed” both *de iure* and *de facto*, and this is the question concerning the *canon in the canon*. By this is meant that a particular corpus or particular documents are taken as having more weight and authority than others, as they are thought to bring the gospel more purely or with greater fidelity than the others. This question, however, is answered differently in cases where it is indeed accepted that some or other centre is to be distinguished in the New Testament. It varies from a comparatively radical choice for certain documents, and a rejection of others, to the approach that the documents are canonical, but that the message of some is central while that of others are peripheral.

It goes without saying that answers to these questions or a principled position in this regard is absolutely crucial as far as dealing with the New Testament is concerned, both in theology and in church practice. This means that the canonicity of the New Testament as a scientific endeavour has a much more important task than simply historically to consider questions concerning the process of canonisation and the canonical destiny of the New Testament. The question concerning the canon is becoming increasingly acute in the light of the fact that more and more New Testament scholars are convinced that the canon, as far as a number of its documents are concerned, represents arbitrary choices and, consequently, that it stands in theological tension with itself.

The question concerning the canon is of further importance in light of the fact that, in the fundamental reflection concerning the theology of the New Testament, the opinion is growing in strength that a study of the theology of earliest Christianity should not be limited to the canon, but should include related extra-Biblical Christian literature of the New Testament period. (Examples of such literature, in particular in the study of the Jesus tradition, that may be mentioned are the Gospel according to Thomas, the hypothetical Q source, the Qumran literature, the child gospels according to Thomas and James, the Gospel according to Peter, the Acts of Pilate, and papyrus fragments such as Oxyrhynchus 1224 & 840, Egerton 2, the Secret Gospel according to Mark,
the Gospel according to the Ebionites, Egyptians, Hebrews and Nasoreans.) It is obvious that such a point of departure may have far-reaching consequences for the New Testament as canon, as well as for its place and role in the theology of the church.

4.1.2 The history of the text/textual research

Although the first textual editions that could be considered critical to a degree appeared during the first half of the eighteenth century, textual research as a scientific endeavour in the modern sense has only been practised since the middle of the nineteenth century. In the meantime it has developed into a highly sophisticated and an indispensable science in the armoury of New Testament Scholarship. Study of the New Testament can, as a matter of course, not commence until such time as a text is available. It is the task of textual research in its various manifestations to posit this, the most probable text.

This research may in the main be divided into two phases or sections: in the first place, the study of the history of the text, its physical production and reproduction and, secondly, textual criticism based on the results and insights attained during the first phase.

4.1.2.1 Textual production and reproduction

Research carried out in relation to textual production investigates all the relevant information relating to the origins of texts, not only during the New Testament period but also in the centuries afterwards, during which the texts were written and handed down manually. In this regard, the following are attended to:

- Scriptor (the person who carried out the actual work of writing) as layman or professional scribe;
- Types of writing: unicals/majuscules or cursives/minuscules and scriptuo continua [continuous writing]). Texts up to the ninth century, for example, were all written in majuscules, and only after the ninth century minuscules were used for the first time. Majuscule writings after the fifth century also differ from the majuscule writings of the first four centuries in that the vertical stripes in the letters Φ, Ψ and Γ are more prominent. These characteristics obviously enable researchers to date certain documents more precisely.
• Writing materials (reed pens, ink, rulers, styluses, measure sticks and sponges): In analyzing the ink used for the writing of a manuscript, researchers can identify the minerals that were used to manufacture the ink that was used. This, again, can help the researcher to identify the location where the ink most probably was manufactured.

• Material that were written on (papyrus, parchment, rolls and codices). Papyrus was used up to more or less the fourth century, and thereafter parchment was used. In the twelfth and thirteenth century paper was introduced, and in the late Medieval period paper replaced all previous material that were used to write on. The quality of the papyri used also determined if the recto- and verso-side could be used to be written upon.

Researchers investigate these not only for interest sake, but to illuminate particular formal or physical phenomena in, or in relation to, the text which otherwise would have remained dark to us and would have complicated or even impeded our recovery and reading of the text. In this regard one might point to the procedure of writing continuously, without spaces between words (scriptuo continua) and to abbreviate in all sorts of ways in order to facilitate copying. Knowledge of the writing materials allows us to understand why almost no text, and in any case no original manuscript, from the first three centuries of the textual tradition have remained extant.

It is, however, especially research carried out in relation to the reproduction of the text that has indispensable value in the determination of the most probable text. The adventures and misadventures of the text since its origin, as it was handed down from place to place, not only constitute an interesting history but also form a sounding board against which answers to the many questions in relation to textual variation and attempts at reconstruction become clear. The fact that so many variations of the text exist, of which some are related to one another and others not, and which indicate textual families which are the products of particular localities and tendencies, makes the question concerning the most probable text a question with many facets. The inquiry is not only concerned with the nature of the differences among the many texts that have been handed down, but also in their causes, whether these be variations which entered unconsciously or were inserted on purpose as a consequence of the
intervention of an individual or of some or other theological or other grouping. The nature and the causes of this variation eventually play an important part in the evaluation of the texts and the positing of criteria for the construction of the most probable text. The following reasons can be listed that most probably created the variant readings in the texts that we have in our possession:

- **Intentional changes**
  - Addition of words (e.g., He 7:14) or sentences (interpolations; e.g., 1 Jn 5:7-8 and Mark 16:9-20)
  - Deletion (e.g., Lk 24:6)
  - Combination and conflation (the combination of two variant readings into one; e.g., Lk 23:23):
  - Moving or transposition (e.g., Jn 7:35-8:11 and Ac 1:13)
  - Replacement or substitution (e.g., Jn 19:54 and Ac 13:26; 19:37)
  - Rounding off (improvement of the style of writing)
  - Linguistic improvements (e.g., Rv 1:4)
  - Expansion of the name of God (e.g., Mk 1:1 and 2 Cor 4:14)
  - Atticism (Hellenistic Greek written back to Attic)

- **Non-intentional changes**
  - “Eye mistakes” (in the case of the copying of a transcript)
    - Letter confusion (A, Δ en Λ)
    - Nomina sacra (ΘZ, which stands for Θεός [God], written as Ὄς [he that])
    - Haplography and dittography (words that ends with the same letters or beginning with the same letters are either duplicated or skipped)
    - Errors of judgment (commentary in the margins of the text being copied is included in the new text that is written down)
  - “Ear mistakes” (in the case where a manuscript was dictated to several scribes; “mass production”)
    - Sound or consonant confusion (ο and ο̅)
    - Iotacism (e.g., εὶ ὅς [and then] and ἵδε [look] in Ja 3:3)
    - Dividing of words (e.g., ὅτι [because of] and ὅ τι [that what] in Jn 8:25)
- Idea- or remembering-mistakes
- Letter swapping (ἐλαβον [they received] and ἔβαλον [they threw] in Mk 14:65)
- Synonyms (ἀληθινή and ἀληθής and διάκαια in Jn 8:16)
- The order of words (e.g., 1 Jn 1:5)
- Assimilation (Lk 6:1 and Mk 2:23)

The inquiry into the reproduction of the text is, however, not only interested in the history of its handwritten transmission. It must necessarily also take cognizance of its printed transmission. Although the unconscious variations which normally occurred in the case of handwritten transmission were eliminated in the printed transmission, the text in printed form did not escape variation – but for reasons other than before, and especially as a result of human interests and personal preferences and value judgements. The ways in which the printed transmission was selected from the handwritten variations, and in which particular textual traditions were preferred – with the consequence that the text was constructed differently in different editions – cannot be ignored in textual research. For the results of such an investigation make a contribution in their own way to the eventual construction of the most probable text.

4.1.2.2 Textual criticism
Textual criticism is normally understood as entailing the reconstruction of ancient texts. However, since we in most cases no longer have access to the original texts (and this is certainly true of the New Testament), it is more correct to say that the purpose of textual criticism is to construct the most probable text. This must be done with reference to all the manuscripts which exist of a particular document, and by taking account of all the differences (named variant readings or readings) in the manuscripts which may range from merely spelling and orthographic matters to the deletion or addition of entire paragraphs.
Here is a simplified example of a text critical problem, and how scholars look at it. The example is that of Mark 1:1:

**TEXT 1:** "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God."
**EVIDENCE:** א¹ S A B Δ K L W Δelta Pi ℓ1 ℓ13 33 565 700 892 1010 Byz Lect lat vg syr(p,h) cop

**TEXT 2:** "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ."
**EVIDENCE:** S* Θeta 28° syr(pal)

**TEXT 3:** "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus."
**EVIDENCE:** 28°

**TEXT 4** "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of the God."
**EVIDENCE:** 1241

Clearly the first reading is most probably the original reading, since evidence for this reading is from the best and the oldest manuscripts.

In this regard the following is interesting. The earliest manuscripts we have of the gospel are dated 125 CE, known as \(p^{52}\) (the so called Rylands-papyri; certain verses from John 18) and PEger2 (the so called Egerton-papyri; verses from an unknown gospel of which some of the verses has a parallel in the Synoptic gospels).

\(p^{52}\) (Jh 18:31-33, 37-38)
Rylands papiri (p52)
p52 is the oldest fragment we have of the New Testament. The front side of the fragment (recto; see picture above) consist of John 8:31-33, and the reverse side (verso) consists of John 18:37-38. The fragment is 8.9 cm in length, and 6.4 cm in width, each “page” (folio) consisting of seven lines. The fragment is dated circa 125-150 CE, and was found in 1920 in Egypt by Bernard P Grenfell. The fragment is kept at the John Rylands library in Manchester, England, and is from the Alexandrinian text family.

The constructed text of p52 (recto; Jn 18:31-33) look as follows (the letters in red are the original in the manuscript, and the black letters indicate the way in which the fragment was reconstructed):

Then said Pilate to them, You take him, and judge him according to your law. The Jews therefore said to him, “It is not lawful for us to put any man to death”. That the saying of Jesus might be fulfilled, which he spoke, signifying what death he should die. Then Pilate entered into the judgment hall again, and called Jesus, and said to him, Are you the King of the Jews?

The constructed text (verso; Jn 18:37-38) look as follows (the letters in red are the original in the manuscript, and the black letters indicate the way in which the fragment was reconstructed):

Pilate therefore said to him, Are you a king then? Jesus answered, You say that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause I came into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Every one that is of the truth hears my voice. Pilate said to him, What is truth? And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews, and said to them, I find in him no fault at all.
The Unknown Gospel/Papyrus Egerton 2

Fragment 1 (recto)

Pas onder Fragment 1 in (recto)
The “Unknown gospel”/Papyrus Egerton 2
Papyrus Egerton 2, also known as the so-called “Unknown gospel” (because the document itself gives no indication of its author, or addressees), was found in Egypt and published in 1953. It is kept in the British Museum in London. An additional fragment of Papyrus Egerton 2 (that fits in the bottom part of Fragment 1; see pictures below) was identified 1987 at the University of Cologne, and is known as Papyrus Köln 255. This fragment is kept at the University of Cologne. Paleographical analysis dates the fragments circa 150 CE. Papyrus Egerton 2 is thus the oldest non-canonical manuscript that we have. With regards to its content, the codex consists of five parts. The first part (verso of Fragment 1) is a controversy story between Jesus and some Jewish leaders about the interpretation of the Jewish writings and the authority of Moses. This controversy story has close parallels with John 5:39, 25 en 9:29. The second part (the first nine lines of recto Fragment 1) is the last part of a narrative about the stoning and arrest of Jesus (par Jn 7:30; 10:31, 39). The third part (the rest of recto Fragment 1) is a story of the healing of a leper by Jesus (par Mk 1:40-45; Lk 17:11-19), and the fourth part (recto of Fragment 2) has as content a question posed to Jesus with regards to the paying of taxes to rulers (par Jn 3:2, Mk 12:13-17 [and par]; Lk 6:46). The last part (verso of Fragment 2) consists of a fragmentary narrative of a miracle that Jesus did at the river Jordan. From this it can be deducted that the author of Papyrus Egerton 2 must have known the gospel of John. However, some scholars argue the contrary: since the traditions in Papyrus Egerton 2 are much shorter and simpler than its parallels in the gospels, it is also possible that the writers of the canonical knew this tradition, and made use of it while expanding it as needed.

Translation
Fragment 1 (verso)
[...] And Jesus said to the lawyers: "Punish every wrongdoer and transgressor, and not me.

11 Paleography is the study of (ancient) handwriting. Paleography gives attention to the different kinds of writing, the way letters are formed (e.g., the angle of writing), the density of the ink that is used, the different materials that are used to write on (e.g., papyri of parchment), as well as different types of writing. By concentrating on these matters, the researcher can, for example, date a specific document in terms of its characteristics when compared with other manuscripts and their respective characteristics and dating. This kind of research also enables the paleographer to identify groups of documents that relate to certain periods, and to ascertain if a specific document was not written by more than one person (e.g., alterations, additions like glosses or remarks).
And turning to the rulers of the people he said this word: "Search the scriptures, in which you think you have life. These are they, which testify about me. Do not suppose that I have come to accuse you to my father. There is one who accuses you: Moses, in whom you have hoped."

And they said: "We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for you, we do not know, where you are from."

Jesus answered and said to them: "Now is accused your disbelief in those who have been commended by him. For had you believed Moses, you would have believed me. For about me he wrote to your fathers [...]"

Fragment 1 (recto)

[...] and taking up stones together to stone him. And the rulers laid their hands upon him to seize him and hand him over to the crowd. And they could not take him because the hour of his arrest had not yet come. But the Lord himself, escaping from their hands, withdrew from them.

And behold, a leper coming to him, says: "Teacher Jesus, while traveling with lepers and eating together with them in the inn, I myself also became a leper. If therefore you will, I am clean."

And the Lord said to him: "I will, be clean."

And immediately the leprosy left him. And Jesus said to him: "Go show yourself to the priests and offer concerning the cleansing as Moses commanded and sin no more [...]"

Fragment 2 (recto)

Coming to him, they tested him in an exacting way, saying: "Teacher Jesus, we know that you have come from God, for what you do testifies beyond all the prophets. Therefore tell us, is it lawful to pay to kings the things which benefit their rule? Shall we pay them or not?"

But Jesus, perceiving their purpose and becoming indignant said to them: "Why do you call me teacher with your mouth, not doing what I say? Well did Isaiah prophesy concerning you, saying: 'This people honor me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. And in vain they worship me, teaching as their doctrines the precepts of men...'

Fragment 2 (verso)

Unfortunately this fragment is in such a bad state, that it cannot be sufficiently reconstructed. What follow is first the text which can be reconstructed pretty sure and then some more speculative restorations.)

And when they where perplexed at the strange question, Jesus, as he walked, stood on the lip of the Jordan river, stretching out his right hand, filled it with (...) and sowed upon the (...) water (...) the (...). And (...) before them, he brought forth fruit (...) much (...) for joy (...)

And when they where perplexed at the strange question, Jesus, as he walked, stood still upon the verge of the River Jordan, and stretching out his right hand, he filled it with water and sprinkled it upon the shore. And thereupon the sprinkled water made the ground moist, and it was watered before them and brought forth fruit...

The earliest available manuscripts of the four gospels in the New Testament are the following:

Matthew: P^{64} (Mt 26:7-8, 10, 14-15, 22-23 en 31-33), P^{67} (Mt 3:9, 15; 5:20-22 and 25-28) en P^{77} (known as the Oxyrhynchus papyri; Mt 23:30-39) – 200 CE

Luke: P^{75} (known as the Bodmer-papyri; sections of Lk 1 to 8 and 15) – 200 CE
The Bodmer papyri were discovered in 1952 at Pabau near Dishna, Egypt, the ancient headquarters of the Pachomian order of monks; the discovery site is not far from Nag Hammadi (where the Nah Hammadi texts were discovered in 1948). The manuscripts were covertly assembled by a Cypriote, Phokio Tano of Cairo, then successively smuggled to Switzerland, where they were bought by Martin Bodmer (1899-1971). The series Papyrus Bodmer began to be published in 1954, with notes, introduction and French translation. The Bodmer Papyri, now conserved in the Bibliotheca Bodmeriana, in Cologny, outside Geneva, are not a Gnostic cache, like the Nag Hammadi library: they bear some pagan as well as Christian texts, parts of some thirty-five books in all, in Coptic and in Greek. With fragments of correspondence, the number of individual texts represented reaches to fifty. Most of the works are in codex form, a few in scrolls. Three are written on parchment. In 2007 the Vatican Library acquired two of the papyri, P74 and P75, which are kept at the Vatican Library.

The Bodmer-papyri consists inter alia of the following manuscripts: (1) p75, a text of the Gospel of John in the manuscript tradition called the Alexandrian text-type. Aside from the Rylands-papyrus (p54), it is the oldest testimony for John. It omits the passage concerning the moving of the waters (John 5:3b-4) and the narrative of the woman taken in adultery (John 7:53-8:11). It was on the basis of this document that the translators of the new Afrikaans translation of the Bible (1983) decided to indicate in the text that these two narratives (or part thereof) are not part of the most reliable manuscripts. (2) p72: the earliest known copy of the letter of Jude, and 1 and 2 Peter. (3) p35: a partial codex containing most of Luke and John. The Bodmer-papyri also include other Christian texts that would become declared apocryphal in the fourth century, such as the Infancy Gospel of James. There is also a Greek-Latin lexicon to some of Paul's
- John: p\textsuperscript{52} (known as the Rylands-papyri, Joh 18:31-33, 37-38) – 125 CE; p\textsuperscript{66} (known as the Bodmer-papyri; Jn 1:1-6:11; en a few verses from Jn 6, and also sections of Jn 15, 16 en 20) – 200 CE
- Mark: p\textsuperscript{45} (known as the Chester Beatty-papyri; several section from Mk 4 to 9 and 11 to 14) – 225 CE

![Chester Beatty-papyrus (p\textsuperscript{45}), folio 13 and 14](image)

**Chester Beatty-papyrys (including p\textsuperscript{45})**
The Chester Beatty Papyri is the name of a group of biblical manuscripts acquired mainly in 1930 by A Cr Beatty, an American collector. They had been discovered at Aphroditopolis, in Egypt, probably originating from the library of a Christian church. The manuscripts are substantial portions of papyrus codices: (1) seven from the Old Testament, including large parts of Genesis, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, Esther, and Ecclesiastes; (2) three from the New Testament, containing the Gospels (including p\textsuperscript{45}; see picture above) with Acts, the Pauline Epistles, and Revelation; (3) one with part of the pseudepigraphical Book of Enoch and a second century homily of the passion.

The earliest available manuscript on the whole New Testament, on the other hand, is \(\text{\textit{\textsuperscript{H}}}^1\) (codex Sinaiticus\textsuperscript{1}), dated 300 CE (fourth century).

If it is borne in mind that around a quarter of a million variant readings occur in the available manuscripts of the New Testament, then there can be no doubt as to the importance of this science for the study of the New Testament. The question is simple: With which New Testament do we work, or do we want to work: with the most probable, if not the true one, or with a different version of it?
Although it is true that, in the vast majority of cases, the variant readings only represent minor orthographic differences, it is also true that an apparently minor variant, for instance a particle, may result in a significant difference in meaning. There is therefore every reason to attempt to find, with all available aids, the most probable text. To this end, textual criticism as a science has already developed a formidable set of criteria and methods. Although there will also in this area always be differences of opinion among researchers, and the last word will never be spoken, a stage has been reached of which one might say that the texts to which we today have access contain the essence of the documents of the New Testament.

Finally, the point should be made that the fact that there have always been multiple textual editions in the history of the printed text (as is currently also the case with the editions of the United Bible Societies and Nestlé-Aland) should not be judged negatively. On the one hand, this indicates that we are here dealing with a science and not with a rigidly formulaic and prescriptive endeavour. And, on the other hand, it indicates that the competence of practising textual criticism should not be expected only of experts in this area; nor should one allow it to remain their exclusive domain. Even though one could not expect each student of the New Testament to be a specialist in this area, nobody could hope to deal responsibly with the New Testament without at least having the basic knowledge and skills to practise textual criticism her- or himself. Indeed, multiple textual editions, among other considerations, in reality force one in this direction.

To sum up:

- We don’t have the originals of any of the books of the New Testament.
- The copies we have were made much later, in most instances many centuries later.
- We have thousands of these copies, in Greek the language in which all the New Testament books were originally written.
- All of these copies contain mistakes – accidental slips on the part of the scribes who made them or intentional alterations by scribes wanting to change the text to make it say what they wanted it to mean (or thought that it did mean).
- We don’t know how many mistakes there are among our surviving copies, but they appear to number in the hundreds of thousands. It is safe to put the matter in comparative terms: there are more differences in our manuscripts than there are words in the New Testament.
• The vast majority of these mistakes are completely insignificant, showing us nothing more than that scribes in antiquity could spell no better than most people can today.
• But some of the mistakes matter – a lot. Some of them affect the interpretation of a verse, a chapter, or an entire book. Others reveal the kinds of concerns that were affecting scribes, who sometimes altered the text in light of debates and controversies going on in their own surroundings.
• The task of the textual critic is both to figure out what the author of a text actually wrote and to understand why scribes modified the text (to help us understand the context within which scribes were working).
• Despite the fact that scholars have been working diligently at these tasks for three hundred years, there continue to be heated differences of opinion. There are some passages where serious and very smart scholars disagree about what the original text said, and there are some places where we will probably never know what the original text said.

4.2 PARTICULAR INTRODUCTION
The more the background information available about a document, the more it obviously contributes to a better understanding of the text. The purpose of the particular introduction is therefore to gather all relevant information in order, firstly, to place in perspective the different corpora of the New Testament, but also, especially, its different documents. The intention is not to precondition the interpretation of individual documents, but rather to lead the student into the study of a particular document, with the assumption that what has been brought to the fore by means of the introduction could still always be corrected through the study of the document itself, or even be replaced by new information. As is the case with any science, therefore, introductory science does not lay claim to the final word.

To start with, before the study of the separate documents particular perspectives are already opened for one through the information that is available concerning the writings that form groups or corpora. A comparison between documents which are related substantially to each other, or which indicate independence from each other, offers important insights as far as understanding them is concerned. In this regard, the best-known corpus is doubtless the Synoptic Gospels (Mark, Luke-Acts, Mat) which, although each of them narrates the Jesus events in its own way, exhibit at once such a close relationship among themselves, yet also differences from one another, that the
The investigation of the synoptic question has become one of the largest endeavours in New Testament Scholarship. It is abundantly clear that the investigation of this question has already made – and is still making – an important contribution to our knowledge of the individual gospels.

The same applies to the information attained when some of the other corpora are more closely considered together, and therefore come to stand in greater relief. In this regard Luke-Acts, the Johannine literature (Joh, 1, 2 & 3 Joh) the epistles of Paul (Rom, 1 & 2 Cor, Gal, Phil, 1 Tess, Philem), the writings to which reference is traditionally made as deuter Pauline literature (Eph, Col, Heb [and 2 Tess]) as one grouping and the Pastoral Epistles (1 & 2 Tim, Tit) as another, and finally also 1 and 2 Peter, James and Jude (the so called Apostolic or General letters) may further be mentioned. Looking at the above-named documents in terms of a corpus is important has the purpose not only of taking account of their individual relatedness and differences, but also to view them, as corpora with their own theologies, in relation to one another. The different corpuses in the New Testament look as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pauline letters</th>
<th>CE</th>
<th>Gospels</th>
<th>CE</th>
<th>Deutero-Pauline letters</th>
<th>CE</th>
<th>General letters</th>
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<th>Pastoral letters</th>
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<th>Johannine letters</th>
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<td>Mk</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>Col</td>
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<td>1 Tm</td>
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<td>Eph</td>
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<td>Ja</td>
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<td>2 Tm</td>
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<td>1 Jn</td>
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<td>1 Cor</td>
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<td>Lk-Ac</td>
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As far as each individual document is concerned, there are different aspects with regard to which information is required in order to understand the particular document better. Much of this information is historical in nature and in a certain sense external to the document itself, while other information touches on internal matters, though this is
not meant to suggest that external circumstances did not have consequences for what was expressed in the document – on the contrary. External aspects concern matters such as the writer and his circumstances (also called the authenticity question); the original readers and their circumstances; the reason for and purpose of the writing; and the time and place of writing. Internal aspects concern literary identification; the history of the origins of the text, if any; language and style; unity; integrity; construction; relationship with other New Testament or related contemporary literature.

Information on each of these aspects contributes in a unique way to a better and more acceptable understanding of a document. A few example may be mentioned by way of illustration: although it may be argued, with some justice, that what concerns us is not really who the author of a document is, but whether it preaches Christ or, in other words, the gospel, information concerning the writer nonetheless remains important for a number of reasons. For instance, it is not acceptable to attribute a theological notion propagated by a particular document to Paul or Peter if careful investigation indicates that the document is not, in fact, by Paul or Peter. Information on the readers and their circumstance not only assists in discerning what the reason for writing it was, but also in determining what it is the writer wanted to achieve, for instance to counteract a heresy or to encourage believers whose faith had weakened towards renewed action. Literary identification, in turn, has the essential function of determining the communication strategy of which the author made use, as each literary type, whether it is a narrative or persuasive text, makes use of its own communication strategies, while form and content are very closely related. Finally, one could still point to the importance of an answer to, respectively, the question of unity and integrity. In order to communicate at all, it is important that there be coherence and progression with regard to the subject matter that is to be transmitted by the text. If, however, there is no unity and coherence, then understanding is barely possible. If it were to become clear that a text is made up of components which cannot be harmonised with one another, then it cannot be read as if it were a unit and the components must be dealt with on their own. New Testament documents which present problems in this regard are, among others, the Epistles to the Corinthians (especially 2 Cor), the Epistle to the Philippians and the first Epistle by Peter.. Related to this is the question of integrity, in other words, the question whether all the parts of a document in fact relate to the content and sense of the document as a whole. In other
words, are there not perhaps elements which must be judged to be inherently foreign to the document?

On this point a final, concluding remark is fitting and necessary. This concerns the phenomenon that, despite the fact that critical science has been practised in the study of the New Testament for such a long time, introductory study is still being practised in a “conservative” way by some. By this is meant the fact that certain so-called conservative introductory scholars still cling to traditional assumptions concerning matters such as, for instance, authorship, readers, dating, unity and integrity, and so forth. This leads to all sorts of attempts to uphold a variety of unacceptable ideas for pietistic reasons and to harmonise irreconcilable and sometimes contradictory elements in the New Testament or in some of its documents with one another. The consequence can only be, and indeed is also, that the documents themselves are not allowed to speak but are forced into ventriloquism. While it is self-evidently the case that each new and critical position which might replace the traditional must be tested thoroughly, the point does need to be made that holding on to unproven positions out of piety for the Bible usually does not register an advance in the scientific study of the Bible but, rather, does the Bible and its message a disservice.
StUDY UNIT 5

HERMENEUTICS

As the concept hermeneutics is concerned with understanding texts in whichever form, reflection on the practice of hermeneutics may be viewed as the most central activity of New Testament Scholarship. After all, this science is fundamentally concerned with the issue of understanding the texts of the New Testament in such a way that it becomes an existential event for its readers or listeners. Under this one heading, hermeneutics, one can identify two areas of scientific activity, namely the principled reflection on, in the first place, understanding as such and, secondly, on the exegesis (interpretation) of texts. We can, for the sake of convenience, simply use the terms “hermeneutics” and “exegesis” for these areas, on condition that we do not take them to refer to two different matters or phases of understanding, as was believed traditionally. For exegesis is nothing else, from beginning to end, but the act of understanding, and hermeneusis does not occur in any other way than through the exegesis of the text. Traditionally the view was held that exegesis was the interpretation of the text and hermeneutics its application. But there is no justification for this distinction between the two, or the phasing of the process of understanding in terms of two sequential steps. In the case of actual exegesis, everything that can in principle be said concerning understanding is therefore fully applicable. The only distinction which does exist is that, when the term “hermeneutics” is used, the principles of understanding as such are meant while, in the case of the term “exegesis”, the methodology or methodologies and practice of the interpretation of texts are meant.

5.1 HERMENEUTICS

As indicated above this facet of hermeneutical reflection concerns, in the first place, the general study of hermeneutics. It concerns, firstly, the history of hermeneutics as it developed in the course of centuries via new philosophical frameworks for thinking and models for understanding that came to the fore, which, from time to time, gave new direction and stimulus to hermeneutical reflection. This general study of hermeneutics further concerns itself with, among other things, the question concerning the place and role of presuppositions in understanding as well as the conditions for and possibilities
of understanding ancient texts, the role of the *subject and object* of understanding, the
function and the *power* of language and the *nature and process* of understanding.
Hermeneutics thus relates to what is called epistemology (“how one knows”). With
regard to the role of the *subject and object* of understanding, three epistemological
paradigms can be mentioned:

- Premodern (the subject is controlled by the object)
- Modern (the subject controls and manipulates the object)
- Postmodern (the subject protects the object)

But, aside from the study of and reflection on the fundamental aspects of hermeneutics
in general, there are also questions concerning Biblical hermeneutics in particular. This
touch on questions such as the following:

- Do other principles of understanding apply when we are dealing with
  understanding the Bible? Is there, in other words, something like a *Biblical*
  hermeneutics as opposed to a *profane* hermeneutics?

- What hermeneutical role does the canon play as the context, or canonicity as
  presupposition, for understanding? By the question concerning the canon as
  hermeneutical context is meant the question whether the fact that there is a
  formal canon implies that separate documents must be interpreted against the
  background of, and in connection with, the larger context of the New Testament
  and, eventually, of the Bible as a whole. This also immediately brings to the fore
  the question concerning the role played by the Old Testament in the interpretation
  of the New Testament; in other words, this is a question concerning the
  (hermeneutical) relationship between the Old and the New Testament. Must the
  interpretation of the New Testament, for instance, be determined or conditioned
  by a schema of promise fulfilment or by the assumption that central motifs or
  events of which the New Testament bears witness are already typologically
  foreshadowed in the Old Testament?

- Should the formal canonicity of the New Testament documents play a role in the
  formation of the *view of Scripture*? What is the nature and function of the *authority*
  of Scripture (New Testament), and in which way may or may the Word not *used*?
  The view of Scripture of a person or church is an important hermeneutical point of
  departure from which one can determine beforehand what kind of authority will be
accorded the Bible and how the Biblical contents will in day to day life be applied. If, for instance, a fundamentalist view of Scripture is held (the so-called “pure sense of Scripture”), then the assumption would be that every word of the Bible is inspired and that it, therefore, as a whole is without error and infallible and that it contains eternal Divine truths and its authority is founded a priori, in other words, that it is already understood before any interpretation. In such a case the Bible is used as a code of law which would have, for each particular situation in life, a rigid answer or pronouncement, regardless of the circumstances, and its “authority” will be enforced. This picture may have just now been delineated to starkly, but this does not diminish in any way the fact that the Bible often is abused rather than used, and that it is the task of hermeneutical reflection to provide an acceptable answer to this contentious issue. In this regard we can also refer to a foundationalist and critical approach to analyzing the Bible. A foundationalist approach to the Bible takes as cue certain presuppositions (“foundations”) as a key to read the text. Some of these foundations can be, for example, the following: men are the stronger sex, church and culture are the same, and some cultures are more developed than others, and therefore are “better”. The question in a foundationalist reading of the text is not the question of having presuppositions or not (we all have them!), but the willingness to discuss my “foundations” and having them tested and scrutinized. A critical reading of the text, finally, takes cognizance of the historical and cultural distance between the reader (subject) and the text (object). A critical reading of the text therefore knowingly tries to avoid an anachronistic or ethnocentristic reading of the ancients texts of the New Testament.

- Finally, what role must the articles of faith play in the understanding of New Testament, as well as the Bible as a whole? Should the articles of faith guide or determine the interpretation of the Bible, or should it serve, at most, as a hermeneutical premise for it? An answer to this question is particularly important as far as its consequences for the preaching of the church is concerned.

5.2 EXEGESIS
Exegesis as a hermeneutical sub discipline can itself be subdivided into two components, namely, on the one hand, the theoretical and, on the other hand, the practical side of exegesis.
5.2.1 The theory of exegesis

The basis of any text is that it has a sender/author who wants to transmit a message to a receiver/reader. Although this might appear to be a rather simple matter, things are often much more complicated than they appear on the surface. The more complicated a text is, the more complicated it obviously becomes to transmit its message to the receiver. Misunderstanding and complete or partial failure in communication often occurs, even in the case of people who share the same language conventions and frame of reference. If this happens in the case of language utterances (whether oral or written) in contemporary situations, how much more likely is it not to occur in the case of texts from a past as distant as the texts of the Bible?

Whether it is, however, a text from the distant past or a contemporary text, the successful transmission of the content/message depends on the efforts of both the sender and the assumed receiver. It is therefore not the case that the sender merely dispatches the message and that the receiver passively accepts it like a sponge absorbs water. The receiver plays as active and important a role, in her/his way, in any successful communication as the sender. The science of exegesis therefore fundamentally inquires into the role of both and attempts to allow both roles to be expressed as effectively as possible in exegetical practice.

Both the sender and the receiver employ strategies in order, respectively, to dispatch and decipher the message as comprehensibly as possible. The receiver must, in order to be able to decipher or decode the text, be able to find out how the message was encoded by the sender. The receiver must therefore attempt to find out which communication strategies were used by the sender to transmit the message and must attempt to understand the message in those terms.

In the case of a text, especially a text from the distant past, the author is of course no longer present and the text therefore takes the place of the author. The text itself now becomes the sender of the message as well as the vehicle by means of which it is transmitted. Exegetical science sets itself the task to inquire, in terms of textual and literary theory, into what a text is, how texts are made, what kinds of texts there are and how the different kinds communicate, in other words, which communication strategies they employ.
In the same way, exegetical science also sets itself the task of inquiring into the role of the reader as far as epistemology, epistemological paradigms, and reading strategies are concerned. There are, of course, different categories of readers, from the naïve reader through to the informed or scientific reader. The exegete attempts to read the text as an informed reader and therefore s/he must orient himself/herself with regard to everything that is and must be relevant in the careful reading of a text.

As far as epistemological paradigms are concerned, it has become habitual to distinguish between historical or diachronic and text-immanent or synchronic paradigms. The first has traditionally been more interested in the author and the origins, or the process of origination, of a text, and it may therefore also be typified as a genetic paradigm, while the latter is interested in the text as such, or the final product in the event that the text represents the final stage of a whole process. Depending on the paradigm according to which texts are approached, the methods according to which exegesis is carried also differ in principle and practice from each other. In the case of the historical paradigm, one finds the methods formal, (earlier) literary, traditional and editorial criticism, while some of the best-known text-immanent methods are French structuralism, Russian formalism, the Amsterdam school, narratology (narrative theory), South African discourse analysis and the so-called new rhetoric.

The first paradigm was, until the first half of the twentieth century the dominant one; however, in some circles the pendulum swung strongly in the direction of the latter from the sixties onwards, sometimes with a total rejection of the first. In view of what was said above with regard to the main interests of these two paradigms, this turn, of course, also implied a turn from the author and towards the text. Now the focus was on the text as an auto-semantic unit with its own particular structure, indicators and markers that generated meaning. In recent years, however, it would appear as if the pendulum has swung back to the point that it is now accepted that these two paradigms are, in fact, mutually complimentary and should therefore function in mutually complimentary fashion. Just how these two paradigms may be reconciled has not become entirely clear, but it seems imperative that this has to happen. It is one of the tasks to which exegetical science will have to devote itself in the future.
In reality, we live in a century in which exegetical methods, particularly during the previous two or three decades, multiplied as never before in the past. Most of these methods are based on and aimed towards the role of the reader, since there has in the previous decades been a significant shift in focus in the direction of the reader. It was noticed that meaning is not something that is located only in the text and that can, in a merely mechanical way, be excavated from it. Meaning, it was realised, is generated between (or through) both the text and the reader, and the reader plays a much more active and decisive role than had been believed earlier. It is for this reason that reader-oriented exegetical approaches such as reception theory/aesthetics, materialistic and feminist exegesis, speech act theory and deconstruction were advanced strongly in some circles.

But it doesn’t end here. Exegetical science must be thoroughly aware of each and every theory or practice which is currently active in the terrain of exegesis, such as the social-scientific method which has recently gained so much ground in North America and has also found strong exponents in South Africa. This method, which is used especially in Jesus studies, may be viewed as a phenomenon of the so-called post-modern era, something that can be seen in the fact that it makes use of theories and models originating from especially psychology, sociology and anthropology in order to study the New Testament and its worlds. Many of the exponents of this method are also convinced that the method represents a paradigm shift, in other words, that through it an entirely new method of inquiry has come to the fore. Whatever the case may be, this method most certainly has confronted exegetical science with new demands and has broadened the area of exegetical inquiry more strongly and in a more nuanced way across the borders of the canon. Intertext (the insight that the New Testament documents are texts of texts that must be read alongside and together with other contemporary texts) as well as context (the first-century Mediterranean world in which the New Testament came into being) has attained new meaning as a result of the cross-cultural comparisons with similar societies in other parts of the world.

What has been said thus far concerning the fundamental reflection and study area of exegetical science should provide a fair impression of the scope of this endeavour. All of this has the positive aim of understanding texts. But this science also has a negative or dismissive task, and that is to point out – and dismiss – exegetical fallacies. For
there is a high degree of consensus concerning a number of fallacies of which an
exegete should not become guilty, for instance the intentional fallacy (which inquires
after the intention of the author), the so-called Cinderella fallacy (the idea that a text
has only one, particular meaning which must and can merely be determined by means
of the correct interpretation), the fallacy of misplaced concretising (the application of a
text to a modern situation without taking account of its meaning in the original context),
and a number of other fallacies. In the training of a student to become an exegete, s/he
should therefore not merely attempt to learn a practical skill but also to point out, in
timely fashion, traps and fallacies.

5.2.2 The practice of exegesis
This facet can be dealt with briefly as it simply concerns the application of theory to
practice. It goes without saying that the difference in kinds of literature in the New
Testament (narrative and argumentative texts respectively) requires different methods
of exegesis. For this reason both must be dealt with in training. In training, however,
the concern is not the volume which must be subjected to exegesis, but the cultivation
of a skill. The amount of text for exegesis is therefore, in training, usually limited to a
smaller unit of a document. Where necessary, on the basis of intertextual
considerations, related extra-Biblical literature is also used for practical training in
exegesis.
STUDY UNIT 6

THEOLOGY

Biblical theology, and therefore also New Testament theology, as an independent discipline within the Biblical Sciences (Old and New Testament), is a relatively recent science. Originally, especially in the period of Scholasticism (1100-1500), the New Testament was used, without exception, as Lehrbegriffe or dicta probantia, that is, the New Testament was employed as an arsenal of proof texts to substantiate the dogmas and the articles of faith of the church (see, e.g., the Heidelberg Catechesis, one of the articles of faith of the Christian church). During the Reformation in the sixteenth century the New Testament was also read from the point of view of dogmatics (dogmatic systemization, e.g., Luther’s “Christum treibet”-principle).

Although a few precursors started moving in this direction before him, J P Gabler is generally recognised as the person who allowed Biblical theology to come into being as an independent science separate from dogmatics. This occurred when Gabler gave his inaugural lecture as professor of the University of Altdorf, on 30 March 1787, on the distinction between Biblical and dogmatic theology and on their respective aims.

But, although from this date onward there was in general no longer any doubt concerning the status of Biblical theology as an independent science, this still does not mean that there was (or is currently) unanimity on what exactly is to be meant by it, or how it should be practised. For this reason, since Gabler and right up to today, there has been a lively debate concerning this topic and no consensus has yet been reached. Aside from other, smaller question about which agreement has not been reached; one might mention the most important question: whether it is the task of Biblical theology to work merely in a historical-descriptive fashion, or whether it should posit a “normative” synthesising of Biblical contents. It should be clear from this that New Testament Scholarship is not only concerned with the positing of the theological contents of the New Testament, but also, very importantly, in the first place with the fundamental aspect of this endeavour.
6.1 PRINCIPLE/FUNDAMENTAL INQUIRIES

The point that, in order at all to practise New Testament theology in a responsible fashion, one first needs clarity as to the fundamental points of departure that should apply to this endeavour, needs no further argument or proof. In the first place, it requires a thorough overview of the history of Biblical theology, as well as of New Testament theology specifically, in order to take cognisance of the positions which were current and the developments that have taken place. It is especially important to take note of the spiritual tendencies and the philosophical models of thought which have, since the Aufklärung, exercised an influence on the practice of Biblical theology. We think here of Rationalism, Hegel’s philosophy of history, Pietism, Orthodoxy, the religious-historical approach, Romanticism, Historical Positivism, Liberal Theology, Dialectical Theology, and so forth. The study of the history of New Testament theology as a science makes up an important and essential part of the teaching and practice of this sub discipline. It also does not entail only the historical developments since Gabler but also those from before Gabler, or at the very least since the Reformation. Even if it is true that, before Gabler, Biblical theology was not an independent science, it is especially necessary to take note of the period before him in order to place subsequent developments after him in perspective.

With the study of the history of New Testament theology, which might then also in many respects be called the fundamental history of this science, the fundamental areas of inquiry and points of departure become clear. It is, however, not sufficient merely to take note of these; it will be necessary to reflect and take up a position. Some of the fundamental questions which arise time and again, and which therefore require reflection and taking up a position are the following:

- Is it at all possible to write a theology of the New Testament if one takes into consideration the compilation of the New Testament, as well as the aim of the different documents of the New Testament? The New Testament, for example, consists of “history” (the gospels and Acts), letters (with a pastoral aim), and even an apocalyptic eschatological document (Revelations). Moreover, it is clear that a very specific development can be indicated in the documents of the New Testament with regard to many topics like ecclesiology and eschatology. Also, not one of the documents of the New Testament can be said to contain a
theology (not even Paul’s letter to the Romans), although a theology in the New Testament is indeed present.

- Is there something like a theology to be found in the New Testament or does it only contain a religion, or both? If it is possible to talk of a theology, is it the task of this science only to describe it, in other words to inquire what it would have meant in the past, or is it also and especially its task to discern what it means for today?
- How should such a theology be structured, thematically or according to different corpora?
- If there is a theology in the New Testament is, where is it to be found? In Paul or John, or in Paul and John, with Jesus of Nazareth only as presupposition of a New Testament theology? Or is it to be found in the faith of the primitive church, the proclamation of Jesus?
- Is there one theology in the New Testament, or more than one?
- Does this mean that certain documents in the New Testament should be seen as more important than others? What is the place, for example, of the Pastoral and General letters in a New Testament theology?
- What is the relation between New Testament theology and systematic theology? Put differently, can Biblical theology render systematic theology a particular service?
- Who should be the actual addressees of a New Testament theology, the church or society in general?
- What documents should serve as sources for an eventual New Testament theology, only the documents of the canon or also contemporary or even pre- or post-New Testament literature?
- What role should the Old Testament play?
- How should the diversity of the New Testament be dealt with?
- And finally (and maybe the most important question): Should the life and work of Jesus of Nazareth (the historical Jesus be part of a New Testament theology, or only the presupposition thereof?)
This small selection of questions makes clear the extent of the challenge confronting one if one were to attempt a theology of the New Testament. But this should not withhold any New Testament scholar from asking theological questions concerning the New Testament. The way in which one will come to a synthesis of the results of such an investigation, is for each of us to work out personally.

6.2 THE THEOLOGY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

Since Gabler’s days an almost infinite number of theologies have arisen, especially in Protestant circles. As many theologies as have arisen, so different are they in terms of approach, nature and structure. They range from largely historical investigations (what it meant) to what may be described as mainly “normative” (what it means) or even dogmatic investigations. Some are thematically oriented, while others are structured according to the order of the corpora and single documents of the New Testament canon. Some view and treat the entire canon as theology, others only parts of it. Some appear to have taken into account many specialist investigations which have been and are being carried out on the New Testament, while others give the impression that they are unaware of the results of such investigations, or that they intentionally ignore or side-step them. It is therefore necessary to distinguish clearly between various so-called evangelical or conservative theologies on the one hand, and critical theologies on the other, with a few that attempts to occupy both camps.

With regard to secondary literature, as far as the study of the New Testament is concerned many aids are therefore available, both older and more recent ones, some more critical and others less so, some more useful and others less, depending of course on the tradition and approach to the scientific study of the Bible of a particular faculty or church. In the past, it was often the case that all the documents of the New Testament on a particular theme were used at the same time, as if they all, together, made a harmonious contribution to the theme. This procedure is known as the “longitudinal section” method – as opposed to the so-called “cross section” by means of which documents were approached separately. Regardless of the procedure that was followed, the New Testament was in most cases in effect treated as a unity, as if each corpus or document were an essential part of the whole and fitted together like pieces of a puzzle in order to create the total picture. But the more the science advanced, the more the tendency became to treat corpora separately from one
another, as independent units, while at the same time being aware of the need not to attempt to harmonise or systematise even documents from one corpus with one another where this could simply not be possible or admissible theologically. This often has radical consequences for traditional assumptions and doctrines – which, however, should not make one flinch from the responsibility of allowing each document or corpus to speak for itself and of not allowing it to be overwhelmed by some or other traditional interpretation or by sections of the canon which have no theological relationship with or authority over it.

While it is true that what is published in the critical-scientific milieu in New Testament theologies is supposed to reflect the latest scientific consensus and to take account of the results of critical exegesis, one should view the use of these publications for the purposes of training and study always as an aid and take care not to let them have the final say. Such publications can at most act as introductions to scientific reflection and the study of the theology of the New Testament. Each such attempt to write down a theology of the New Testament is nothing but an “attempt” and can only be a theology of the New Testament and not the theology. The diversity of the New Testament, which often is quite disparate, also does not allow one to refer to a theology of the New Testament in the singular. This means that, even if we were occasionally to refer to the theology of the New Testament, we mean nothing by this but the theologies.

It is understandable and inevitable, given the role which particular corpora or groupings of New Testament documents have played in the past – and are still playing in the church and in theology – that these particular documents should figure much more prominently than others in the study and teaching of New Testament. Indeed, theologies have been published which concentrated on these documents only. In this regard we are thinking of what may be called the three large blocks, namely the Synoptic Gospels (Mark, Lk-Ac, Mt), the Johannine texts (Jn & 1, 2, 3 Jn) and Paul (Rm, 1 & 2 Cor, Gl, Phl, 1 Th, Phlm). Although the documents in these respective blocks or corpora evince relationships with one another, this does not mean that they can be simply treated as units. This is especially true as far as the Synoptic Gospels are concerned, since it has already been the case for decades that, despite the traditions that they share, each of the synoptic Gospels is seen and dealt with as an independent narrative with its own theological perspective.
Of the remainder, some of which figure theologically much less prominently than others, there are in the first place those which attempted to continue the Pauline tradition, or which indicate something of a development after Paul (Col and Eph, 1, 2 Tm & Tt, 2 Th, 1 Pt), and also the others which take up more or less their own position (Heb, Ja, Jude & 2 Pt, Rev). This ordering is not meant to imply that the last two groupings are theologically inferior or irrelevant. In some respects, most of them have at times figured very relevantly and prominently, for instance the Pastoral Epistles in the office structure of the church and Revelation in the emergency situations in which the church has found itself. The fact remains, however, that these documents do not have the same theological impact as the blocks mentioned first.

Although New Testament Scholarship needs to be careful not to systematise too easily or to place matters under one heading, it is not possible to avoid, in the practice of New Testament theology, working thematically or, on the basis of the documents, reflecting theologically on a number of themes. If one concedes this, then the question will of course immediately be which themes should be considered. Although it would be possible to increase such themes ad absurdum, the following are normally themes which receive particular attention: the concept of the divine, Christology, pneumatology, anthropology, soteriology, ecclesiology, ethics, eschatology, sacramental theology, the interpretation of parables and miracles.

So far we have consistently spoken of the theology or theologies of the New Testament. We have, however, taken note a few times above of a view that was already being propagated in the previous century by William Wrede, and which recently has drawn strong support from and become the practice of a number of New Testament scholars. This is the view that New Testament Scholarship cannot be limited to the canon only or based on it alone. This view is founded, on the one hand, on the conviction that the canon represents an arbitrary choice and, on the other hand, on the fact that non-canonical early Christian or related writings not only contain important supporting or additional information, but in some cases most probably more original data than the canonical documents, especially as far as the historical Jesus is concerned. Applied to the subject of New Testament theology, this implies that reference should be made to the theology of earliest Christianity rather than to the theology of the New Testament. Were we therefore consciously to limit ourselves to the
canon, then this remains New Testament theology. Inquiring after the theology of the earliest church would of course broaden the field of investigation considerably.

It appears that this broadened perspective will and, indeed, should be the pattern in future. One of the most important profits, among others, in which this results, is the fact that it reveals theological tendencies which already came to the fore in the origin and transmission of the earliest traditions and also those which through a process of selection and dismissal became “canonised”. At the same time, it allows one to notice the “other” positions or traditions which were not necessarily, or even at all, “apocryphal” or “heretical”, but for particular reasons could simply not find acceptance among the “orthodox”.

6.3 BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

One of the consequences of the critical and specialised scientific practice resulting from the Aufklärung was that the Old and the New Testaments were separated almost completely. In a sense this separation was necessary, certainly when seen in terms of the fact that earlier the two Testaments were dealt with in such a way that the interpretation of the one preconditioned that of the other. The best-known examples of this is probably the way in which the so-called messianic texts in the Old Testament were explained with reference to the New Testament without, however, taking account of the original context, while, conversely, the New Testament was explained typologically in terms of events in the Old Testament. Aside from eliminating this undesirable practice, there was also the positive element that, given the fact that each Testament came into being in its own way and also, to a considerable degree, has its own character, it simply is the correct procedure first, and in many respects still, to let each speak for itself.

But this does not change the fact that, since there are indeed commonalities between the two Testaments, a specialised inquiry into their relationship is necessary. This appears particularly apposite when the matter is viewed from the perspective of the New Testament – in which so many concepts, motifs and themes from the Old Testament are echoed. New Testament theology can therefore not be practised with the idea of totally excluding the Old Testament, and also not without eventually inquiring into what might possibly be brought to the fore in a common “Biblical”
theology, even if only a few lines could be drawn. The study of the theology of the New Testament as a sub discipline of New Testament Scholarship therefore needs to include a theological reflection on the relationship between the Old and the New Testaments as well as an attempt to bring the commonalities between them to the fore.

6.4 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BIBLICAL THEOLOGY AND SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

If New Testament Scholarship is to be practised in conjunction with, and in service to, the church, then reflecting on and inquiring into the service that Biblical theology might render systematic theology is a responsibility than cannot be evaded. The epoch-making inaugural lecture by Gabler, which announced the birth of Biblical theology as an independent science, was not only aimed at “liberating” Biblical theology from the bonds of dogmatics. It also had the positive aim of offering dogmatic (systematic) theology something fundamental on which it could build. However, few New Testament scholars after Gabler rarely managed to execute his intentions (or were interested in doing so). The result of the liberation of Biblical theology, rather, was that it moved away further and further from systematic theology.

The result of this, in turn, was that systematic theologians in most cases continued in their old ways by often, without taking into consideration the original contexts, using the Bible as an arsenal of evidential texts (dicta probantia) with which to substantiate dogma. Although there are Biblical scholars who have no problem with such a procedure, especially those attached to faculties not linked to particular churches, scholars attached to faculties which are linked to particular churches can of course not accept this. From the side of systematic theologians, discontent has also developed with regard to Biblical scholars. The latter are accused of being co-responsible for the “misuse” of the Bible by the former: they sit in their ivory towers, generating products accessible and understandable only to their guild of specialised colleagues, with no use value at all to systematic theologians.

Since this accusation is not without foundation, and given that New Testament Scholarship is practised in faculties attached to particular churches, it seems imperative that this science pay attention to the relationship between Biblical theology and systematic theology. The purpose of this is to train students in such a way that
they will not end their inquiry into the theology of the New Testament before having indicated what the consequences of their investigation might be for a possible “church” theology, or, at least, to take a well-founded position with regard to the question concerning the relationship between Biblical theology and systematic theology. This could be of great assistance and service to systematic theologians, as well as to ministers of the church, to the extent that they on occasion must also think and formulate in terms of systematic theology.
The perception which the vast majority of Christians have about the history of the church during the first century is that the church might have at times been threatened from the outside, but that it nonetheless grew strongly and harmoniously, without serious internal tensions or tendencies. Of course, its is Acts in particular that is responsible for this perception, since the author of this book made it his task to represent the history of the earliest churches as the triumphal march of the gospel which, starting in Jerusalem, expanded powerfully further and further right into the centre of the Roman empire, the strategically important Rome. But if one looks more deeply and reads between the lines, then it soon becomes clear that everything did not run so smoothly. For it becomes apparent that the church did not constitute the kind of unity that is usually assumed, that there were not only geographical groupings but, also, theological and other interest groups. Some of these groupings also did not merely coexist peacefully next to one another but, apparently, opposed one another.

The Ebionites

“The Ebionites were a group of Christians who were converted Jews who insisted on maintaining their Jewishness and on following the laws God had given Moses, as found in the Hebrew Bible, all while believing that Jesus was the Messiah sent from God for the salvation of the world. We do not know where their name comes from. Most scholars think that it derives from the Hebrew word ebyon, which means ‘the poor.’ Possibly these Christians followed Jesus’ command to give up everything for the sake of the Gospel and had taken on voluntary poverty as part of their religious devotion, much like the first followers of Jesus as described in the book of Acts (Acts 2:44-45; 4:32). The Ebionites almost certainly claimed to be the spiritual descendants of these first followers and like them understood that faith in Jesus did not entail a break with Judaism but the proper interpretation of it, the religion revealed to Moses by God on Mount Sinai.

Some scholars have thought that the Ebionites may have held views very much like those of the first followers of Jesus, such as his brother James or his disciple Pete;
both leaders of the church in Jerusalem in the years after Jesus’ death. James in particular appears to have held to the ongoing validity of the Jewish law for all followers of Jesus. His view, and evidently that of the Ebionites late; was that Jesus was the Jewish Messiah sent from the Jewish God to the Jewish people in fulfilment of the Jewish law. Therefore, anyone who wanted to follow Jesus had to be Jewish. If a Gentile man converted to the faith, he had to be circumcised, since circumcision always had been the requirement of a male to become a follower of the God of Israel, as God himself demanded in the law (Gen 17:10-14).

Eventually the apostle Paul came along and insisted the opposite, that the God of Jesus was the God of all people and that gentiles did not have to become Jewish to follow Jesus. For Paul, doing what the law required could not put a person into a right standing with God, and trying to keep the law was pointless when it came to salvation. Paul ended up winning this argument, but for centuries there were Christians who disagreed with him, including the Ebionites. They did not view Paul as the great apostle of the faith; he was the one who had gotten the fundamentals of the faith precisely wrong.

The Ebionites were strict Jewish monotheists. As such, they did not think that Jesus was himself divine. There could be only one God. Instead, Jesus was the human appointed by God to be the Messiah. He was not born of a virgin: his parents were Joseph and Mary, and he was a very righteous man whom God had adopted to be his son and to whom he had given a mission of dying on the Cross to atone for the sins of others.

You might wonder why the Ebionites didn’t just read their New Testaments to see that Jesus was born of a virgin, was himself divine, had abrogated the Jewish law, and was correctly proclaimed by Paul. They couldn’t read the New Testament because there was as yet no New Testament. The Ebionites had their own sacred books, along with the Hebrew Bible, that proclaimed their points of view, including a Gospel that looked very much like our Gospel of Matthew (the most ‘Jewish’ of our Gospels), but without its first two chapters, which narrate the virgin birth.” (Ehrman 20009:191-193).
The Marcionites

“At the opposite end of the theological spectrum were the Marcionites, followers of Marcion, a famous preacher-theologian of the second century from Asia Minor, who spent a few years in Rome before being expelled from the church and moving back to Asia Minor, where he established numerous churches in lots of cities.

Unlike the Ebionites, Marcion understood Paul as the great hero of the faith, the one apostle who actually understood Jesus and his relation to the Jewish law. As we have seen, Paul drew a distinction between the law given by Moses, which could not bring salvation, and the gospel of Jesus, which could. Marcion thought that this distinction was absolute: the Jewish law and the gospel of Jesus had nothing in common. The law was one thing (for Jews), the gospel was another (for Christians).

Marcion wrote a book called the Antitheses (literally, ‘Contrary Statements’) that showed the absolute dichotomy between the God of the Old Testament and the God of Jesus. The God of the Old Testament was a wrathful, vengeful God of judgment; the God of Jesus was a loving and merciful God of salvation. How different were these two Gods? Marcion drew a logical conclusion: these were two different Gods.

The God of the Old Testament had created this world, chosen Israel to be his people, given them his law, and then condemned them, and everyone else, to eternal punishment when they disobeyed. The God of Jesus had nothing to do with this creation, Israel, or the law, and came into this world to save people from the wrath of the Old Testament God. He did this by having Jesus die on the cross, to take the wrath of God upon himself. Those who have faith in Jesus can therefore escape the clutches of the vengeful God of the Jews.

In this interpretation, Jesus was not and could not be a human being. That would make him physical, part of the physical creation, a creature of the creator God. According to Marcion, Jesus only seemed to be a human but was actually a divine being, pure and simple. Marcion’s opponents called this view of Christ ‘docetism,’ from the Greek word dokeo (‘to seem, to appear’). Jesus appeared in the likeness of human flesh, as Paul says (Romans 8:3); he did not really become flesh.
Consequently, per Marcion, the followers of Jesus were not to be associated with Jews or Judaism in any form. They were to be followers of Jesus and of Paul, the one apostle who understood Jesus.

Marcion had his own list of sacred books, but obviously not those of the Ebionites. His canon consisted of the ten letters of Paul that he knew (all of our thirteen, apart from the Pastoral Epistles) and a form of the Gospel of Luke. All of these books, though, are problematic in terms of the support they offer for Marcion’s views, since they quote the Old Testament (the book of the ‘other’ God) and seem to assume that the Creation was made by the true God. Marcion believed that all of these books had been altered by the scribes who copied them, who did not understand the truth of the Gospel. And so Marcion produced his own version of his eleven books of Scripture (he did not, of course, include the Old Testament in his canon), a truncated version that eliminated the scribal changes that tied Jesus to the creator God” (Ehrman 193-195).

**The various groups of Gnostics**

“Scholars debate whether or not the Christians called Gnostics constitute one group or a bunch of roughly similar groups, or a number of groups without much in common. I won’t go into all of the scholarly debates here, but simply indicate that I think there were multiple groups of Gnostics that had some basic theological views in common and that it is heuristically useful to think about these groups together, as ‘Gnostic.’ (Of course there were differences, too, otherwise they would not be separate groups.)

They are called Gnostic, from the Greek gnosis, ‘knowledge,’ because they maintained that knowledge, not faith, was necessary for salvation. But knowledge of what? Knowledge of how this world came into existence and, yet more important, of who you really are. Specifically, you need to know who you are, where you came from, how you got here, and how you can return.

The assumption of the various Gnostic groups was that some of us do not come from here, on this earth, and do not belong here. We come from another realm, a
heavenly place, and we have become entrapped in the evil confines of our bodies. We need to learn how to escape, and for that we need secret knowledge (gnosis).

The Gnostics believed that this world is not the creation of the one and only true God. Instead, there are many divine beings in the heavenly realm, even if all of them were generated from the ultimate divinity, and this world was art afterthought, the creation of lower; inferior, and ignorant divinities. Its creation was a kind of cosmic disaster, the result of a catastrophe that took place in the divine realm. In part the world was created in order to provide a place of imprisonment for elements of the divine. Some of us have these sparks of the divine within us. We need to learn the truth about this world and the world above, and about our true identity, in order to escape and return to our heavenly home.

What does this have to do with being a follower of Jesus? In the Christian Gnostic systems (there were also non-Christian varieties), Jesus is a divine being who has come down from the divine realm in order to communicate the secret knowledge of salvation to the spirits who have been entrapped here. This knowledge includes an account of how the divine realm itself came into being, how the catastrophic material creation came to exist, and how elements of the divine managed to become entrapped here. Without Jesus we could not have this knowledge. He really is the saviour of our souls.

Of course Jesus himself could not be an entrapped spirit. Some Gnostics agreed with Marcion that Jesus was a divine being who only appeared to be human. He came to earth in order to convey his secret teachings. Most Gnostics thought differently, however; according to them, Jesus himself was a human being who was temporarily inhabited by a divine being, the Christ, for his public ministry between the time of his baptism – when the Christ entered into him in the form of a dove – and the time before his death. That’s why on the cross Jesus cried out, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’ It was then that the divine Christ left Jesus to die alone. But he raised Jesus from the dead, after which he continued to deliver his secret teachings to his close disciples before ascending back to the heavenly realm.
This may not sound like the kind of Christianity you learned about in Sunday School, but it was very popular in many regions of the early church. Salvation came not by having faith in Jesus’ death and resurrection but by understanding the secret teaching that he revealed. Since the teaching was secret, the public instruction that Jesus gave was not his real message, or at least it was carefully coded so that only the insiders, those with the divine spark within, could fully understand it. His real message came in private revelations that he gave to his closest followers. Many of the Gnostic books reveal this divine knowledge.

We are fortunate that a number of these books have turned up in modern times, especially when a cache of Gnostic writings, commonly called the Gnostic Gospels, was discovered in the wilderness of Egypt near the town of Nag Hammadi in 1945. They convey a picture of Christianity quite unlike anything most of us were reared on or ever even heard before. And the reason for this is obvious: the Gnostics were losers in the struggle over who would decide the ‘right,’ the official, form of Christianity for all posterity” (Ehrman 2009:195-197).

The proto-Orthodox Christians

“Ultimately, only one group of Christians won in the struggle to gain converts. Their victory was probably sealed sometime in the third century. When the Roman emperor Constantine converted to Christianity in the early fourth century, he converted to this victorious form of the faith. When Christianity later became the official religion of the empire, about fifty years after Constantine, it was this form that was accepted by nearly everyone – with lots of variation of course. Alternative views have always been around.

Once it won the battles, this form of Christianity declared not only that it was right, but that it had been right all along. The technical term for ‘correct belief’ is ‘orthodoxy’ (in Greek, orthos means ‘right’; dora means ‘opinion’). The ‘orthodox’ Christians, that is, the ones who won the struggle, labelled all the competing perspectives heresies, from the Greek word for ‘choice.’ Heretics are people who choose to believe the wrong belief, a non-orthodox belief.
What should we call the group of Christians who held to the views that eventually won out, before the victory was sealed? I usually call them the ‘proto-orthodox,’ the spiritual ancestors of those whose views later became orthodox.

The proto-orthodox are the second- and third-century Christians we are best informed about, since it was their writings, not the writings of their opponents, that were preserved for posterity. This would include such writers as Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Hippolytus, Clement of Alexandria, and Origen – figures well known to students of early Christianity. These authors were responsible for shaping the views that eventually became orthodox. They did so in no small part by arguing against all contrary sides at once, leading to certain kinds of paradoxical affirmations. For example, they agreed with the Ebionites that Jesus was fully human, but disagreed when they denied he was God. They agreed with the Marcionites that Jesus was fully divine, but disagreed when they denied he was human. How could the proto-orthodox have it both ways? By saying that Jesus was both things at once, God and man. This became the orthodox view.

The major orthodox doctrines are the ones that eventually made it into the Christian creeds: there is one God, he is the creator of all there is; therefore, the Creation is inherently good, even if flawed by sin. Jesus his son is both human and divine, and he is not two beings (as the Gnostics held), but one; he brought salvation not through secret knowledge but by shedding his real blood.

Like all of their opponents, the proto-orthodox had a range of books that they considered sacred authorities and that they saw as authorizing their particular perspectives. Some of these books eventually made it into the canon. The major debates within proto-orthodox circles concerned which of the proto-orthodox books to accept, but all proto-orthodox agreed that none of the heretical books could possibly have been written by any of the apostles and so were not to be included in the canon of Scripture” (Ehrman 2009:197-198).

Within the New Testament itself, the clearest example of the struggle in the early church is the struggle between Paul and the “Judaizers”. (This was the group that set the requirement that non-Jews first had to be circumcised and had to follow certain
prescriptions of the Jewish law before they could become part of the new people of God, the church.) Add to this the fact that all sorts of theological developments or changes in particular perceptions can be discerned in the New Testament. Examples that might be mentioned include changes in perception concerning the church, ministrations, eschatology, and so forth. We do not only notice something of an initially unorganised, spontaneous and enthusiastic experience of being a believer or a church. We also notice attempts to account for the delay of the second coming by viewing the church and organising it as an entity which had to establish itself in the world and had to make arrangements to survive. This introduced the period of so-called early Catholicism, a period during which already, among other things, more permanent offices and other organisational structures were being established, the dynamic preaching of the gospel was being replaced more and more by dogmas, and the sacraments were more strongly tending to become redemptive institutions.

What we are dealing with here clearly are a reflection of the “growing pains” which this young religious movement underwent in its attempt to interpret the Christ events and to come to an understanding of its own identity and existence in light of these events. No confession, articles of faith, or church order were available as they had not yet been formulated. The young Jesus movement therefore had to find its way in terms of traditions that were available from within its own ranks, but also in terms of what was viewed as useful in the Jewish and non-Jewish environments.

All this tells us that studying the history of earliest Christianity must make up a necessary component of New Testament Scholarship. Since the New Testament is the result of this history, most of its documents as well as much of its content will be placed in perspective when we are informed about the history lying at its basis. This makes one realise further that an appeal or a particular document or pronouncement in the New Testament may be an appeal to a minority opinion in the earliest church or to a position which was provoked by particular circumstances. Under different circumstances it probably would have appeared differently. (Paul’s differing pronouncements on the Jewish law are an example of this.)

The historical questions which are normally asked in this regard are those concerning theological and other tendencies, groupings in the church, theological influence and
developments in the ranks of the church, as well as the influence of external ideological, political, economical, social and religious factors on the thought of the earliest church and on the origins of the New Testament.
FINAL NOTE

With this we have reached the end of the encyclopædia of the subdisciplines of New Testament Scholarship. The order according to which these disciplines were presented should not be viewed as inflexible. Nonetheless, a certain rationale is attached to this particular order. This is because an attempt has been made to present the disciplines as they come to the fore in the process of working with the text, as one moves from first being introduced to it towards wider and deeper essences.

An attempt was made in each case not merely to say whether this or that subject is being studied, but also to explain what the questions concerning it are and what the study entails. Hopefully it has contributed to a good understanding of the field of study and interests of New Testament Scholarship.
SECTION B
THE MEDITERRANEAN SOCIO-CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT

"all language … derives its meanings from the societal system and cultural context in which the language communication originally takes place"
(Malina 1993:xii)

INTRODUCTION

This part of the study guide is based on Bruce J Malina’s *Windows on the World of Jesus. Time Travel to Ancient Judea* (Westminster/John Knox Press: Louisville, 1993; from now on *Windows*). It is an adaptation, not a translation of the book.

Malina (1993:xii) says in the introduction to *Windows*: “all language … derives its meanings from the societal system and cultural context in which the language communication originally takes place”). After a visit by Malina to South Africa in 1994 the idea was brought up that *Windows*, which was originally aimed at the American reader, could be adapted to the sociological and cultural situation in South Africa. This implied more than a mere translation. Prof Jan van der Watt and Stephan Joubert were then asked to make the necessary adjustments to *Windows*. Although the basic content of *Windows* was retained, the windows were rewritten, and reduced in number. To make the book easier for the South African readers to digest, the emphasis is on the New Testament. That is why references to the New Testament have been somewhat expanded. A section on the *Profile of the first century world* has also been added (Chapter 1) to give readers more preliminary information.

In the meanwhile the book went out of print and the printing company that published it (Orion Publishers) no longer exists. After a discussion dr Kobus Kok and prof Ernest van Eck had with Bruce Malina at the SBL conference in New Orleans, USA, in November 2009, and in collaboration with prof Jan van der Watt and Stephan Joubert, it was decided to rework the book for use in the classroom context at the University of Pretoria. A later book publication is being planned.
In this book the reader is taken on a time trip to ancient Mediterranean society. There are four macro Windows to guide the reader:

• Macro-window 1 is about groups and outsiders
• Macro-window 2 is about the family
• Macro-window 3 is about general values
• Macro-window 4 is about the ancients’ concept of time.

To ease the reader’s entry into the ancient Mediterranean world, the windows relate the experiences of Jack and Joy Turner, a modern couple, who find themselves back in the first century Mediterranean world. However, they do not change into first century people. (We could imagine that they travel back to the first century in some kind of time machine.) The idea is to illustrate, with the help of the (anachronistic) windows, the culture shock that modern people would experience on a trip to the first century. In every case there is an introductory episode (a window) which deals with a certain ancient value or outlook. Under the heading Meaning of the window the Mediterranean value is then explained and brought to bear on New Testament material. The references to the New Testament are by no means exhaustive. They are merely examples to illustrate the point. Thus the reader is encouraged to understand the value or outlook and to then apply it to other parts of the New Testament.

Malina calls it the incarnational approach to the New Testament. The idea of the approach is to enable the reader to identify with the fundamental values and perspectives of the ancient Mediterranean world, because these values and perspectives lie at the root of the whole New Testament.

The material in this book is not proved scientifically, neither is it presented in academic language. Scholars are not the target group of the book. The scientific arguments for the concepts illustrated here are available elsewhere for those who want to know more. Some of the relevant literature is listed at the end of the book.

The window-approach used in this book is based on the work of a team of researchers who started almost a generation ago to provide a theoretical and practical framework to aid people in assimilating foreign cultures.
The modern world is indeed very different from the world of the first century. This book, then, is an introduction to the Mediterranean world of the first century, and also to a better understanding of the New Testament.

For more information, read the following:
T. R. Mitchell, J. Gagerman and S. Schwartz, *Greek Culture Assimilator*, Urbana, Ill, 1969. The value of learning to know a culture in this way has been proved.

STUDY UNIT 1

A PROFILE OF THE FIRST CENTURY WORLD

1.1 Introduction

1.2 Aim

1.3 Not individuals, but a community

1.4 The patriarchal family – the heart of the first century world

1.5 Honour and shame – primary values in the Mediterranean world

1.6 A socio-economic profile of the first century world

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Until recently, most South Africans would not have understood the following sentence: Big Mac’s is big value for money! Yet millions of people all over the world know that it refers to popular beef burgers produced by an international fast-food giant. Another example is the heading of a recent article in one of our papers: South African hookers score. Most local sports fans will know at once that the article is about the hookers who score so many tries on our rugby fields nowadays. An average American, though, glancing at the paper and knowing nothing about rugby, will interpret it quite differently. In America a hooker is a prostitute, and an American would think this heading means that South African prostitutes are doing good business.

These two examples teach us that meaning has more to it than we think. At the very least it means that understanding entails more than knowing the meaning of every individual word in a sentence. To understand what someone says, we must know something of his background and culture. We know much by instinct, but we do not always bother our heads about it, especially when we read the Bible. We often read it as if it were written only for us, in South Africa, today.

We easily forget that we read the Bible over the shoulders of the original addressees: they not only spoke another language, but their habits were quite different from ours. This has caused many hitches in the interpretation of the Bible. An example is the question that was once such an issue in many churches: should
women wear hats to church or not? Those who voted for hats built a strong case on 1 Corinthians 11, where it is said that women should wear a head-covering. But is that what the text really means? What did Paul have in mind when he said that the Christian women in Corinth should cover their heads during worship? How do we apply this Biblical injunction to our own lives? We have to know the cultural framework in which the authors of the Bible said certain things, or we will misunderstand them. We must get to know the values, habits, traditions and institutions of the people of Biblical times. Then only will we understand how the writers of the Bible gave expression to God’s revelation in their own world, and then only will we be able to transfer the message of the Bible correctly to our world of today.

1.2 AIM
This book focuses on the New Testament. We want to unlock the cultural framework in which every book in the New Testament came into being. With one or two exceptions, all these documents were written in the first century of the Christian era, in the eastern Mediterranean world. This eastern part broadly covers the area around the Mediterranean, from Palestine to Rome. Because the area is vast, we will not discuss every group or nation in detail, or pause at every possible tradition or institution. Rather, we want to give a general impression of the Mediterranean scene. Thus we will study typical values, traits and traditions of the first century world and see how the New Testament relates to them.

Our approach in this book is like our impression when we look down on a vast landscape from an airplane. We are going to map a general landscape of the first century. This will not only help us to place the New Testament firmly in context, but also to handle the books of the Bible with circumspection when we try to establish their message for our times.

In the remainder of Chapter 1 we will look at the most important values and traditions of the Mediterranean world around the first century of the Christian era. Here and there we will also note the differences and the similarities between the first century world and our own. Enjoy your journey through the first century!
1.3 NOT INDIVIDUALS, BUT A COMMUNITY

During a job interview, the first question put to you is about your qualifications. Nowadays your papers determine, largely, what you are. In the first century this was not so. Then people would judge your worth by asking your father’s name, from which town you came, or to what group or nation you belonged.

People in the time of the New Testament were not unattached individuals; they were mostly associated with their families, communities or home towns. In the gospels Jesus is called Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph, and Simon is called the son of Jonah; the gospels refer to the sons of Zebedee; Paul is called Paul of Tarsus. One’s tribe or group was also important. See how Paul emphasizes his Israelite descent in Philippians 3 and 2 Corinthians 11. The most important papers Judeans possessed in the first century were their family trees; that is, the list of the names of their forebears. Levites and priests had to show that they were of pure blood before they were allowed to serve in the temple. In the Bible too, genealogy is important. Apart from the many examples in the Old Testament, we find the family tree of Jesus in Matthew 1:1-17. One reason for this genealogy is to show that Jesus was really the promised Messiah, a descendant of David (cf Lk 3:23-28).

The world of the first century did not accommodate individualism. Groups, such as the family, the local community, town, city, tribe or nation determined your identity. Because roles in these groups were stereotyped, matters which are important to us, like personal rights, free choice, and the right to free association, were low on the agenda. Individuals had little say in matters which many of us today can decide about for ourselves, like whom to marry, what job to do, who our friends will be, which faith we will adhere to, and so on. The larger groups, and especially the family – the most vital institution in the first century – mostly decided about these matters.

Because the group largely determined the individual’s values and behaviour, individuals had to know the values and rules of the group – and their particular roles within it – as well as possible. For example, they had to defend the other group-mem bers’ names even with their own lives, and had to share their belongings with needy group-members.
In the time of the New Testament people outside the group were usually viewed with suspicion. They were outsiders with whom the group did not really mix. The outsiders were stereotyped, so that the group could know exactly how to react to them. The Greeks, for example, referred to other people as *barbaroi*, because they made nonsensical *bar-bar* sounds; the Pharisees spoke slightingly of those who disobeyed the law of Moses as *the people of this land*. These (mostly pejorative) labels for outsiders further alienated groups.

### 1.4 THE PATRIARCHAL FAMILY: THE HEART OF THE FIRST CENTURY WORLD

#### 1.4.1 A man’s world

Although there are many positive remarks about women in the Old Testament, the Jews of the first century thought that the wife was inferior to her husband and that men were by nature women’s superiors. A popular belief was that women had caused the Fall of Man; so they were regarded as craftier, more vain and more materialistic than men. Many Jews believed that women had to keep the following covered: their mouths, legs and hair. Their mouths could speak folly and embarrass their husbands, with their legs they could seduce other men, and a wife who appeared in public with loose hair was believed to challenge her husband’s authority. The Mishna, a collection of Jewish verbal traditions and laws which was compiled around the third century of the Christian era, forbids women to study the law with men. One rabbi even said that a woman was like a piece of meat with which a man could do as he pleased.

Of course, women were not only regarded as inferior to men in the Jewish world. Even in the Graeco-Roman world, where women were generally more emancipated than in the Jewish world, the husband was still the undisputed head. The Roman philosopher Seneca wrote that the man was made to rule and the woman to be silent and obey.

Thus men did not regard women as their equals. Especially the Jewish men were proud in their conviction that they were the most eminent of all God’s creatures. They, not women, were the receivers of the command to go out and multiply. They
not only had to perpetuate mankind, but had to perform all religious duties, like sacrificing in the temple and visiting the synagogue.

1.4.2 The specific roles of every member of the family

1.4.2.1 The paterfamilias

Naturally, the father was the major figure in the family of the first century. Especially in the Roman world the father had power over his family throughout his life, even after his children had married and set up their own household. Children could not possess or sell land, or make a will without their father’s consent. The father’s power over his family (known as the *patria potestas*) meant that he had the right to decide whether he accepted them as his children or not. He could even reject a child, and such a baby was often left on one of the dumps outside the town or city. He also had the right to sell his children as slaves, or to have them put to death if they disobeyed him. This power of a father over the lives of his children was repealed only as late as the year 374 CE, by the emperor Valentian. Although the Jewish world did not have the same kind of laws touching a father and his children, even there the father was the undisputed ruler and his children owed him absolute obedience.

It was the Mediterranean father’s duty to supply his family’s food and clothing. He also had to represent his family in public (that is, where the men usually gathered, as on the city or town square), in the cultic place, and defend their good name. He also had to help educate his children. A Jewish father was expected to teach his son the laws of the Lord and to take his son with him to the public religious meetings after the son’s twelfth year.

1.4.2.2 The wife

The woman’s place was in the home, as we have noted under the previous heading. A respectable wife appeared in public as little as possible. Only when she went to pray at the temple, or to buy food and other necessities at the market, was she allowed to leave her house – but not without a veil! The well-known Jewish philosopher, Philo of Alexandria, specified that women were not to go to the temple at the busiest time of day; it could create a bad impression, for prostitutes often appeared in public (without veils).
The woman’s tasks in the home were to prepare food, to tend the children, and to supervise the household. When her sons married, it was her duty to teach her daughter-in-law (who usually, in the Jewish world, moved in with her in-laws) the rules and traditions of the family.

1.4.2.3 Sons and daughters
Sons were more important than daughters to the Mediterranean people of the first century. A girl’s greatest asset was her sexual purity; only a girl who retained her virginity could expect to get a good man for a husband. Mothers kept their daughters out of the public eye as much as possible, so as not to expose them to temptation. While the daughter’s place was in the home, the son, as he grew up, could move about with his father in public. After his marriage the son usually remained in his home with his wife. Eventually it became his duty to tend his aging parents.

1.5 HONOUR AND SHAME: PRIMARY VALUES IN THE MEDITERRANEAN WORLD
Broadly speaking, values are about conformity to a way of life. People choose to live and behave according to what they hold to be true about things like time, space, possessions, religion, other people and themselves.

If we ask what our modern society’s basic values are, most people would probably say that the major force in our day is economics and all that goes with it, like labour, production, consumption, money and possessions. This force not only motivates many people’s behaviour, but claims most of their energy and time. Over against this, economics was not the be-all and end-all for people in the first century. During that time people worked primarily to conserve their status, and not to gather possessions. Those who did try to make money were suspected of doing it at the expense of the groups to which they belonged.

The values of the first century were mainly honour and shame. Honour refers to a person’s worth as a person and to the recognition of his worth by others. Shame, on the other hand, refers chiefly to people’s (especially women’s) mindfulness of their public reputation. Shame, therefore, was also a positive value.
In ancient times man was chiefly motivated by a desire to have his own values accepted by others. Of course, the individual's group played the main role in the matter. The individual's good name was maintained when the group recognized his honour. Thus it was essential for people to know, and then to conform to the standards of their group. When a person overstepped the mark (as when a child defied his parents, or when a pupil disobeyed his teacher), or when his claim to public honour was not acknowledged, he was punished, even expelled from the community. He was then branded as a fool, sinner, sot, heathen, and the like. Because such persons without honour had no positive status, they were excluded from the everyday life of the community, which boiled down to a social death sentence.

In the strongly patriarchal world of the first century, honour was closely united to gender. Men had more honour than women. When someone was born into an honourable family or tribe (for instance, the tribe Benjamin, see Phil 3:5), he was an honourable man from the very beginning. Conversely, if a man's parents were without honour, he inherited their dishonour: Deuteronomy 23:2-4 excludes children born out of wedlock or born from forbidden alliances – even a child of the tenth generation – from the congregation of Israel.

Persons could, however, gain honour if a prominent person, such as an emperor, king or god, conferred it on him. When an emperor granted Roman citizenship to a town or city, the status of all the citizens was immediately and dramatically raised. People could also gain honour by social interaction with outsiders. If a person could successfully challenge the good name of another person of the same social status by means of debate, insult and loaded questions (cf the public debates between Jesus and the Pharisees in Mt 22), he could raise his own honour and that of his group by publicly humiliating the other person.

1.6 A SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROFILE OF THE FIRST CENTURY WORLD
The first century world was agriculturally oriented. Eighty to ninety per cent of the population were farmers who eked out a living on smallholdings. Farming, like most of the other economic activities, centered around the family. The family, the basic
economic unit of the ancient world, raised certain crops or manufactured articles, and then sold them at the market or exchanged them for necessities.

Most of the people in the first century could not read and were poor. Less than ten per cent of the population could read and write, while wealth was restricted to a small group of the elite in the cities, like the aristocracy, and religious and military leaders. This group, which totaled only two to five per cent of the population, was served by a larger group – officials, officers, teachers of the law and of Scripture. The city chiefly centered around the needs of the elite group, and the basic structures of modern cities, like an economic infrastructure and general services (like sewerage systems and running water) did not exist. Because of the dense population in the cities, their general conditions were appalling. It has been estimated that the city of Antioch had, in the first century, a population of 120 people per acre, while a modern city like New York only has 38 people per acre.

Bad hygienic conditions in the cities (and in the country), meager medical services, and high crime rates led to a high death rate. Some scholars say that in the ancient world only about 40% of the population became older than 16; 25% older than 26, and 10% older than 46, while a mere 3% of the population became older than 60. The great advantage of the ancient cities was that they were usually walled around, granting relative safety to the citizens, and affording them the opportunity to sell their products there to the rich.

Although a large number of people lived in the cities, the greatest number lived in small towns or communities in the country, where agriculture was their means of making a living. Because of poor infrastructure, natural catastrophes, high taxes and war, most people had little money. In Palestine alone more than 70% of the population around the first century lived under the breadline, which was estimated at 200 denarii per year. A denarius was the wage that a day laborer earned. Because work was scarce and religious and state taxes high, most of the Jews fell below this level of income, and many lost their land and possessions and were even sold as slaves.
Introduction
The distinction between group and outsiders was one of the central features of Mediterranean culture.

People first and foremost saw themselves as part of a group or group-relationship. Societies were always divided into we – the members of the group – and they – those outside the group. Membership of a group determined your attitude and behaviour towards others.

Group members always had to be supported and respected. Your group and its members had the first claim to your loyalty; even at your expense. Outsiders – meaning all other people – simply did not count. You were not part of them and simply had no responsibility towards them. The self-image of ancient man was mostly shaped by his membership of a group. What people thought or felt, what they expected of themselves, or what they did, was dictated by the claims and expectations of the group.

This differs somewhat from the way the city dwellers of today think about themselves. We are individualists. I am taught to make my own decisions, I do not have to have the same profession as my father, and so on. The idea of the interests and honour of the group does not appeal to modern man.
Except for immediate family ties we often do not feel responsible for one another. *The devil take the hindmost* is the popular slogan.

When we read the Bible today, and want to understand the New Testament, we must always remember that the people of the Bible were essentially group people and not individualists. In the windows that follow the importance of this group perspective will become clear.

**WINDOW 1**
**THE GREAT BENEFACTOR**
Jack and Joy Turner were touring first century Jerusalem. The market was to be their first stop, but then they got lost. In the end Jack asked a citizen the way. This person told them to go straight on till they got to Simon bar Jonathan’s tannery on the next corner. There they had to turn right and follow the road to get to the market.

Jack and Joy followed his instructions. When they reached the tannery, they decided to look inside. While they were watching a worker cutting something out of leather, the owner turned up and inspected his employee’s work. Then he moved on to the next workbench. The worker he had just left then started telling Jack and Joy – for everyone in the shop to hear – what a wonderful boss Simon was, for he has employed not only him, but also his two sons. For three months already they had been in the employ of him and his kind family.

*Why did this workman voice his gratitude towards Simon so loudly?*

**MEANING OF THE WINDOW**
**GOOD RELATIONS BETWEEN EMPLOYER AND EMPLOYEE**
One of the primary relationships in the ancient world was that between persons in a position of power and those who depended on their favour for their own survival. The former group, which included politicians, aristocrats, landowners, and owners of small businesses, usually controlled essential provisions and had honourable positions in society. Because most of the people in the Mediterranean world were very poor, they relied on these well-doers. A great landowner could grant a needy
person a piece of land to farm on, and also help to protect him and allow him to use the outlets for his products.

This relationship between benefactors and their clients influenced almost all social relations in the first century, including the one between the Roman emperor and his subjects. In his turn Zeus, Rome’s chief god, was not only the father of all their gods, but also seen as the invisible head of the whole empire. People had to prove their fealty to the emperor and the gods with offerings, proofs of esteem, and obedience to their laws and regulations.

Because the clients could not repay their benefactors for their favours, they had to uphold and extol their good name in public, as the worker in Simon’s tannery did. In this way they asserted their benefactor’s honourable position in public, and also expressed their own gratitude.

Some persons in the ancient world acted as mediators between the benefactors and their clients. When the benefactor was out of reach, as, for instance, an important public figure or a god, prophets and students of the law could contact them on behalf of their clients. The honour of such mediators was based on their influence with the persons in power and on the recognition of this influence by the clients.

Ancient people regarded the invisible world as the real one, because everything was controlled from there. That is why people were forever arguing about which gods ruled the invisible world. The New Testament has no doubt about the matter: God is in charge of everything and everyone (cf Rev 4).

In terms of first century ideas, God, according to the New Testament, is the great Benefactor who has unlimited access to and power over everything in the universe, including life, health, land, honour, and power over death and Hades (see Mt 10:28-31). This great power He fully shares with his son, Jesus Christ. According to Colossians 1:15-20, Jesus is so great that He is the image of the God who has created all things visible and invisible, and who keeps the entire creation intact.
In the New Testament God’s clients are initially all known as sinners. This includes all who do not live according to his commands (see Window 6). But Christ is the mediator between God and his clients; He redeems them from the power of sin and gives them access to God’s favour (see also Window 2, as well as Col 1:21-22; 1 Tim 2:5-6). Paul says that those who react in faith to Christ’s mediation, undergo a change of status – they become children of God (Rom 8:16). As children, they are now heirs of God and of Christ (Rom 8:17), and that is why they get a share in God’s Spirit (Rom 8:23; Eph 1:14), and in a new way of life which even death cannot destroy (Rom 8:38).

The New Testament is very clear on the matter: God is the great Benefactor who radically changes the status of his clients and who grants them a share in his favours, like his protection and custody, and new life. Naturally, according to the New Testament, the clients are under an obligation to respond in a suitable way to God’s favour. To show their gratitude for all these favours, the faithful are called upon to extol God’s name in public and to honour Him (see Mt 5:16; 1 Cor 10:31; Col 3:17).

**WINDOW 2**

**GROUP BOUNDARIES AND MORE GROUP BOUNDARIES**

Uri, a Jerusalem businessman, was a native of Modain, where Jack went to visit him. Jack was rather shocked to hear how aggressive and forthright people sometimes were towards each other when they met at the market. After one such an episode, Uri explained to him that Judah, with whom he had just had an altercation about a standing place for a donkey, belonged to another family group in the town. Uri was merely protecting his family’s interests.

When Jack visited Uri at his business a few days later, he had a big surprise. Judah also came into the shop. Uri left all the clients and took trouble to be friendly towards Judah and to help him. Jack wondered what had happened to the hostility between them – now it had changed into preferential treatment.

*Jack kept his opinion to himself, but wondered how Uri and Judah could be such hypocrites!*
MEANING OF THE WINDOW
FROM ONE GROUP BOUNDARY TO ANOTHER

Jack misunderstood Uri and Judah’s behaviour. A good example will help to explain his misunderstanding. In a town like Nazareth, family A will regard family B as outsiders if family A’s interests vie with those of family B. That is what happened with Uri and Judah in Modain. But if families A and B go to Capernaum, the people of Capernaum become the outsiders and families A and B become a single group which places its common interests above those of Capernaum. That is what happened with Uri and Judah in Jerusalem. And if people from Capernaum and Nazareth – towns in Galilee – come to Judea, they will group themselves as Galileans against the Judeans, and so on. What Jack did not understand, was that group boundaries can change as situations change.

You were mainly classified as a member of a group according to where you came from (not necessarily where you were born). It was generally accepted that (a) persons from the same spot on the map would have group-feelings towards their fellow group-members, even long after they had left to stay elsewhere; and (b) by knowing someone’s place of origin; you would also be able to say how he would behave and what you could expect of him. Galilee was, for example, regarded as benighted, compared to Judea. When people hear that Jesus comes from Galilee, they immediately ask if he is fit to be a prophet (Jn 1:46; 7:41, 52).

Your family was also an important means of classifying you. Because you had been born into a certain family, you would show certain characteristics. Note how Jesus is classified according to his family in John 6:42 (see also Jn 7:27). That, too, is the function of the long family trees in Luke 3:23-38 and Matthew 1:1-17. Groups collaborated on the grounds of origin, family, and shared interests.

This collaboration within the group meant, as we have seen above, that you would be loyal to your group before all else. This explains the demands in the New Testament that the faithful should love one another. After all, they are part of a group, the family of God, and therefore they should be loyal to one another. The call in James 4:11 not to become angry with one’s brother is an example: it is aimed at protecting these group boundaries. If you behave maliciously towards a group
member, you harm the group as a whole. This reminds us of what Jesus says in Mark 3:24: a kingdom (group) divided against itself cannot stand. This explains why quarrels and strife are greater sins in the Bible than we as modern people perceive them to be. Quarrels and strife were not merely between individuals – they destroyed the whole group.

This strong group feeling in the first century was one important reason why Christianity spread so quickly from Jerusalem to Rome. In Acts, Paul, on his missionary journeys, usually goes to the synagogues first – to the Jewish meeting-houses – to preach there (see Acts 13:5,14-15; 14:1; 16:13; 17:1,10,17; 18:4,19,26; 19:8). The Jews are Paul’s group members (brothers – Acts 13:15,38) at the places in question. There he will be accepted immediately. Thus Jewish missionaries had home bases everywhere from where they could start preaching the Gospel.

But when the Jews realize that Paul’s preaching is destroying their traditions, or when they become jealous, they send him packing (Acts 13:50; 14:2,5). In this way they place him outside the group and he becomes an outsider to them. Thus the boundaries of the group are defined and protected. Their behaviour towards Paul changes completely and he is seen as an enemy. They even send delegations to other towns to warn them against Paul (Acts 14:19; 17:13; 21:27-28) and to protect their group. Sections like 1 John 2:18-19 or 2 John 10-11 also describe the protection of group boundaries and group identity.

Paul, however, remains convinced that he is part of the Jewish group, although they reject him (see Rom 9:3; 16:7, 11, 21). His desire to reconcile the group is clear when he speaks to the Jews in Rome (Acts 28:17-20). But the group rejects him because he does and says things which are inconsistent with the group-nature. As regards the group attachment, it is unimportant what Paul as an individual thinks; the group is the entity which weighs and judges.

Defining group boundaries was not always easy or simple. There could be groups within groups, as the situation changed and interests came into play. Someone would be accepted in one situation and rejected in another by the same group. This could explain the conflict between Peter and Paul in Galatians 2:11-14. In Galatians
2:12 Paul mentions James’ people and the non-Jewish believers – thus there are two Christian groups with differing opinions. The Jewish traditions, such as the question of circumcision, apparently define the two groups. Peter has to choose one of the two. Although both groups are Christian, Peter starts to behave coolly towards the non-Jewish believers. He no longer wants to eat with them, which shows that he regards them, in a certain sense, as outsiders (Gal 2:14). (He does not distance himself from them completely, which shows that he still regards them as Christians, but here we have a group within a group.) Paul thinks that Peter is playing the hypocrite. Peter, after all, usually eats with non-Jewish believers, but when another group appears with whom he identifies more strongly, he starts acting differently – as Uri did when he left his clients to serve Judah.

The saying of Jesus that those who are not against us are for us, is about where the group boundaries have to be drawn in that situation (Mk 9:40). The disciples are unsure – are the persons involved insiders or outsiders? Jesus, as the leader of the group, defines the boundaries and solves the problem. Paul handles a similar problem in the same way in Philippians 1:15-18, when he mentions people who seem to be his opponents. Although they are making life difficult for him, they are still proclaiming the name of Jesus, and that fact binds them and Paul together around that central, common interest. On those grounds Paul, as a leader, declares them to be part of the group.

The interests of outsiders did not concern individuals or a group. Group members did not interfere with other groups. The Gallio episode (Acts 18:14-17), illustrates this well. The Jews argue about something and Gallio regards it as an in-fight in the group. It is a matter which concerns only them. As a Roman he keeps out of it. (See also Jn 18:31; 19:6, 12.)

**WINDOW 3**

**MAKING UP**

Joy’s most pleasant memories were of the way in which a family would receive a newcomer. It was a merry occasion when all the friends and family were gathered together. Everything was an event – even the name-giving.
When Ravi was born, Joy noticed growing tension between Aharon and the other group members. Aharon did not agree with certain group decisions. The conversations were vehement. Then Aharon left the house – lock, stock and barrel. At first, Joy thought he had left of his own accord, but later, when she met him in town, she saw he was depressed. He asked Joy to tell Jonathan, the father of the family, that he wanted to return.

Joy did so. To her surprise Aharon was not accepted back after a mere handshake. Some of the older members of the group first held a meeting before they summoned Aharon. After long negotiations Aharon meekly joined the group again.

*Why did they make such to-do about it when Aharon wanted to return? Joy wondered.*

**MEANING OF THE WINDOW**

**HOW DO I BECOME PART OF A GROUP?**

As we have said, an individual in ancient times was part of a group. How you became part of a group, was a momentous matter.

The group had to decide to accept you (usually the leader of the group made the decision); you had no say in the matter. As a group member you had to obey the group rules. If you did not want to do so any more, your membership was in jeopardy, as in the case of Aharon above.

Under the heading *A profile of the first century world* we noted that the family was the heart of that society. The image of the family (the faithful are children of God, they are brothers and sisters) is often used in the church to emphasize the social interdependence of the believers.

But when did a group or family accept you? These examples illustrate different circumstances and group types:
Member of a family by birth and adoption

Birth was, of course, the most important way of becoming a member of a family. The New Testament also uses this image to say how a believer becomes part of God’s family. In John 1:12-13 and 3:1-8, as well as in 1 John 2:29, 3:9, 4:7 (in Greek the reference is to the birth that makes a believer a child of God) it is said that the believer is born into the family of God (see also 1 Pet 1:3,23). The Holy Spirit establishes your new status as a child of God (Jn 3:1-8). As a believer you become part of the divine family with all the rights and duties of a child. In 1 John 3:1 it is said that God calls us children; this possibly refers to the custom in which the Father – as leader of the family – formally accepted the believer as his child and as a member of the family! Because it entailed the acceptance of a newcomer into the group, a fuss was usually made of the birth and the name-giving as a matter of public or group interest (Lk 1:59-62).

You could only become a member of the family by being born into it. As in our time, you could be adopted. Paul uses this familiar image to explain how people become members of God’s family (Rom 8:23 – see also 8:15-16; Rom 9:4; Gal 4:5). God accepts a believer into his family group and grants him the status of kinship. Romans 8:17 implies that the adopted child has all the rights of a child who has been born into the family. He is even a co-heir when it comes to God’s inheritance.

Note that salvation, described in terms of birth or adoption, only describes the beginning of a whole new life as member of God’s family. To be accepted as a member of the family, means to live in harmony with the character of the family, which Aharon initially did not want to do.

The setting to rights of a broken relationship by reconciliation and redemption

Like Aharon, members sometimes caused divisions within the group (cf 1 Jn 2:19-20; 2 Jn 10-11). Such people were then reckoned as outsiders and even as enemies. After all, they had acted against the interests of the group. In Colossians 1:21 unbelievers are described as God’s enemies because they behave like enemies.
There was, however, ways of reconciling hostile groups. This is what Jesus came to do. Among other things, he had to reconcile God’s enemies with God. Because Jesus acted as mediator, people who were hostile towards God could again measure up to God’s high requirements of them (Col 1:22). Peace was made, on condition that they would now live according to God’s standards for the group (Col 1:23). In 2 Corinthians 5:17 Paul tells of the peace-talks between God and mankind: how Jesus brought the talks about and what the outcome was. He says that everything has been made new for mankind. The old things, including the debt incurred by sin, have passed away. Christ has made it possible for people to become part of God’s group (cf Rom 5:10).

It is important to remember that the Christian’s station before God has been given him because God views the believer as a member of his family, with all the consequences attached to it.

The idea of redemption is closely related to this concept. Prisoners of war, who were slaves, could be redeemed from their slavery. As slaves they could belong to the group who owned them (Jn 8:34; Rom 6:16). At a price the king could buy the person back into his own group. For the slave this meant freedom and new life – within the group of the king who redeemed him. In 1 Peter 1:18-19 the blood of Christ is said to be the price for the believers – indeed a high one! (see Mk 10:45; 1 Cor 6:20, which implies the same thing). In Galatians 4:5 we find the beautiful image of Jesus buying the believers back in order to have them adopted as God’s children.

Terms like reconciliation and redemption denote the acceptance of a person into a group, under certain circumstances.

**Invitations to join a group**

A group could, through its leader, extend invitations to people to become members of the group. Interested parties could also ask to be accepted into a group, if they were prepared to fulfill the conditions set by the group. Both these ways of becoming part of a group, are found in the New Testament.
Matthew 4:19, 9:9, 11:28, 19:21 all contain invitations by Jesus to follow him. In Matthew 8:19-22 and Luke 9:57-62 there are also requests to be allowed to become part of the Jesus group. In both these cases the person had to be prepared to accept certain duties.

Members could also expect something in return from the group. In Matthew 19:27-29 (cf Lk 18:28-30; Mk 10:28-30) Jesus promises that he will let his disciples sit on thrones and will recompense them hundredfold because they have left everything and followed him.

*Friends of friends …*

The extended family not only included blood relatives, but could include friends and slaves. References to friends must therefore be regarded as group terminology. As a friend of a group member, you were reckoned as a member of the group. A nation like Israel was regarded as an extended group. The Christians are described as *the new Israel*, or *the people of God*. They became part of this new nation through belief in Jesus. They formed a group in which things that were true of groups also became true of them. They could expect certain things of the group, but also had to live in a way that brought honour to the group.

**WINDOW 4**

**THANKS … BUT NO THANKS**

Jack and Joy were very excited. Joachim had invited them to his beach house at Eilat. They were showered with hospitality. But they also felt that they were irritating Joachim, although he did not show it.

While they were alone at the foredeck of the boat, they talked about the feeling they had. They had not once heard any of the children say thank you; it seemed as if they did not know the word. They seemed to take everything for granted. Neither did the adults say thank you, but that was understandable. Meanwhile they, Jack and Joy, were saying thank you for everything. That had to be the problem, but how was it possible, and how could gratitude give offence?

*They decided to talk to Joachim. What did Joachim say?*
MEANING OF THE WINDOW

WHAT THANK YOU MEANS

The members of the same group or family are dependent on each other. Their possessions, honour, family name and so on belong to all of them together. Things are expected of each other because of the loyalty and support which exists between the members of the group. That is why it is unnecessary to say thank you constantly. Rather, you have to live your thanks by your loyalty to the group.

Group people think of themselves as a team, not as individuals, as in the case of a rugby team. A player does not say thank you when he receives the ball during a movement, because as a member of the team the ball belongs to him as much as to the whole team.

That evening Joy and Jack scour the New Testament. Indeed, except for in Romans 16:4, it is never said in so many words that believers have to thank each other, which may sound strange in today’s world.

Yet, in the New Testament it is said repeatedly that the believer has to thank God. In Acts 24:3 it is said that the king has to be thanked. Why?

Saying thank you had much to do with a person’s honour and importance. Group members did not thank each other, but the situation changed when an important person was involved. Important people had to be thanked, usually in public. Because the subordinate did not deserve anything from the important person and had to rely on his favour, he had to acknowledge the favour by means of thanks.

That is the reason why the believer has to thank God. In Colossians 1:12 the believer has to acknowledge God by giving him honour and thanks, for God has saved him, even though he has not deserved it. Paul also thanks God for the grace God has granted the believers (Rom 1:8; 1 Cor 1:4; Col 1:3; 1 Th 1:2). Paul uses the word praise instead of thanks (Eph 1:3) in the same context, which shows how akin thanks to God and praise for Him are. In the same way homage to God and thanks to Him are connected in Romans 1:21. Gratitude therefore shows who you are (the powerless receiver of a favour) and who the Giver is (the powerful, free, benevolent
Giver who deserves the praise). Gratitude is therefore not mere civility, but an act of self-denial and recognition of God. The gratitude of the leper for his cure in Luke 17:16-18 is seen by Jesus as homage to God (see also Jn 9:24). Recognition and praise for undeserved favour are the means of showing gratitude towards God.

References to gratitude for sustenance are also often found in the New Testament (cf Mt 15:36; Acts 27:35; Jn 6:11,23; 1 Cor 10:30). To thank God for food is to acknowledge Him as the Giver. Thereby you acknowledge God as the one on whom your life depends (Mt 6:11); you have no right to life, and yet He grants it to you – you are merely the dependent, grateful receiver.

Because this dependent recognition is part of gratitude, things went wrong for the Pharisee whose prayer was full of boasting and swagger (Lk 18:11-14). Because he did not acknowledge his own absolute dependence on God (cf Lk 18:12) his gratitude was a sham (Lk 18:14).
STUDY UNIT 3

NETWORK OF FRIENDS

WINDOW 5  Forced to volunteer
WINDOW 6  Friends of friends of friends
WINDOW 7  I do not know you, but make yourself at home
WINDOW 8  Familiarity or …?
WINDOW 9  Love that transcends the modern mind

WINDOW 5
FORCED TO VOLUNTEER

Chayim, a friend of Joachim, had to bring something with him from Jerusalem for Joachim, but he did not. Chayim then gave a long, extensive account of how dearly he had wanted to bring it and how hard he had tried to, but that it had been impossible, for several reasons. Jack felt that this lengthy explanation was extravagant. Why did Chayim not merely say that he had not been able to get it, and have done?

Another part of the discussion was just as interesting. Chayim griped about not being to enlarge his house, because he had to help pay his nephew’s studies. It was clear that he would have preferred to enlarge his house, for it was becoming cramped because of the new baby.

*Jack wondered why Chayim did not do what he wanted to do. Why did he put his family second to help his brother’s child to study? Surely his brother would understand?!*

MEANING OF THE WINDOW
SHOWING GRATITUDE BY YOUR ACTIONS

The ancient society was one of limited means. There was no overabundance. Each had just enough or, often, too little for his own needs (except, of course, a few of the rich). When you gave something to someone, you naturally expected some return. By means of gifts you could establish invisible bonds of obligation between yourself
and others. Today it is quite different. We prefer people not to do something in order to expect something else in return.

A statement like *Who sows sparingly will reap sparingly* (2 Cor 9:6, Moffatt) has its roots in the custom of giving and expecting something in return. Paul’s quotation of Job 41:11 in Romans 11:35 is about the same thing: *Who has first given to God and has to be repaid* (Moffatt)? The underlying idea is that gifts are to be repaid.

This idea has enormous consequences when we think of the gifts God so freely gives us. Because it was the custom to repay gifts, the New Testament references to God’s gifts impel the believer to repay his *debt* to God. The word that is often translated with the word *grace* refers to God’s gift of grace to and care of the believer. In obedient devotion towards God the believer has to repay God for his gifts. Because Jesus gave his life for you, you must be prepared to give your life for others (1 Jn 3:16; cf 2 Cor 9:15; Eph 2:8-9 – note that one responds to God’s gift with good deeds – Eph 2:10; 1 Pet 4:10).

This allegiance and obligation begins at birth. Your parents gave you life through birth and cared for you within the family. For this gift you were bound to them for life by being responsible for and loyal to them – you had to care for and respect them, talk about them in a positive way and show respect for them in your behaviour. You had to behave like a truly respectful child and show of what good character your family was. In 1 Peter 1:22-23 Peter uses the idea of birth into God’s family as the reason why the believers should love one another. How deeply ingrained this convention really was, can also be seen in 1 John 3:9-10. Because of the responsibility that the child has towards his father and his group, he will do nothing to undermine the interests of the group. John is almost absolute about it: a child *will not sin* (break the will of the father and the group). His interests are so bound up with that of the group that he will have no desire to go against the group interests (see the same reasoning in Jn 8:38,39,41,42). John knows well enough that someone can make a mistake, but then the mistake has to be rectified.

In this way there was a network of obligation and loyalty in a family, in which you cared for me and I for you. Thus the *sum of the Law* becomes easier to understand
Believers are part of the family (or nation) of God. The claim on a member of the family, and his obligation to love God, is understandable in the light of what God has done for the believer. But why does the command to love my neighbour as myself stand on a par with the love for God, which is the first commandment? In Mark 12:33 the teacher of the Law says that love for the neighbour is better than holocausts and sacrifices. Sacrifices were aimed mainly at keeping your ties with God pure. Love for one’s neighbour is thereby seen as service to God. The believer, who serves a fellow member of his group, proves his loyalty to God’s group and to God himself. He, who wrongs his brother, wrongs God, because the brother is part of God’s group. God’s interests, as Father of the family, are interwoven with the interests of his children. (Read Paul’s assertion in 1 Cor 8 that you sin against Christ himself when you cause your brother to stumble! You are being disloyal to Jesus if you wrong the members of his group.) The believer himself is part of the group and therefore the love for your brother is equal to your love for yourself. What is done for yourself and for your brother or sister is in the interests of the group. Thus an intricate network of mutual obligation and loyalty regulated groups in ancient times. You had to live according to it. You admitted your group responsibility by fulfilling your obligations. (That is why Chayim consented to help his brother.)

Important arguments in Paul’s short letter to Philemon are based on this convention. Philemon’s slave, Onesimus, has run away, which means a possible death sentence for him. But Onesimus meets Paul and becomes a Christian, in other words, a member of the family of God to whom his owner, Philemon, also belongs (Phil 10). Philemon’s love and loyalty towards fellow-believers is well-known (Phil 5-6), so he is a good and loyal group member. Because Philemon is bound, by Christ, to the group, he is also under an obligation (Phil 8) towards Onesimus, and therefore Paul does not have to coerce him. The network of group loyalty is the fundamental reason why Philemon has to take his runaway slave, Onesimus, back into service.

The responsibility towards the group was not left to an individual to take or leave as he pleased – it was an obligation. If a group member shrugged off his duties, he showed that he no longer wanted to be a part of the group network. That is why Chayim made sure, with his long explanation, that Joachim would not think that
Chayim had dodged his responsibility and thereby shown that he rated their friendship cheaply. The behaviour of one person towards another said much, like whether you wanted to be associated with that other person or not. In the New Testament each of the guests invited to the banquet had some excuse, thereby conveying something of an impaired loyalty towards their host. That is why we read in Luke 14:21 that the owner of the slave becomes angry (Mt 22:1-14 puts it even more strongly). Immediately he invites other people and so changes the boundaries of his group, because your guests at table were reckoned as your friends (cf the Pharisees who accused Jesus of eating with publicans and sinners). And perhaps 2 Corinthians 1:17-19 is about the Corinthians feeling hurt as a group because Paul preferred to change his itinerary after he had promised to visit them.

If you did not behave loyally towards your group, you started moving outside the group. The rejection of Jesus at Nazareth (Lk 4:16-17 and 22-31; Mt 13:53-58; Mk 6:1-6) can be explained in this way. Luke hints that Jesus did wonders in Capernaum, but not in Nazareth (Lk 4:23). For a small town like Nazareth a miracle-worker would bring much honour. But Jesus does wonders elsewhere and so deprives Nazareth of the honour which his miracles would bestow on them and their community. But Jesus explains that it is God's way to let prophets work outside their group. The people of Nazareth probably see Jesus' actions as treason towards his own group. This can be the underlying reason why they reject him (Lk 4:28-30) After all, in the Gospels it seems as if Nazareth is regarded as Jesus' basic group. That is why he is called Jesus of Nazareth, Son of Joseph (Jn 1:45-46).

**WINDOW 6**

**FRIENDS OF FRIENDS OF FRIENDS**

Joachim took Jack and Joy to visit the district of Perea. Again and again Jack offered to pay for their lodging, but Joachim would not hear of it. He would pay, he said. That made it very difficult for Joy. She was used to having tea at someone's house only after making an appointment with them. But apparently Joachim was not so refined. One night, and late at night at that, they imposed themselves on a large family. Children who were already asleep had to be moved. Food had to be prepared, and so on. Joy was so embarrassed! To her it seemed as if Joachim was not bothered at
all and, what was worse, it did not seem to bother the host either (or was he just a good actor who could disguise his frustration?)

They reached the limit on Friday, just before the Sabbath. Joachim was avidly looking for someone’s house. Jack asked him whether he knew the owner. No, replied Joachim, *but a friend of mine does.* Joy wondered whether they would stay for a whole weekend in a house where even Joachim did not know the people. But when they got there, Joachim took out a letter and gave it to the man. With a big smile the owner of the house, after he had carefully read the letter, let them in. He and Joachim sat chatting like old friends.

*That weekend Joy would never forget. They were waited on hand and foot by total strangers!*  

**MEANING OF THE WINDOW**

**FRIENDSHIP IS LIKE A NET, CONNECTING FRIENDS TO EACH OTHER**

If Joy had understood that a network of friends and *friends of friends* was common in the ancient world, she would have been less worried. Friendship meant that friends could rely on one another. That is why Joachim could arrive out of the blue on a friend’s doorstep, even though it was late, because they were his *friends!* Friendship was no superficial matter, but implied a true commitment. Without batting an eyelash, people would help each other for friendship’s sake and even go out of their way for each other.

Even if you and another person had a mutual friend, it would mean that you were friends. It was indeed like a net, fastened together with knots. You would therefore not hesitate to help each other. That is what happened in the household where Jack and Joy and Joachim arrived on the Friday evening.

The network of *friends of friends of friends* played an important role in the early Christian travel plans (more about this in the next window). The network also made it easy for believers to undertake journeys (cf Tit 3:13). Naturally, many Christians did not know each other personally and could not just walk into any home. That is why a traveler would take along a letter by someone who knew the people where he would
be staying (cf Acts 18:27; 2 Cor 3:1). A letter, like the one Joachim had, would ensure that the bearer of the letter would enjoy the same hospitality as that which the writer of the letter could expect (cf Paul’s request to the congregation in Rome concerning Phoebe – Rom 16:1-2). This network of support was also an important aid when it came to missionary work. A preacher could, at no great expense, undertake long journeys (cf how Paul intercedes for Timothy, in order to help Timothy continue on his journey – 1 Cor 16:10-11).

Two such letters of recommendation became part of the New Testament, namely 3 John and Philemon. In 3 John the elder is very upset because his previous letter of recommendation has been ignored by Diotrephes. Diotrephes did not receive the bearers of the letter (3 Jn 10). This the elder sees as a direct insult to himself (3 Jn 9). But he entreats Gaius – his friend! – to receive Demetrius (3 Jn 1, see also 3 Jn 11-12). Philemon, also, is called a friend (Phil 1). In the body of the letter Paul then asks Philemon to receive his runaway slave like a brother (Phil 16), because the latter became a believer in the prison (Phil 10). Paul thus uses his influence and friendship to ensure a good reception for Onesimus. Note also how Paul asks Philemon to keep his bed ready (Phil 22). After all, they are friends.

In some of Paul’s other letters there are also recommendations with which the network of believers who support each other are widened. We have already referred to Romans 16:1-2 and 1 Corinthians 16:10-11. In Philippians 2:19-30 Paul writes extensively about Timothy and Epaphroditus and asks the congregation to receive them well.

These examples show clearly how the bearer of the letter received the necessary help from the host because of the relationship between the host and someone like Paul or the elder. The bearer of the letter is, in effect, accompanied by the writer of the letter, which means that the host sees the bearer in the same light as the writer.

Matthew 10:5-15 shows an interesting variation of this network of friends. When Jesus sends out his disciples, he says that they must take the minimum baggage, because they have to depend on the care of others (Mt 10:10). When they enter a city, they must look out for someone with whom they can stay (in Greek someone
who is worthy, Mt 10:11). When they find someone, they must stay there until they continue their journey. But if someone does not want to put them up, he detaches himself from the group and classifies himself as an outsider. The disciples must then clearly show that they break all bonds with such a person (or city) (Mt 10:14). From this description of Matthew it seems as if the disciples do not even have letters of recommendation. They can depend on the hospitality and good-will that is part and parcel of society at the time. The response and association that develop between the disciples and the people, because of their message, then lead to their being regarded as friends and members of the group. If people regard them as group members, the disciples can depend on the care and hospitality of the group that accepts them.

WINDOW 7
I DO NOT KNOW YOU, BUT MAKE YOURSELF AT HOME
Jack and Joy were impressed. They had not been in Judea long, and already their friend, Joachim, was doing his best to make them feel at home.

They were even more impressed one night, after a knock on the door. At first they thought the visitors were friends of Joachim, because Joachim invited them in and gave them lodging. Their son was ill and Joachim called the doctor over and played him into the bargain. But during the conversation it sounded to Joy as if Joachim did not really know the people. She was right. Later she asked Joachim who they were, and he told her that he had never laid eyes on them before, but that they knew one of the families who had lived in his neighbourhood years ago.

It really seemed as if the trouble Joachim went to for strangers was to him the most natural thing in the world.

Was it?

MEANING OF THE WINDOW
HOSPITALITY AND BOARDING HOUSES!
Hospitality played a large role in the ancient world, and did not only revolve around family and friends, for whom you had to care anyway. Hospitality meant to receive
strangers also and to accept responsibility for them while they were under your roof (Mt 25:35; the Greek word for hospitality that is used in Rom 12:13, Heb 13:2 or 1 Pet 4:9, implies, among other things, hospitality towards strangers). After his stay a stranger could leave either as a friend or as an enemy (cf Acts 28:7-10 where Paul leaves the island of Publius as a friend). But while the stranger stayed with host, he was embedded into the host’s group. The host had to cater to the guest’s needs in every way, as Joachim did when the boy was ill. Sometimes the host even had to defend his guest’s life with his own. The early Christians were bidden to show this kind of hospitality. In Romans 12:13 Paul lists hospitality along with the aid that believers owe their brothers. Peter mentions hospitality in connection with love (1 Pet 4:8-9).

This is understandable. There was no system of hotels or boarding houses where people could stay (in The New Testament we read of an inn only in Lk 10:34). In Mark 14:14, Luke 2:7 and 22:11 a word is used that we can translate as room or guest room. If we keep in mind how many journeys we read of in the New Testament, the few references to inns are probably a sign that there were not so many of them. The inns were mostly of dubious character, and more care went into tending donkeys and camels, than into lodging people. An interesting apocryphal account of Paul’s night in such an inn tells of a great many bedbugs in the mattress. When the bedbugs discovered that Paul was their bedfellow, they all left. It goes without saying that Paul was not disturbed again that night!

Travelers depended on friends, or even strangers, for lodging. (In our own history, when people still went on horseback, they often, at dusk, asked for lodging at a farmhouse on their way).

But you could not simply travel, like a tramp, from one house to another. There were rules for guests as well as for hosts, and the rules were a safeguard against abuse. A Christian document of the first century, Didache, states, for example, that a stranger who calls himself a fellow-Christian and a preacher is a false prophet if he stays with you for longer than three days. In 2 John the elder says that no hospitality should be extended towards people who can harm the group. Believers should not show hospitality towards people who preach a false gospel (2 Jn 10-11). (Think, too,
of Paul’s argument in favour of an apostle’s right to be cared for by the congregation as long as he stays with them.)

We cannot go into these rules any further. What is important is that the early Christians made good use of this system of hospitality when it came to Christian missions. Christian travelers or itinerant preachers could journey from one Christian group to another in the ancient world and always be certain that a local group would welcome and house them (cf Ac 14:28; 16:15, 40; 17:7; 18:1-3, 26-27; 21:16; note also the implication in Ac 15:3-4).

Elders had to show hospitality to be good elders (1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:8; see also 1 Tim 5:10). This is, of course, the core of the problem in the Johannine congregation in 3 John. Diotrephes (who was probably some kind of elder or leader) refused to receive brothers sent by the elder. Gaius, however, does receive them, and so the elder praises him. John is very critical of Diotrephes and regards his refusal to receive the brothers as a break with the elder’s group, and therefore a break with the truth.

WINDOW 8
FAMILIARITY OR…?
Jack had to go and wait for Joachim’s son, Isaac, outside the barracks. The donkey stood ready for Isaac’s luggage, which Isaac and his friend carried from the barracks while they were chatting. When they reached the donkey, Jack was introduced. The friend was affable, almost familiar, Jack felt. He asked Jack how old he was, what he did in South Africa, and so on. When he left, he asked Isaac if he could do anything else for him. The funny thing was that Isaac saluted him afterwards.

Jack was curious. Isaac and his friend seemed to be of equal rank. But when Jack asked about it, Isaac said that his friend was his CO.

That was not how Jack remembered corporals in the army!
MEANING OF THE WINDOW

AUTHORITY WITH THE FACE OF SOLIDARITY

Group relations naturally have their expression on a personal level. One person’s actions towards another are determined by their group relations. The CO saw Jack as a friend because Jack was a friend of Isaac. That is why he easily put personal questions to Jack: group members could, and had to do so (cf Rom 12:15). That is also why he helped Isaac with his luggage. It emphasized the bond of care and courtesy between the group leader and his subordinates.

Isaac’s salute was equally important. The hierarchical structure that clearly defined the function of each member of the group, was stronger then than today, and had to be seen in the behaviour of the group members. (Note the almost rigid limits in Col 3:18-4:1, where Paul describes family structures, as well as the way the behaviour of each person is demarcated; 1 Tim 6:1-2). This is what Isaac acknowledged with his salute. A good leader in the ancient world had to be thoughtful and caring, yet he had to maintain a distance between him and his subordinates.

Church structures of the first century were strongly group-oriented and functioned along similar lines. The New Testament requirements for elders and deacons of the congregations clearly resemble standards commonly accepted in society. The descriptions in 1 Timothy 3:1-13 and Titus 1:7-9 can almost be compared with that of a superior Roman officer who had to shape the development of young recruits. Note the emphasis on authority in 1 Timothy 3:4, 12, while hospitality, kindness, and a love of peace are also recommended (1 Tim 3:2-3).

Relationships and behaviour were, for ancient Mediterranean man, arranged in concentric circles. The central circle was that of the family. The family organisation was reflected in structures of authority in the town and, eventually, in the kingdom. The king was described as the father of his kingdom, and the town leader as the father of the town. We also see this in the commands to Christians concerning the state. You had to respect your superiors in the state as you respected your superiors in the family. As God set up the father as head of the family (as was generally accepted in the ancient world), he also gave rulers their position. This meant that they, too, had to be respected (see Rom 13:1,5; see also 1 Pet 2:13-14). This family
Pattern was the basis of the organization of the early church. That is why Christians are called brothers and sisters, as we have noted in the first chapter.

Paul often instructs his congregations like a typical father would instruct his children; he holds himself up as an example of correct behaviour, admonishes them, and reprimands them (1 Cor 4:14-21; 2 Cor 8-9; 2 Th 3:14-15). Yet it is God who is usually described as the Father of the Christians, as in the gospel of John (Jn 20:18). He loves his children (Jn 16:27), cares for them, and protects them (Jn 10:29), but also expects them to obey his orders (Jn 15:10 – the Father uses his only begotten Son – Jn 1:18; 3:16 – as the intermediary). The Father in the gospel of John is thus described in terms of the ideal father of the ancient Mediterranean world. Christians therefore have to be the ideal family members, brothers and sister to one another (1 Jn 5:1).

Hence, obedience is a major concept. In the family you recognized the authority of your superiors by being obedient. Without obedience the family could not function. This was important for the Christian community, for Christian relationships were voluntary. When you became part of this voluntary community of faith, God made you the sibling of the other believers, and your obedience would help the congregation to function well (Rom 1:5; 2 Cor 7:15; 1 Pet 1:2, 14, 22). Obedience within the congregation meant obedience to God himself (Rom 6:16, 17; 15:18; Heb 5:9). Note how Paul in Colossians 3:20 and 3:22-4:1 links the obedience that behooves children and slaves with the subordination that the believer owes the Lord (see also Eph 5:24; 6:1-4, 9).

Of course, authority in the congregation was not always meekly recognized (3 Jn 9; 2 Cor 2:5-9). Someone could even decide to disobey the rules of the group, or to detach himself from the group completely (see Mt 18:15-17; 2 Tim 4:10; Heb 6:6; 2 Pet 2:20-22; 1 Jn 2:18-19; Rev 2:4). The other members could react to this in several ways. Group mechanisms were the main tool in hand to set things right. The person was part of the group and the group felt responsible for him. The idea was to keep the person in the group as long as possible. Yet group interests rated higher than those of the individual. If the individual impaired the group interests, or did not want
to bear responsibility any longer, he broke away from the group. The group would then systematically withdraw their support and love from the individual until the break was final. Then the person was again regarded as an outsider. But until then the group had to try everything in their power to convince the person to accept the character and demands of the group. In 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15 it is clear how Paul encourages the group to use group pressure to sway an unruly member without scaring him off.

The most well-known example of group mechanisms is in Matthew 18:15-17. The group tries to draw the offending member back into the group by calling in more of the others after every attempt – clearly a group action. When they have failed repeatedly, the break between the group and the individual is final. In Matthew 18:18 the group action is borne out by heavenly authority, and in Matthew 18:19-20 the importance of attachment to the group is stressed. Christians are meant to be together within a group. Other assertions (from gentle counsel to radical separation) that reflect this process are found throughout the New Testament. Read Galatians 6:1; 1 Thessalonians 5:14; 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15; James 5:19-20; 1 Peter 4:8; 2 John 10-11. Of course, there had to be sound evidence from the group itself before the group could act against anyone – in other words, it had to be a group charge against the individual (2 Cor 13:1; 1 Tim 5:19).

**WINDOW 9**

**LOVE THAT TRANSCENDS THE MODERN MIND**

Back in their room, after her outing, Joy angrily told Jack what had happened. She had a fancy for those large figs dipped in honey, although they were expensive. Joy told Jack that she had bought four of them, and had eaten the first piecemeal. Then she met Sipporah, Joachim’s daughter, and one of Sipporah’s friends. To her surprise Sipporah, without as much as a by your leave, took the bag containing the other figs and took out one for herself and one for her friend. Joy could only watch in amazement. Sipporah could have asked.

Joy’s mood mellowed a little when she saw that her dress that she had torn on a branch the day before near the Gate of Damascus in Jerusalem, lay neatly mended on her bed.
Yes, Jack said, the Mediterranean people are funny that way. They take your things without batting an eye, and yet they can be so helpful that they make you quite uncomfortable.

Jack had his own story to tell. He and Joachim had gone to visit friends just south of the temple wall. Jack had felt ill, probably from something he had eaten. At the friend’s house there was a big jar of curds on the table, and dried fruit. Jack did not want to eat anything, and when the friend pushed the jar towards him he began to refuse politely. Then Joachim did the strangest thing – he immediately interrupted Jack, poured some of the curds into his cup, and smacked down a handful of dried fruit in front of him. Joachim’s nudge in Jack’s ribs told Jack to shut up and eat.

What has become of one’s free choice? Jack wondered to himself.

MEANING OF THE WINDOW
LOVE BINDS THE GROUP TOGETHER
Joy did not understand that social and psychological fences between group members are much lower than between outsiders. Sipporah saw Joy as part of her group and therefore Joy could have no objection to her taking a fig. In a sense Joy’s figs were Sipporah’s figs. After all, group members had an unwritten code of openness, helpfulness and acceptance. No wonder Paul says that believers should be joyful with those who are joyful, and mourn with those who mourn (Rom 12:15). Because the social fences in the group are so low, their interests mingle with those of the other members. Note how Paul regards himself as absolutely involved with his congregation, to such an extent that their weakness becomes his, and when they sin, he himself feels as if he is going through fire (2 Cor 11:29). The interests of group members are interwoven.

Paul calls love the bond which binds believers in a perfect unity (Col 3:14; cf 1 Pet 4:8 for the way love binds people together). Love was no abstract idea or (simply) and emotion. It had to be converted into actions. Note how love is defined in the Bible: By this we know what love is: Jesus laid down his life for us. We should lay down our lives for our brothers (and sisters) (1 Jn 3:16); or Love is patient, love is kind, love is not jealous … (1 Cor 13:4); God so loved the world that he gave his only
begotten Son … (Jn 3:16). Love is therefore described as a total sacrifice, even to the point of sacrificing your life – for your group members (1 Jn 3:16).

What seems to today’s people like servile low-towing was the heart of group dynamics in ancient times. Because group members offered one another a support network, you could know that, if you served the group interests, the group members would serve you; you could give your support in the knowledge that you had a whole group to support you (Rom 12:10). Within the congregation people of diverse social classes realized that they all belonged to the same group. They had to look beyond familiar social limits to see the boundaries of the family of God. This is what Jesus wanted the teacher of the Law to learn from the parable of the good Samaritan (Lk 10:30-37). Love and kindness meant that you remained attached to the group and acted as a group member (see Jn 13:34-35; Gal 5:13; Eph 4:2; 2 Th 1:3). Group members had to bear one another’s burdens (Gal 6:2) and help others in time of need. For Jesus, in his discussion of prayer in Matthew 11:5-8, it is obvious that a friend would help a friend in need. That is why the Bible often talks of brotherly love (Heb 13:1; Rom 12:10; 1 Jn 4:20-21; 1 Pet 1:22); it is a love which is primarily focused on the group.

Why is love for God placed on a par with love for one’s neighbour (Mt 22:39)? The believers are part of God’s family or group, thus God’s interests and the group’s everyday interests are inseparable. God’s honour is directly represented by the believers (1 Pet 2:12; 4:16). To do something for one’s neighbour is to do it for God (Mt 25:34 ff; 1 Jn 4:7-8,12; 5:1). Love for the neighbour is not distinct from love for God; love for God is expressed in love for one’s neighbour (1 Jn 3:17). Conversely, those who do not love their neighbour, do not love God, because as a group their interests are inextricably interwoven (see 1 Cor 8:12). In 1 John 4:20-21 it is said in so many words.

People in ancient times often did things for other group members without being asked. Because the interests of the individual were one with those of the group, any investment in the group was an investment in oneself. That is why Joy’s dress was mended. Joy would, at any given time, return the favour. Gifts were always paid for
(cf also Rom 11:35, which implies that a gift has to be repaid). In this way members relied on, and had close ties with one another.

Thus it would have been an insult to the host’s hospitality and friendship if Jack had not taken curds and dried fruit. Whether you accepted or rejected someone’s gift, you conveyed something about your recognition of people’s dependence on one another.

If we realize this, we see how great the obligation of the believer is. Paul describes God’s gift to man as *indescribable* and his grace as *abounding* (2 Cor 9:14). One who rejects the gifts, rejects God, and is deeply indebted to Him (see also Eph 2:8-9; 1 Pet 4:10).
STUDY UNIT 4
OUTSIDERS AND INSIDERS

WINDOW 10  Outsiders don’t count
WINDOW 11  A waiter does an about face
WINDOW 12  The discourteous rabbi
WINDOW 13  Sin – to place the group second
WINDOW 14  Saying you are sorry

WINDOW 10
OUTSIDERS DON’T COUNT
Jack and Joy found it difficult to move around in public in Mediterranean cities. Once they queued in Jerusalem to wait for a horse and cart that would take them on a trip through the city, and one of the locals simply came and jumped the queue in front of them. What they immediately noticed was that he gave a friend a place in front of him just after. They often had to suffer such treatment. In the narrow streets they were shoved aside several times by people who, directly afterwards, behaved courteously towards friends or family.

Why were the Mediterranean people so rude?

MEANING OF THE WINDOW
WHO IS MY NEIGHBOUR?
In the first century world people owed loyalty only to their group. All others were regarded as outsiders, and were mostly regarded with suspicion because their motives and values were unknown to the group. Individuals were under no obligation to show regard for them. Group members could even lie to outsiders, and refuse to aid them. They only owed truth and assistance to one another. Compare the behaviour of the Levite and the priest in the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10. Because the man who had been assaulted and robbed was an unknown outsider, they assumed that they owed him no kindness and passed by.
The Jewish religious leaders in and around the first century had clear categories for those who were pure and those who were not – in other words, in a religious context they decided who were in-group members and who were outsiders. Impure persons were not fit to participate in cultic activity, such as sacrificing in the temple. According to the Mishna, a Jewish document from around the third century CE and a compilation of many oral traditions and religious rules, people were classed in a hierarchy: priests, Levites, priests’ children born out of wedlock, proselytes, Jews born out of extra-marital relations, and foundlings. Gentiles and persons who could not procreate were regarded as unclean.

The New Testament is well acquainted with first century views on outsiders. In Matthew 5:43 Jesus quotes a typical contemporary opinion about outsiders when he says: You have learnt how it was said: You must love your neighbour and hate your enemy (Jerusalem Bible). Yet in the New Testament this negative appraisal of outsiders is conspicuously absent. Such people were regarded, by the first Christians, as potential new members of the group to which they belonged, namely the church (see Window 6).

The early Christian conviction about people went back to Jesus himself. The synoptic gospels make it clear that he had a new opinion on, and conduct towards outsiders, which was, according to Matthew 5:43-48, based on God’s own conduct towards them. Here it is said that God causes his sun to rise on bad men as well as good, shine and his rain fall on honest and dishonest men alike (Jerusalem Bible). In other words, he shows kindness towards all people, without regard to status as group members or outsiders. For this reason Jesus in verse 48 calls on his disciples to be as perfect as God is by also loving their enemies and other outsiders.

For the first Christians outsider was primarily a religious concept without political or social undertones. Those who did not believe in Christ were regarded as outsiders. New tenets on group members among Christians (see Window 3) made little room for social, sexual, cultural and ethnic boundaries (cf Gal 3:28), and had a great influence on their idea of outsiders. People were not excluded from the early church because of their sex or their cultural background. The traditional pigeonholes into which outsiders were fitted, were not preached or used by the leaders of the early
church. A new attitude and code of conduct towards them prevailed, as we will see in the next window.

WINDOW 11
A WAITER DOES AN ABOUT FACE
On a business trip to Capernaum Jack stayed in a luxury inn. The service was good, but apathetic, although he left a big tip after the first meal. Two evenings later, he invited one of his business associates, a childhood friend of the waiter, to dinner. The service afterwards was outstanding.

For the rest of Jack’s stay the waiter could not do enough for him.

MEANING OF THE WINDOW
GROUPS AND GROUP BOUNDARIES
In first century Palestine there were clear boundaries between group members and outsiders. Your daily behaviour was largely determined by your group affiliation. Towards fellow group members you would show the greatest esteem and courtesy. Courtesy was seldom, if ever, shown towards outsiders, as Jack experienced. Even his tip could not change this deeply rooted tendency. However, in the waiter’s eyes the other businessman changed Jack from a stranger into a friend, which of course led to better service.

In the New Testament we find clear evidence of boundaries between groups. We read of the boundaries between Jews and Samaritans (Jn 4:9), and between Jews and Greeks (Acts 18:4; Gal 2:14; Rom 1:14; Col 3:11). Names like Jesus of Nazareth, son of Joseph (Jn 1:45), Simon, son of John (Jn 21:15; Mt 16:17), James, son of Zebedee (Mt 10:3), and so on denote group affiliation. Also, the Jews were extremely set on their group identity, especially on religious and national level. After all, they were God’s people. Because Christendom has its roots in Jewry, we often read in the New Testament about the Jews’ strong adherence to their group.

Yet the New Testament sets aside the boundaries in order to admit all who believe into a new, better group, the Jesus group, making them part of the family of God.
The believer has to align himself with this group, find his identity in it, and adjust his conduct accordingly (see 1 Th 4:9-10).

This conduct of the believer towards outsiders is not neutral. God loves the world (Jn 3:16) and expects his family to do likewise. Jesus’ last command to his disciples is to go into the world and to make disciples (Mt 28:19-20). This means that the believer has to treat every outsider as a potential group member. Even if the outsider treats the believer badly, the believer still has to show love for the outsider, as God would. In Matthew 5:43-48 Jesus asks his followers to do the almost unthinkable, namely to love their enemies (that is, to treat them as possible group members). Paul urges the believers to let their love grow for all people, including outsiders (1 Th 3:12). In the believers’ conduct outsiders have to see their Father’s nature; then they will pay reverence to God. Even if outsiders persecute or mistreat them, the believers should still show God’s love (1 Pet 2:12; 3:14ff; 4:12ff.) Even if outsiders hate and kill them (Jn 15:18-16:4) the believers should not retaliate. The believers should remain true to themselves and to what they have been taught (2 Tim 3:10-15).

This leads to a basic attitude of pacifism. The commands to be subservient to the authorities (1 Pet 2:13-15; Rom 13:1-7), even if times are hard, are also important. Believers must at all times behave in such a way that outsiders want to be admitted to the group. The believer’s idea of his group boundaries, as well as his conduct, is thus redefined in the light of the love of God.

The love of God has to be seen in the lives of his followers and must transcend the usual group boundaries. See how strongly Paul puts it in Colossians 3:11: Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and in all. In Ephesians 2:13-14 Paul says that the group limits (between Jews and Gentiles) are like a dividing wall which has been broken down.

In 2 John, however, it is shown that the believer has to adhere to that which sets him apart from unbelievers. He has to remain fully aware of his own group identity which is based in Jesus. In the Johannine congregation there were people who, as so-called fellow believers, tried to infect the group with false doctrine. John tells the
members of the congregation to break all contact with such people. The command is
aimed at protecting the group boundaries (see also Gal 1:8-9 for a similar injunction
from Paul.)

**WINDOW 12**

**THE DISCOURTEOUS RABBI**

While Jack and Joy were walking in a shopping mall in Jerusalem, they saw a crowd
of people around a man standing on a wall and speaking with great fervour. Jack
asked the bystanders what was going on. The answer came, *It is Judah ben Kev.*
*Some people say he is a rabbi or teacher who is especially well trained in ethics. He
has many followers, too.*

Then Jack saw a group of six men approaching. They were elegantly dressed. One
of that group then asked rabbi Judah a seemingly innocent question about how he
and his followers made a living, for it did not seem as if they worked for it.

Rabbi Judah retorted: *How do lazy, rich people like you make a living?* Jack and Joy
were shocked at this sharp and uncivil reply from an ostensibly respected rabbi!

*Without asking any questions, Jack and Joy returned to the shops.*

**MEANING OF THE WINDOW**

**FIGHT FOR HONOUR WITH THE WEAPONS OF DEBATE**

The Mediterranean people of the first century spent the greatest part of their lives in
public. Honour was the result of the public acknowledgement of a person’s worth. An
attack on someone’s honour called for a sharp reaction. Judah ben Kev saw the
question by the other group as a challenge to his honour. To defend his own honour
as well as that of his group, he had to react in such a way as to transfer the pressure
back to the other group and thus to prove his superiority. To this end people would
generally use sarcasm and sharp language. To answer a question with a question
was a typical reaction to challenges. That is why the matter in hand often fell by the
wayside; the emphasis was more on the ability of the two speakers to score off each
other with *challenges* and *replies* in order to prove their own superiority. Such a
successful defence of your honour in the social game led to a raising of your honour.
It also substantiated the values of your group. In this way the group members were confirmed in their own identity and in their adherence to the group.

The conversations which Jesus had, especially with the Pharisees and other Jewish leaders, have to be seen in this light. They were typical disputes. That is why what is said is usually less important than the way in which it is said. With these disputes Jesus’ honour and the truth of his witness is at stake. When we read such a conversation, we not only learn something from Him, but also something about Him.

In his conversations with the Sadducees about the woman who, according to the custom at the time, in turn married each of seven brothers after the demise of the previous one, Jesus attacks his opponents directly (Mk 12:24-27). He tells them to their faces that they are on the wrong track (Mk 12:24,27), and that they – who run the temple and the Sanhedrin and control the schooling of the nation – neither know the Scriptures nor the power of God. This means, in essence, that they do not know God. In this way Jesus attacks their status and person, and establishes his own status at their expense. To modern ears such a personal attack sounds strange. We think it proper to stick to the issue. But at that time this harsh game of question and answer was the accepted manner in which you defended and confirmed your own group boundaries. Note how Jesus’ enemies tried to outsmart him (Lk 10:25; 12:53-54; Mt 22:15, 34-35) and tried to hold their own against him (Lk 10:29) – all terms which point to a social game.

In another case Jesus turns the attack around and shows that the attacker’s behaviour is the same as his. When they say that he drives out devils by means of Beelzebub, by whose power do they do exactly the same? Jesus asks them (Mt 12:27; Lk 11:19). No matter in which direction they look for an answer, his opponents will only land themselves in more trouble (see also Mk 11:27-33). Jesus could worm his way out of such difficult questions, which heightened his honour. In the attempt to trip him up with a question on the payment of taxes the listeners can only stand astounded at Jesus’ reply (Mk 12:13-17), and when they query his authority in Mark 11:27-33 he entangles his opponents in their own question (see also Mk 12:18-27).
Counter questions were also common. The counter question contains a built-in supposition which makes only one answer possible. This supposition makes the original question seem foolish (cf Mk 2:18-19, 24-26).

The way in which people were addressed was also part of this power game. On Mark 12:26 Jesus asks the Sadducees, who were constantly reading the Scriptures, whether they had read the part about the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. His have you not read … is degrading language, for the question implies that the Sadducees do not read the Scriptures properly (see also Mt 12:3,5; 19:4; 22:31; Mk 12:10; Lk 10:25-26). The same sarcasm is found in the questions of Paul, questions in which the answer is already given. The opponents can only concede that they are wrong. (See Mk 3:4; Lk 14:3; Acts 22:25). These are the ways in which one party would try to prove itself superior to the other. It was also expected of the group members to support their speaker. If they leave him or turn against him, it would reflect badly on the name of the speaker or the leader (only in Jn 6:60-69 something to this effect is said about the followers of Jesus).

WINDOW 13
SIN – TO PLACE THE GROUP SECOND
During a visit to the Dead Sea, Jack and Joy came across a lonely figure. This poor man looked so forsaken that Jack went over to him and offered him a piece of food. The man refused to even talk to him, let alone take the food, but after a while he cautiously approached and took it. When Jack asked him who he was, he told him that he belonged to a religious community situated on the northeast side of the Dead Sea. Immediately Jack realized he was referring to the Qumran community who had broken away from the system in Jerusalem and was now, in total seclusion, studying God’s word and obeying all kinds of strict rules and regulations.

Jack then asked why this man was roaming around outside in the blistering sun, and he replied that a few days before he had fallen asleep during a religious meeting. For his punishment he was banned from the community for thirty days. That was why he was now roaming around the Dead Sea, looking for scraps of food until the month was over.
Why was this man so severely punished?

MEANING OF THE WINDOW
THE GROUP ALWAYS COMES FIRST
Because the group in the ancient world was more important than the individual, it was natural that the interests of the group were set above that of the individual. Any violation of group laws, like children disobeying their parents, was seen in very serious light. Someone could even be banned from the group if his transgression was serious enough, which meant that his status as group member was changed to that of outsider. Sometimes transgressors were even punished with death. On a religious level the breaking of group laws and codes was seen as a sin, because the individual had put own interests before those of the group. In the case of the person in our story, who had been banned from the Qumran community for a month, his transgression of group rules changed him, for a month, into an outsider. But after he had served his sentence, he could be received back into their community.

According to John, the believers, as children of God (1 Jn 3:1), had to obey God’s commands (1 Jn 3:4-10). They had to love him and the believers (which were now their brothers and sisters), in word and deed (1 Jn 3:11-18; 4:20-21). But if they neglected to put the interests of the family first, by hating one another or by not sharing their belongings, it was, according to John, a sin, because the basic standards of the church were then ignored (1 Jn 2:9-11; 3:17-18).

Transgression of the rules of the church is seen in the rest of the New Testament as a very serious offence. Paul, for example, calls upon the congregation in Philippi to not only think of themselves, but also of others. They had to maintain the attitude of Christ who abandoned his high heavenly position for the sake of others (Phil 2:4-11).

If a believer did transgress the rules of the church, it was the duty of the other members to speak to him about it in a brotherly fashion (Mt 18:15-16). If this did not yield any gains, such a person was banned from the church and regarded as an outsider. He was then branded as a publican and a heathen (Mt 18:17).
The seriousness with which the Christians regarded the transgression of their group laws is clear in the story of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5:1-11. The couple is punished with death because they pretend to hand over to the congregation in Jerusalem the full sum for which their land has been sold, while really keeping a part for themselves.

**WINDOW 14**

**SAYING YOU ARE SORRY**

On a visit to the temple in Jerusalem Jack and Joy were struck by the content of some of the public prayers in the forecourts. Most of the people who prayed, after they had thanked God for all his favours, listed their good deeds before Him and did it loudly enough for all the bystanders to hear.

Other people, after sacrificing on the temple altar for their transgressions, confessed aloud that they had broken God’s laws and then thanked Him for his forgiveness.

*Why did the worshippers mention their good deeds and their sins aloud before God?*

**MEANING OF THE WINDOW**

**ASK THE RIGHT PEOPLE’S FORGIVENESS**

Usually ancient man had very clear systems with which he classified right and wrong, especially in religious context. As we have seen, complying with group rules was seen as honourable behaviour, while disobedience was seen as shameful. The requirements for a successful lifestyle were therefore quite simple. People could maintain their status in society by simply reminding others of their good deeds.

Compare, for example, the prayer of the Pharisee in Jesus’ parable of the publican and the Pharisee in Luke 18. The Pharisee informs God aloud of all his good deeds, among other things that he fasts twice a week and is no adulterer. In this way he publicly confirms that he is doing his duty towards God and other group members.

When persons transgressed the rules of their group, they had to show their remorse in public with penance and other symbolic acts. When the persons or group against whom they had transgressed pardoned them, the broken relationship, as well as the honour of the offender was restored. When religious rules and laws were broken, it
was honourable, especially in the Jewish world, to publicly confess it before God. This was often done by means of symbolic acts like sacrifices, tearing clothes and scattering ash on the head, as well as by means of prayers.

But while the keeping of religious rules and remorse for breaking them was largely a public affair in the Mediterranean world, Jesus, according to Matthew, emphasized the internal nature of the matter. That is why his followers were not to pray on the street corners for the sake of public recognition. You had to help the poor in secret, and you had to fast without any outward show (Mt 6:1-18). Jesus denounced all religious practices which you undertook in order to publicly confirm or boost your honour. In Luke 18:1-9, in the parable of the Pharisee and the publican, Jesus censures the Pharisee for enumerating his good deeds before God.

Religion is, according to the New Testament, first a matter which touches the heart (the headquarters of thoughts, will and emotions), out of which a correct lifestyle has to emerge (Mt 6:18-21; 7:21-23). But although the inner aspect of remorse, as well as the secrecy of good deeds is emphasized in the New Testament, the public aspect is acknowledged. Most of the Christian communities in the first century were relatively small, with less than a hundred members, who often met daily. That is why clear rules for interpersonal behaviour were necessary. In James 5:16 the believers are urged to confess their sins against each other and to pray for one another. As members of God’s family they have to ask the pardon of the others if they have sinned against them.

But confessing one’s sins was not only an interpersonal affair with the early Christians. According to the New Testament, in their relationship with God they as a community also had to attend to the matter. John writes, (in 1 Jn 1:8-10), that the believers have to confess their sins to Christ, because He is their intercessor with the Father. Jesus is their advocate in the invisible world, and handles his clients’ case in the heavenly court, showing them to be innocent when they confess their guilt.

**SUMMARY OF MACRO-WINDOW 1**

**MY PEOPLE AND YOURS, WE AGAINST YOU!**

In New Testament times people thought about themselves, their actions and others in terms of the group. Group relationships revolved around important persons like
benefactors or fathers in their relationship with subordinates. Clear group boundaries separated group members from outsiders. You could become a member of a group in several ways, but you then had to be absolutely loyal to the group. Your loyalty determined your whole lifestyle and behaviour.
STUDY UNIT 5

MACRO-WINDOW 2

THE FAMILY

WINDOW 15  Marriage: for love or for children?
WINDOW 16  Children should know their place
WINDOW 17  A chip off the old block
WINDOW 18  All places are not the same
SUMMARY OF MACRO-WINDOW 2

MACRO-WINDOW 2

THE FAMILY

Introduction
We have seen in Chapter 1 that the family was the nucleus of the ancient world. As in other social structures in the Mediterranean world, everything and everyone within the family was judged according to their gender roles. Even articles used in and around the house were connected to gender. For instance, kitchen utensils were seen as feminine, while farming tools were seen as masculine. Goats were found mainly within the female area around the house and in the courtyard, while sheep were found on male ground in the fields. The female domain included the kitchen, the inner courtyard, as well as the inside of the house, while the male area was mainly outside the house. The duties and places of men and women were divided accordingly. The woman’s duty was to run her household, while the men were the breadwinners who could move around in public. Women had to tend and educate the children. When boys were allowed into the adult male world, the men had to educate them further and teach them how to act like men.

In this macro-window the focus is on the following aspects of the Mediterranean families:

- The nature of marriage (window 15)
- The place of boys and girls (window 16)
- The common idea that children were extensions of their parents (window 17)
- Public and private areas (window 18).
MARRIAGE: FOR LOVE OR FOR CHILDREN?

One afternoon Joy went to visit a wife of the innkeeper at the inn where they had stayed over in Jerusalem. While a few children played around them in the kitchen, the woman told her that she was preparing for her daughter’s betrothal to the son of rabbi Joseph. When Joy replied that she looked very young for someone who had a daughter who was about to be married, the woman called one of her daughters, who was playing with the others, to her. “Here is my daughter Mary. Her father has chosen the best husband on earth for her. In a year’s time she is to be wed to our honoured rabbi’s son,” the woman said proudly. Joy was stunned. The girl looked no more than twelve or thirteen years old. What astounded her even more was the woman’s remark that Mary would see her future husband for the first time, a week from now, at their betrothal.

Why was the woman so proud of her child who would marry so young and had not yet even met her future husband?

MEANING OF THE WINDOW

LOVE DOES MATTER!

In the first century marriages were generally contracted at a very early age. In the Jewish world girls would be betrothed around their twelfth or thirteenth year, and they married a few years afterwards. The marrying age for men was between sixteen and eighteen years. In the Roman world the marrying ages for men and women were not much higher. In fact, Augustus Caesar once even had to make a law which forbade girls under twelve years of age to marry.

Parents usually decided in advance whom their children would marry. Children’s own feelings and personal preferences were unimportant when it came to marriage. Rather, children had to respect their father’s authority and good judgement by marrying the person chosen by him.

Around the first century marriages were contracted mainly for the sake of children, not for love. Love had to come after the marriage. Childlessness, which was always regarded as the woman’s fault, was seen as a great problem. In the Jewish world a
man was allowed to divorce his wife if after ten years she had not yet borne any children. Divorce was also allowed if wives behaved shamefully. Of course, rabbis differed on what could be termed shameful behaviour. Adultery was seen as shameful, but some of the more enlightened rabbis even said that a woman who appeared in public with loose hair, or often burned her husband’s food, could be divorced by her husband.

In contrast to the emphasis on reproduction as the main aim of marriage in the Mediterranean world, the focus in the New Testament is primarily on a harmonious relationship between husband and wife. The creation story in Genesis, in which man and wife are to become one in marriage, is often referred to in the New Testament when the nature of God’s institution of matrimony is discussed (see also Mk 10:6; Eph 5:31). A lifelong affection, and not an inquiry as to lawful reasons for divorce, was now the foundation of matrimony (see Mt 5:31-32; Mk 10:1-10).

On the one hand the New Testament agrees with the first century ideas about the role of man and wife in marriage. The wife still has to obey her husband as the head of the household (Eph 5:22-24). In 1 Peter 3:6 women are even encouraged to behave in the same way as Sarah, who addressed her husband Abraham as my lord. On the other hand men have to honour their wives as the weaker sex (1 Pet 3:7).

But the roles of men and women were also adjusted. According to the synoptic gospels, Jesus broke away from stereotyped first century notions about women by speaking to them in public, giving them religious teaching, and admitting them into the group which travelled around with Him publicly through Galilee (see also Lk 8:1-3; 10:3-42). This radical elevation of the social status of women by Jesus is reflected in Paul’s remarks in Ephesians 5 on the roles of man and wife in matrimony. Although he does not break away from first century ideas on marriage, Paul does adjust the ideas by calling upon men to serve their wives (verse 21) and to love them (verse 25). He further bases the behaviour of men and women towards each other on Christ’s death. In the light of Christ’s self-sacrifice, they have to redefine their roles in their marriage and act towards one another in a new way.
WINDOW 16

CHILDREN SHOULD KNOW THEIR PLACE

On a visit to the Galilean city Tiberias, Jack one day met a group of men who were congratulating one of their friends in public. Jack asked a bystander why the man was being congratulated, and was told that the man’s oldest son had just returned with good news. A few weeks before his younger sister had run away from home with an unknown man, and he had tracked her down and killed her.

Was this horrible event a reason to celebrate?

MEANING OF THE WINDOW

THE ROLES ARE REVERSED

Because sexual relations before or outside of marriage were usually regarded with disfavour, a situation like the one in our story, where a daughter had run away before her marriage with another man, brought great dishonour to the head of the family and the family itself. If the father in our story had not been so severe with the offender, his public honour would have been at stake, for then he would be regarded as someone who could not control his household. Usually it was the duty of the oldest son to restore the honour of his father and the family when one of the other children behaved in a shameful way. One of the most effective (and honourable) ways in which it could be done, was to kill the offender (see also Deut 21:18-21).

As we have seen in Chapter 1, sons were higher than daughters in the patriarchally oriented Mediterranean world. Sons had to learn from their fathers how to uphold the honour of their families in public. A daughter’s place was in the home. She was regarded as a mirror of her family’s honour and values. Inner beauty, modesty and calmness of spirit (see 1 Pet 3:4) were highly rated virtues which their mothers had to instill in them.

In the New Testament much emphasis is placed on children having to obey their parents (see Eph 6:1-3; Col 3:20). Parents should discipline their children (Eph 6:4), but they do not have the right to kill them for being disobedient. The relationship between parents and children is seen as a mutual one in which the father also has certain duties, like wisely raising his children and not constantly finding fault with
them (Col 3:20). That the early Christians raised their children with great tenderness, is seen in an early Roman document which says that they, unlike many people in the Roman Empire, do not abandon their babies on the rubbish dumps.

According to available information, children were seen as an integral part of the church. They took part in congregational activities like baptism, teaching, communal meals and worship (see also Acts 16:3-34; 1 Cor 1:16). In contrast to the sharp distinctions between sons and daughters in the ancient world, in New Testament children are referred to in a neutral way when they are spoken of in group context. Children are also given greater prominence. Jesus healed quite a few children, like the daughter of the Canaanite woman (Mt 15:21-28), as well as an afflicted son (Mt 17:14-18). The most well-known episode featuring children in the New Testament is the episode in which the women publicly bring their children to Christ to have them blessed by Him (Mk 10:13-16). The disciples act according to protocol when they chide the women for impertinent behaviour when they approach Jesus in public. Yet Jesus reproves his disciples and blesses the children.

When the disciples speculate on who is the most important in the kingdom of God, Jesus uses a child as a symbol of importance (Mt 18:1-5). Children are a sign that roles in the kingdom have been completely reversed. In the kingdom true greatness is no longer connected to gender roles, to social status or to age, but to service and humility.

**WINDOW 17**

**A CHIP OFF THE OLD BLOCK**

Jack and Joy took trouble to talk to Mediterranean people. At inns where they lodged, or on visits to public places like temples and market places, they liked to chat to the bystanders to find out how they thought and felt. Often, in a long conversation, Jack and Joy noticed that the Mediterranean people liked to talk about their children; especially about their achievements.

*Why did the Mediterranean people love to talk about their children’s good qualities and their feats?*
MEANING OF THE WINDOW
GOOD FATHERS HAVE GOOD CHILDREN
Because of the symbolic value which parents attached to children in the first century, they were in general very proud of their children. After all, the children shared the inherited status of their parents and forebears. Any child who did an honourable deed, or rose in the public eye, was therefore a great cause for joy to his parents and family.

As we have seen in Chapter 1, genealogy was very important in the Jewish world, for it confirmed people’s honour ratings. Honour was especially passed on by means of birth from generation to generation. Therefore children were taught at their mother’s knee that they were the bearers and keepers of their family’s good name. Their parents regarded good behaviour in a very positive light, for it reflected their own honourable name, as well as that of the family.

Because first century people saw children as extensions of their parents, they generally believed that children acted like their parents. Good parents had good children, while bad people, like sinners and prostitutes, had bad children. That is why honourable people never mixed with the children of bad people.

The most important father-child relationship in the New Testament is the one between God and Jesus. At his baptism God speaks approvingly of Jesus when He says that Jesus is his beloved Son with whom He is well pleased (Mk 1:11). In turn Jesus, in the gospels, frequently talks about the unique relationship between Himself and his Father. He says that He is the one who reveals God because He knows Him best of all (Mt 11:27; Jn 7:28-29; 8:55). According to John, Jesus does exactly what his Father does. When God does good things, like giving people eternal life, Jesus does the same (Jn 5:20-23). Jesus is such a faithful son that He even once tells his disciples that those who have seen Him, have seen his Father (Jn 14:6-11).

According to the New Testament Jesus’ unstinting obedience to his Father is not only the embodiment of honourable behaviour, but is also the one on which the believers are to model their own conduct (see also Phil 2:5-11). Believers are now
also children of God who have the duty to uphold their heavenly Father’s good name in public.

The Mediterranean notion that children are the extension of their parents lies at the root of New Testament assertions that believers have to honour God, their heavenly Father, with their good deeds (cf Mt 5:16; Jn 15:8). Obedience and loyalty to his commands are now the only form of honourable behaviour (Jn 17:17). Believers who act according to God’s will are often praised in the New Testament (see also Rom 4; Heb 11). According to Matthew 10:31-32, faithful followers of Jesus even receive the assurance that He will honour them in a special way by mentioning their names aloud in heaven before God. Honourable conduct by children of God is thus worthy of mention, in the invisible world as well as among other believers.

**WINDOW 18**

**ALL PLACES ARE NOT THE SAME**

On their way home Jack and Joy were both very quiet. They were thinking hard about events earlier that evening. They had been very excited at going to the Dayans for dinner. All went well until they sat down at the table. Sarah Dayan had prepared a big dinner. Her servant had already gone home by the time the food was brought to the table. Joy gave Jack a nudge and he leaped to go and help Sarah carry the heavy dishes from the kitchen. Jack noticed that Sarah was very annoyed with him about something. After that the mood at table was subdued, and Jack felt that Sarah was ignoring him. He was a bit peeved about this; he had really wanted to help – why was Sarah so rude to him then?

Fortunately the evening recovered somewhat when Ravi arrived. He is Dayan’s oldest son. It was plain that Sarah was excited and she immediately rose to serve him with motherly affability. Jack could see that they had an extremely good relationship. To tell the truth, it appeared as if Ravi’s mother spoiled him a little.
MEANING OF THE WINDOW

A PLACE IS NOT MERELY A PLACE

The roles of the various parties in society in ancient times were more clearly circumscribed than in our time. Men, women, children and slaves all had their specific place and station in society (read Col 3:18-4:1; as well as Philemon).

The various groups were not only distinguished from one another, but different places or areas were reserved for each. Thus the *kitchen area* belonged to the women. They had to run the household and therefore a specific area was reserved for them. The larger houses even had a women’s court where no men were allowed. In the house the woman could therefore move around freely and she did not have to wear a veil indoors, only when she went out. (Of course there were also smaller houses with only one room, which was perhaps divided into two levels. In such cases the area boundaries could not be so strict.)

Certain tasks went along with these areas which were so specifically reserved for certain groups. The woman was responsible for running the household and for tending her family and therefore the kitchen was assigned to her (cf the interesting comment in Lk 8:3). According to Proverbs 31:10-30 the virtuous wife had to keep everything ready and even see to it that the fields produced all that had to be eaten!

We can assume that some female groups today would say that the virtuous wife in Proverbs was nothing more than her husband’s slave. She had to work hard in the fields and in the kitchen while her husband sat in the sun at the city gate with the other men!

In general the woman was free to act and move around as she chose while she was at home (or in the private area of the family). There she completed her tasks. Note how Peter’s mother-in-law gets up immediately after she has been healed and then serves the men (Lk 4:38-39). To us it seems as if the men – especially her own son-in-law – act unfeelingly by allowing her to serve them. But Peter’s conduct becomes understandable when we realize that the divisions of roles and functions were much clearer then. It was the woman’s job to serve and that is why Peter’s mother-in-law did so. Martha (in Lk 10:38-42) has much to gripe about when Mary sits at Jesus’
feet while Martha has to serve them. Martha is actually asking Jesus to speak to Mary because she is behaving like a man and not like a woman.

The house was the woman’s domain. When she went out, she stepped into the public area which was mainly the domain of the man. Then she had to cover her face with a veil in order not to tempt men from other families and thereby shaming her own family.

The man’s task, on the other hand, lay outside the house in public life. He had to represent his family in public and he had to earn money to buy food and other things. He represented his family’s honour outside the house. Especially the oldest sons were important, for they had to become the family representatives in their turn. When we keep in mind that a woman could not really represent her family’s honour outside the home, but that it had to be done by a male member of the family, we can understand why boys were so important and were normally pampered to such an extent by their mothers (read Lk 2:48,51; 7:13,15). In Luke 11:27 a woman calls out that the woman who bore Jesus in her body was fortunate. The woman who said so was happy because Jesus’ behaviour redounded to his mother’s honour! That is why Sarah was so friendly towards Ravi.

Children could not go where they pleased. They belonged to the less important groups in society and were therefore not allowed everywhere. That is why the disciples try to send the children away when the children want to come to Jesus (Mt 19:13 par).

But there were not only places for men, women and children. There were also holy and unholy places. The temple, for example, was the most holy place. That is why Paul (Acts 21:28) was arrested in the temple – he had sullied the holy place by, according to the accusation, bringing Trophimus of Ephesus into the temple. Graves normally had to be avoided, because contact with dead bones, regarded as unclean, (cf in this regard Jesus’ sharp denouncement of the Pharisees in Mt 23:27) was best avoided. See also Romans 3:13. In some cases the graves were well-tended (Mt 23:29; Acts 2:29).
These facts open up interesting possibilities when we get to the difficult passages about women in 1 Corinthians.

Let us consider the example of the head covering which Paul talks about in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16. Paul says that the woman has to wear a head covering during worship as a sign of respect for and acknowledgement of her husband’s authority over her. If she did not do so, she could just as well shave her hair. The question is why there were women who did not want to wear head coverings during worship. It may be that they were libertines who rebelled against men’s authority because of certain circumstances. Yet the riddle can be solved by thinking in terms of public and private places. In her own home it was not necessary for the woman to wear a head covering. (Head coverings must in any case not be confused with today’s hats. Many women in ancient times wore decorations on their heads and these corresponded to today’s hats. But the head coverings of which Paul speaks were worn over the hats of that time.) When the woman moved outside her house in a public area, she had to wear a head covering. But Paul says in 1 Corinthians 16:19 that the congregations gathered in houses (see also Rom 16:5; Acts 20:8). The house was the woman’s domain. There she was allowed to take off her veil.

The congregation gathered in the houses – perhaps as many as three families in a house (it is unlikely that they totaled more than 20 people). But the private area of the house would, because of the assembly of believers, become a public area in which the people prayed. After all, strangers could walk in at any time, according to 1 Corinthians 14:23. In public areas women had to wear veils. Women who did not wear veils in public, were usually regarded as prostitutes. Prostitutes were also often punished by having their heads shaved. (For a woman of that time it was a great disgrace and afterwards she was, of course, not so attractive to men.)

What happened in the congregation? A woman was used to not wearing a veil at home. But her home changed into a public place when the congregation gathered there. What would someone who came in from outside think when he saw women at a public meeting without veils? In that case the women might as well have shaven their heads. That is why Paul asks them to wear a veil during worship, even if they were in their own homes.
Contemporary customs could also provide us with an interesting explanation for Paul’s refusal to let women speak in the congregations (1 Cor 14:34-36), in spite of the fact that he says in 1 Corinthians 11:5 that some women prophesy during the gatherings. Apparently the women in Corinth actively took part in the conversations of the assembly. But when Paul speaks about order in the congregation, he asks that women should not be allowed to speak.

Let us assume again that the congregation did not gather in a synagogue or in a public place, but in the privacy of a home. At home the wife was free to talk and to discuss matters with her husband, as Paul himself implies in 1 Corinthians 14:35. In a public place it was the man’s duty to converse and take the lead. As a man had to stay out of the kitchen, the woman had to stay out of the public discussions. By saying too much, she would violate the social boundaries which were determined by the society of the day. That would disturb the order. The women probably felt they could take part in discussions in their own homes. After all, it was their place. But Paul asks them not to talk, among other things for the sake of order, during the gatherings of the congregation (even if the congregation gathered in their homes) and in that way to respect the public nature of the gathering.

**SUMMARY OF MACRO-WINDOW 2**

**THE FAMILY**

The family was not only the nucleus of the ancient world, but also served as a basis for the New Testament church. In the various New Testament writings matrimony, the role of children, prevalent notions about public and private places, and the position of the children as extensions of their parents are used and given new meaning to explain the relationship between God and his church, as well as the mutual friendships between Christians.
MACRO-WINDOW 3
SOME GENERAL VALUES

Introduction

The ancient world had very clear boundaries for everything and everyone. From childhood people were taught their roles and how to behave properly. These roles were very stereotyped and changed little from generation to generation. For instance, subordinates were always expected to remain respectful towards their superiors. When disciples or pupils rejected their teachers’ authority, or disobeyed their employers, it was regarded as dishonourable behaviour.

Mediterranean society was organized mainly around the big cities. These pre-industrial cities were the administrative and political centres and mostly had some or other central temple as an expression of the religion of the potentates in that country or area. Smallholders came to sell their products in the cities and many people worked there for artisans and small businessmen in their shops.

In the first century world the purpose of labour was not to get ahead in life or to better your social station. Labour was the means of keeping your family alive and to maintain your inherited status. Ambition could easily be regarded as dishonourable conduct. Others could easily think that you wanted to gather essential provisions like food or land (which, according to the ancient notion of limited means, was always available in small amounts) at their expense.
The primary values of the Mediterranean world were honour and shame and these played a large role in the way people worked. It was important for workers not to make mistakes or, when they did, they had to make sure that they were not caught out, for it could mar their good name. It was also not so important to finish work within a certain time. It was much more important that what you had already finished would be approved of by others. Because your acts were seen as an extension of your personality, criticizing someone’s work also meant criticizing him. In this macro-window the focus will be on the following general values and attitudes within the Mediterranean world of the first century:

- People do not make mistakes (window 19)
- Respect for seniority (window 20)
- The inside of your body is a home for other powers (window 21)
- External deeds as a reflection of your personality (window 22)
- People are irreplaceable (window 23).

**WINDOW 19
WE DO NOT MAKE MISTAKES**

One morning, while Jack and Joy were visiting Antioch, they persuaded one of the locals to take them through the city with his horse and cart. While they sat looking at all the people and buildings, someone came riding towards them in the narrow street. This man was so involved in the conversation he was having with the people on his own cart that he did not even see Jack and Joy approaching. In spite of all their warnings he crashed into them. Fortunately nobody was hurt, but the two drivers immediately fell to arguing about whose fault it was. Jack and Joy knew the other driver was the guilty party, but he refused to accept the blame. In the end he stuck to his remark that fate had caused this accident and everyone had to accept his explanation.

Why was this person who had caused the accident not prepared to accept responsibility for his mistake?
MEANING OF THE WINDOW
MAKE THE RIGHT CHOICE!

In the first century world rewards were given for people's achievements. Therefore, individuals had to avoid mistakes, or make certain that their mistakes would go unnoticed. To make a mistake in public could not only taint your own name, but also that of your group. The result was that people did not easily admit to being wrong, especially not in front of outsiders, as we have seen in our story.

To admit your faults and weaknesses in public was usually seen as a confession of ineptitude. That is why Mediterranean people preferred to name fate as the cause of the problem. Fate, or even God's providence, or the goddess of fate, Tugé, were held responsible for the most important events (positive as well as negative) in the existence of individuals, groups or nations. Yet, while the gods were the cause of the major events in the Mediterranean world, it did not mean that people had no personal responsibility. As we have seen, people were severely disciplined within their groups if they violated the rules of the group.

Mediterranean people were often not eager to take the initiative in public situations; they were afraid of making mistakes and tarnishing their good name. The general attitude was a passive one. Important decisions were usually left to the group. Pilate's behaviour during Jesus' trial is a first rate example. He is not prepared to decide on Jesus' guilt or innocence, but simply leaves the verdict to the crowd (see Mk 15:6-16).

According to the New Testament the most important, and the most difficult decision which people had to make was to join the early church. Your individual choice had serious consequences, as you probably had to turn your back on the family religion, which was regarded as a great shame. That is why Jesus remarks in Matthew 10:35-37 that he is going to bring division between a man and his father, and between a daughter and her mother and mother-in-law.

In the book of Acts it is clear that the early Christian missionaries usually brought the Gospel to the heads of households first, probably to ease the weight of the decision for the other members of the family (see Acts 16:31-34). If the head of a family then
joined a Christian group, the rest of the family would respect his choice (and follow him!).

New Testament authors continually remind the Christian communities that there is now a difference between the rules and standards which they have to obey, and those of outsiders, who usually belonged to the sinful world (see 1 Jn 2:15-17). Great pressure is put on them to make the right choices in this context. For instance, Paul writes to the Corinthians: today is the day of salvation (2 Cor 6:2), and pleads with them to accept Christ’s salvation (2 Cor 5:20). In the book of Hebrews the readers are also summoned to immediately make the right choices when it came to faith (see also Heb 3-4).

Together with the pressure from the New Testament writers in their communities to make the right decisions, there was also greater freedom to talk about their own faults and weaknesses. Especially Paul, in this context, spoke frankly about his own weaknesses, like personal setbacks, failures and problems (see 2 Cor 6 and 2 Cor 11-13). He now redefines his own suffering as honourable behaviour, for God has seen fit to paradoxically show his great power within human weakness (2 Cor 12:8-10). Paul finds the best example of this in the events on the cross where God actually saved people when Jesus was crucified as a frail human being (2 Cor 13:4). Believers are therefore called upon to have compassion with others because of their weaknesses and to assist one another (see Rom 12:9-21).

WINDOW 20
THE BOSS IS ALWAYS RIGHT!
Jack loved to go to the city square to listen to the philosophers’ debates. One morning in Rome he was amazed at the behaviour of a group of young scholars. First they argued loudly about the exact meaning of the term logos. (Logos is the Greek term which is translated with Word in Jn 1). They then reached a more or less unanimous verdict. After this, an older person joined them. From their deferential conduct towards the older man, Jack deduced that he was their teacher. Then one of the young men asked how the teacher understood the word logos, and got an answer which was the direct opposite of what his students had just agreed upon.
Yet, instead of differing from him, the young philosophers immediately concurred with their teacher and complimented him on his great insight.

Why did not one of them dare to differ from the teacher?

MEANING OF THE WINDOW

KNOW YOUR PLACE

In the first century world it was regarded as dishonourable to oppose your betters in public. A man would remain silent rather than bring shame on his head by dissenting from someone of higher station and then shaming him by proving him wrong. In the Mediterranean world it was only fitting for people of equal rank to openly differ from one another or to challenge each other’s authority. Two pupils or two teachers of the law with equal status could differ from one another, but not subordinates from their betters.

Children were taught great respect for older people. The Jewish religion even commanded children to show respect for the aged, out of respect for the Lord (see Lev 19:32). Mediterranean people thought that children were too young to be as wise as their parents or other respected adults. In Proverbs 1-9 it is emphasized that children have to listen to their father’s instruction in order to become wise. The children were also expected to tend their aging parents and, eventually, to bury them. This last act was not only one of the most important duties of a Jewish son, but also the last homage he paid his father.

The New Testament authors were well acquainted with the hierarchical structures of the Mediterranean world. According to them God had the highest position in the invisible world. Thus believers owed Him absolute obedience. As the only begotten Son of God, and as the head of the church, Jesus was of course worshipped and revered as God (Col 1:18; Heb 1:1-14).

In the early church there were also hierarchical positions. The apostles were in the most important positions because they had been eyewitnesses to Jesus’ life and work (Acts 1:20-26); then came dignitaries like the prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers (Eph 4:11), as well as overseers or elders (1 Tim 3:1-7) and deacons
(1 Tim 3:8-13). Group members were, in their turn, obliged to show the necessary esteem for all persons in positions of authority in the church, and to obey their instructions (1 Th 1:6-10; 1 Tim 5:17). They also had to treat older people in the group with respect. Timothy is called upon to admonish an older man as if he were his own father, and to treat an older woman like his mother (1 Tim 5:1-2). He is also told to teach the younger group members to provide for their own parents and grandparents, because God wanted this (1 Tim 5:3-4).

Apart from the Christians’ obligations towards the members of their group, they also had to conduct themselves correctly towards outsiders in positions of authority. They had to pay their taxes faithfully (Mk 12:13-17), and pray for all who ruled and had power (2 Tim 2:2), and they had to obey those who had been granted authority over them (Rom 13:1-7).

WINDOW 21
MAN ALSO HAS A HEART
On their journey through Galilee, Jack and Joy came upon a crowd gathering around a single man. He was screaming hysterically and foaming at the mouth. Someone else was standing in front of him and shouting the names of strange gods while making all kinds of gestures with his hands. When Jack asked a bystander what was going on, the bystander explained that an exorcist was freeing the lunatic from demons. He was doing this by mentioning the names of as many gods as he knew and at the same time keeping the demons away from himself with all kinds of rituals.

Why did the exorcist perform such strange rituals?

MEANING OF THE WINDOW
UNDER NEW MANAGEMENT
People in the ancient world not only believed in many gods, but also in the existence of evil powers who could harm one. The Jews saw Satan, also known as Azazel and Belial, as the head of the evil forces who could at any time possess them. Because the inside of their bodies was regarded as a home, they had to be wary, for evil spirits could easily enter them through the apertures of the body. Adultery and
contact with defiled persons were especially risky, because it could lead to demonic possession. One also had to avoid places where demons liked to stay, like deserts and water, and animals like wolves, snakes or dogs.

Because of the dangers of demonic possession, there were many exorcists in the ancient world. They used all kinds of methods to free people, like giving them homeopathic medicines. It was believed that evil forces were scared off when people ate small pieces of the elements in which demons lived, like earth, water or plants. A popular amulet was the so-called Evil Eye, and people knew a gesture of a fist with the little finger and forefinger extended (the so-called safe sign). The Evil Eye was an amulet in the shape of an eye which people wore around their necks to show in the direction of anyone who they suspected of witchcraft or demonic possession. The gesture with the extended little finger and forefinger was also to fend off evil. Exorcists sometimes mentioned the names of every conceivable god to intimidate the evil spirits and to drive them out (cf the conduct of the sons of Sceva in Acts 19:13-16).

The New Testament shares the first century idea of the existence of the Evil One, as well as the idea that one's body is a place in which forces can make a home. Jesus tells a story in Luke 11:24-26 of an evil spirit who leaves someone and then, after a many travels, comes back to find the house still empty. He then goes to fetch seven other spirits to come and live with him there.

Jesus himself drove out many evil spirits. At the same time He also taught people that his kingdom was stronger than Satan's. In Luke 11:21-22 He says that He has come to take over the strong man's house by robbing him of all his weapons.

The early church believed that Jesus had triumphed over all kinds of evil forces, whatever shape they took, by dying on the cross (see Col 2:15). Revelation 12 says that the devil and his forces were thrown out of the invisible control room of the world – heaven – when he ascended to heaven. The early Christians not only believed that they shared in Jesus' triumph over Satan (2 Cor 2:14-17); they also believed that the insides of their bodies were not accessible to evil forces any more. This space was now completely filled with God's Spirit (2 Cor 6:14-7:1). In fact, Paul reminds the
Corinthians several times that their bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit and are now under his control (1 Cor 3:16; 6:18-20).

Because the first Christians believed that evil forces could no longer possess them, they did not carry out exorcisms on one another. Yet they did believe that evil spirits could possess unbelieving outsiders. That is why Acts tells of how Paul drove out demons from outsiders (see Acts 16:18; 19:12).

WINDOW 22
WHAT YOU DO SHOW WHO YOU ARE
At the inn in Athens where they were staying Jack and Joy told the innkeeper that their next destination was Crete. He did not look ecstatic. “You must keep your wits about you with those Cretans, they are the biggest liars in the world,” he said. When Susan asked why he said so, he replied that the Cretans told everyone they meet that the tomb of Zeus is on the island. “Of course this isn’t so”, he added hastily. When Jack and Joy were walking away, Jack told Joy that even the apostle Paul in Titus 1:12 quotes the philosopher Epimenides who, as long ago as the sixth century before Christ, had said that the Cretans are always slothful, beastly, and unfit for anything good.

*Why did people in ancient times judge others so quickly by their deeds?*

MEANING OF THE WINDOW
THE RIGHT PEOPLE DO THE RIGHT THINGS
In the first century your general behaviour, how you did your work, what you said and what you did in public, were seen as an extension of your personality. Your conduct immediately showed what type of a person you were. Mediterranean people were therefore engrossed with their public behaviour, as we have seen. When they worked, it was not important to complete a job within a set time. It was much more important that any completed job would be approved by all. A good employer would therefore not be concerned about all that was not yet finished; he would rather know that what had already been done had been done well.
When a person’s work or behaviour was negatively judged, it was seen as a judgement of the person. When the innkeeper, or Paul or Epimenides, in our story above, criticized the conduct of the people of Crete, they judged the people themselves.

Criticism had a certain impact on the group to which the criticized person belonged, as well as to his employer. A bad worker would convey a negative image of his employer to the outside world, while a good worker strengthened his employer’s good name. The same went for the public behaviour of group members. Compare the critical question put to Jesus in Mark 2:18 – why his disciples do not fast while the Pharisees and the disciples of John do practise fasting. See also the criticism leveled against Jesus by the Pharisees because his disciples pluck ears of wheat on the Sabbath (Mk 2:23-28). This type of criticism not only questions the integrity of the disciples, but also that of the lifestyle of Jesus, their master.

Just as in the broader Mediterranean world, the New Testament did not separate people’s deeds from their persons, Jesus said that a person’s deeds are a window into his interior existence. It is like the fruit on a tree. A good tree, that is, one whose inner life is focused on God, bears good fruit, whereas a bad tree, that is, someone whose heart is not set on God, bears bad fruit (Mt 7:1-20). Here Jesus used an ancient belief that your eye sheds light. He says that if your eye lets darkness into your heart, all within you becomes dark (Mt 6:22-23). That is why he says that you must set your heart – your emotions, will and thoughts – on God, to make your deeds a true reflection of what is happening in your heart (Mt 6:19-21).

Often in the New Testament the believer’s conduct is used as a measure of his internal life (1 Jn 2:9). Especially in the letter by James good deeds as an illustration of your faith is emphasized. Thus believers behave correctly when they help people in need (Jas 2:14-26), and control their own tongues (Jas 3:1-12). Group members whose conduct go against the rules and standards of the early church, are accused of being liars and eventually banned from their ranks (1 Jn 2:11; 3:7-10).

Yet the New Testament warns against a wrong judgment of others. When a person’s heart is full of darkness, he always judges people wrongly. Jesus says that you first
have to remove the log from your own eye before you start taking out splinters from other people’s eyes. James also warns against the selfish judgment of another person because of their outward appearance, dress, or social station (Jas 2:1-10).

WINDOW 23
PEOPLE CANNOT DO WITHOUT ME

Jack and Joy had so fallen in love with Jerusalem that they decided to pay it a second visit. At the toll gate outside the city they had to stand in a long queue, just like the first time, to pay tax on the wares they took into the city. After an hour or so in the hot sun they eventually reached the gate. Jack saw that the same man who had manned the point the previous time, was doing it once again. Irritated after the long wait, Jack asked the official whether his colleagues were on holiday, as the queue was moving so slowly. “I am the only one who collects the taxes for my employer, Levi ben Jakov,” he answered.

“But why don’t you get help? Then people will not have to wait so long outside,” Jack asked.

But the official quickly replied, “Never. If I do that, I get the sack.”

Why did the official not want anyone to help him lighten his workload?

MEANING OF THE WINDOW
I AM IRREPLACEABLE

In general the Mediterranean people regarded themselves as irreplaceable, or at least they tried their utmost to become irreplaceable. If the official at the gate had asked for extra aid, it would have been tantamount to a confession that he could be replaced. Our modern idea is that no man is irreplaceable; the ancients believed exactly the opposite and tried to live accordingly.

Leaders in the Mediterranean society made certain that they would remain irreplaceable. Land barons and political potentates provided for the poor with all kinds of donations and in that way saw to it that their name be well publicized. Religious figures also rendered themselves irreplaceable by asserting that they possessed special knowledge and were the receivers of direct divine revelations, as
well as uttering all kinds of prophecies. The ability of the well-known prophetesses of the god Apollo at Delphi to tell the future made them a big attraction in the ancient world. The first century Jewish historian, Flavius Josephus, who had been a Jewish general in the war against Rome before joining the Romans later on, made himself irreplaceable by prophesying that the head of the Roman army, Vespasian, would shortly become the new emperor. When his prophecy came true, the Roman general treated him with great esteem and allowed him to write the histories which were famous even in his day.

Of course persons of a high social station did not endanger their positions when they employed the services of persons of a lower station. Because people in lower positions could never challenge or threaten the honour of others in higher positions, the latter could employ them without any trouble, or ask them to perform certain tasks.

When someone in the ancient world was given a job or task in public, he did not easily refuse, even if he had no notion of how to tackle it. Because a man’s behaviour was an extension of his person, as we have seen in the previous window, any indication by him that he could not perform a given task reflected negatively on the rest of his conduct as father and husband. A good example is the behaviour of Jesus’ disciples in Mark 9:14-29. When someone asks them to drive out the demon from his son, they agree to do it, rather than admitting that they are not able to. Unfortunately they are not successful, so that Jesus has to preserve their honour by doing it Himself.

People in the Mediterranean world were expected to conduct themselves according to their social stations. A doctor had to be able to heal his patients, an exorcist had to be able to free people from demonic possession, and so on. If a doctor realized that he would not be able to heal someone, he would totally ignore any request to visit the sick person, rather than put his honour at stake. In the light of this idea we have to understand the conduct of the people during Jesus’ crucifixion. Because Jesus openly stated that he was the Messiah, they expect Him to behave like the Messiah. That is why the teachers of the law and the crowd mocked Him – he could not free
Himself from the cross (Mt 27:39-44). His powerlessness on the cross means great dishonour for Him. That is why his enemies insisted on his being crucified.

People were regarded as irreplaceable in the early church. To illustrate this point, Paul uses the image of the body in 1 Corinthians 12. Every member of the group is like a body member. The diversity of the body members, and the function peculiar to each, Paul sees as a good illustration for the diversity of people and gifts in the church, as well as the different tasks that have to be performed (1 Cor 12:12-26). Just as the body cannot function effectively without one of his members, in the same way the church can only, according to Paul, function well if each member does his duty.

Within this organic image of the church every member is irreplaceable. When one member does not do his duty, a gap is left. Paul asserts the opposite of our modern idea that people and means are easily replaceable. The ancient notion of limited means implied that only limited amounts of each item, like land, food, honour, and even life, was available and could not be replaced; so Paul asserts that people who neglect their duty in the church leave an irreplaceable gap and in that way hampers the church’s work.

In the early church the apostles were especially seen as irreplaceable because of their first hand knowledge of Jesus’ words or deeds and because of the fact that Jesus appeared to them after his resurrection (1 Cor 15:3-7). Their preaching (Acts 2:14-24) and miracles (Acts 5:12-16), as well as their role as leaders when arguments had to be settled (Acts 15), further underlined their honourable positions as pillars (Gal 2:9) of the Christian society. Paul struggled to prove his apostolic authority to his congregations, for some did not recognize him as an apostle (see 1 Cor 4 and 9). Therefore he also offered his services as manager and accomplice to God, among other things. He saw himself as someone to whom all the sacred mysteries have been entrusted (1 Cor 4:1; 2 Cor 6:1). He emphasized his power by claiming that Jesus also appeared to him (1 Cor 15:8-11), and that God himself has entrusted the gospel to him (Gal. 1:15-16)
SUMMARY OF MACRO-WINDOW 3
SOME GENERAL VALUES
Job security in the first century mainly depended on your ability not to make mistakes. Because of the danger of too much personal initiative, individuals did not like making important decisions. They left that to senior persons or to the rest of the group. When people were asked to perform a certain task, they did not easily refuse, because that would leave a negative impression on others.

In the early Christian communities the New Testament authors used these ideas to put great pressure on group members to make correct decisions and placing the interests of their group first. The believers were taught, among other things, to respect others in the church and to show by their deeds that their bodies were now under the internal control of God’s Spirit. The need for every member’s contribution was also underlined.
STUDY UNIT 7

MACRO-WINDOW 4
TIME IS NOT WHAT IT WAS

WINDOW 24  What happened to my watch?
WINDOW 25  Time to learn something about time
WINDOW 26  Problems! What now?
SUMMARY OF MACRO-WINDOW 4

MACRO-WINDOW 4
TIME IS NOT WHAT IT WAS

Introduction
The approach by a culture or social group to time is more important than we are inclined to think.

In the ancient Mediterranean world people preferred to live in the present. Eight out of every ten people were very poor and lived from day to day. In any case, they worked almost the whole day to earn enough to buy food (in Mt 20:1-16 mention is made of a 12-hour working day in which manual work was done.) For the people the present included much more than it does for us. To us the present is the seconds on the watch, ticking away. Ancient Mediterranean man saw the present as something which flowed into and was part of the past and the future. If something was, for some reason, at the point of happening, it was already experienced as part of the present. The past is also clearly rooted in the experiences of the present.

Neither was time measured with timepieces, but with relation to important people. 
*The time of important people was always the right time.*

When we remember that there are a great many references to time in the New Testament and that the New Testament mentions many things that are to happen or had happened, it is important to know how the Mediterranean people approached time. Misunderstandings in reading the Bible can easily develop, because modern man’s approach differs much from the approach of ancient Mediterranean man.
WINDOW 24
WHAT HAPPENED TO MY WATCH?
Joy and Hannah, Joachim’s wife, went to Sepphoris for the day. The town was much larger than the village of Nazareth. Hannah was constantly talking about what the city had been through in the past. Hannah also knew exactly in which important person’s time a statue was erected or a building raised. Joy felt a little ashamed, for she did not know her history half as well as Hannah. She could more or less date certain buildings, but who the prime minister was at the time she did not know at all, for what did that have to do with buildings?

Even though it seemed as if Hannah had all the time in the world – it was already half past three when they went to have lunch – she suddenly began hurrying just before sunset. Joy still wanted to visit a pleasant little shop that sold the prettiest table mats, but Hannah dragged her away. They had to go home immediately. After a mad rush in the car they had just stepped into the house, when the sun went down.

*It had been a lovely day, although Joy did wish she could buy Hannah a watch to help her organize her time better.*

MEANING OF THE WINDOW
A CALENDAR, NOT ON PAPER, BUT IN NATURE
Joy was right. Hannah did not possess a watch and that indeed meant that she – and all the people in the Mediterranean area – did not view *time* as we do. Because we have watches, we are much more aware of time and we are also much more specific about it.

The circumstances of the time make it easier to understand how and why time was once seen so differently from now.

Ancient man did not own a watch. Neither was it necessary in everyday situations to measure time exactly. Save for a few sundials here and there (certainly not on every person’s arm or even on every corner), people depended on nature to help them with the rhythm of their programmes. *External matters* like sunsets (Mt 14:15), or sunrises (Mt 28:1), the position of the moon and the sun, were the ways in which people read
time (see Mt 24:32). Time was also read internally, as when one became hungry or sleepy. This meant that time was not very exact, and this had an influence on how people thought about it. We find very few indications of time in the New Testament – even in Paul’s or Luke the historian’s writings. This underlines the other mentality of the ancient Mediterranean man; time was not such an exact subject.

Uniformity in people’s attitude towards time did not exist. The days were divided up differently by different groups. For the Romans a new day started at midnight, while for a Jew it started at sunset. This makes interpretation difficult in the time of the New Testament. If the sixth hour is mentioned, according to what time schedule should it be judged? (See Jn 4:6 in which it could be six at night or twelve noon.)

Yet we must not think that there were no time schedules. Especially the Romans learned a lot about measuring time. For military purposes the day was carefully divided into parts. We also read of the time units of three hours in which a day was allotted for the sake of watchmen (Lk 12:38; Acts 3:1; Mt 20:1-9; 27:45). In the story of the labourers who were hired at different times of the day, we even read of an eleventh hour (Matt 20:6). The new translation speaks of five o’clock (17:00). Here the Jewish time scale – the Jews counted their hours from sunrise, has been adapted to our modern one. Therefore our nine o’clock is their third hour, our twelve o’clock is their sixth hour). The eleventh hour shows that the Jews could make fine distinctions in time if it became necessary. Yet Matthew 20:6 is the only place in the New Testament where the eleventh hour is spoken of so exactly. In the parable this subtle reference to time has, naturally, an important function, and that is why it is special in the context. Of days they kept more accurate record, as in Acts (see 21:27; 24:1; 25:1). The sun helped them to do this.

Joy had no call to feel ashamed at Hannah’s knowledge of historical names. For Hannah it was important to remember everything. Events were her calendar, because in Jesus’ time there was no uniform almanac. When you wanted to say when a thing had happened, you mentioned the names of important people as an aid to say more or less when it had taken place. In our time older people still talk about the great depression or the big flu. Luke 1:5 starts with the words: In the time of Herod, King of Judea … (See Lk 2:1-2; 3:1). Neither does Luke keep an accurate
calendar when he describes the life of Jesus. He talks about Once … (Lk 5:1); One day … (Lk 5:12); On one of those days … (5:17); One Sabbath … (6:1) and so on. Matthew also talks about early in the morning or late in the afternoon (Mt 27:1 and 57 – he does not say exactly how late). These references are not vague because the Evangelists wanted it that way, but reflect the habit common to the ancients of not keeping time very accurately. When a thing happened was not so important. Rather, it was important that it had happened. This fact tells us much about how the Gospel was written, and how we should read it.

When Joy thought hard about the rush homeward she realized: this is Friday afternoon. The Sabbath starts at sunset! With that another important facet of the Mediterranean people’s approach to time was brought to the fore. Their lives were mainly regulated and controlled by holy times. Especially the Sabbath and feast days were important. Then they conducted themselves in a special way. We could say that the day took control of their lives. It became a master controlling man. That was why Jesus criticized the Jewish view of the Sabbath and said that the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath (Mk 2:27-28). Feasts and other holy times were indeed important for the lives of the people; this we can see when John in his Gospel uses feasts to give us our bearings (Jn 2:13,23; 5:1; 7:2; 10:22; 11:55; 12:1; 13:1 in most of the cases he also uses the symbolism of the feast to underline his message).

WINDOW 25
TIME TO LEARN SOMETHING ABOUT TIME
After all the hospitality they had enjoyed, Jack and Joy decided to hold a reception. They decided on a barbecue. Invitations were sent out for just after sundown.

It was a frustrating experience. Jack saw to it that the meat was ready just after sundown and at the same time Joy took her stuffed potatoes out of the oven, but the guests arrived in fits and starts. As late as ten o’ clock the last one made an appearance. By then Jack’s meat was tough and Joy’s potatoes were cold and hard. They felt about as bad as the food tasted.
Could people not make an appointment and stick to it? It seemed to them as if the first century Mediterranean people felt differently about time than we do today.

MEANING OF THE WINDOW

IMPORTANT PERSONS ARE TIME

As we have said, in the Mediterranean world of the first century people’s approach to time was quite different from ours. They thought about time in a less exact way than we do with our accurate watches. An hour or two either way did not matter much then. *After sundown* could mean anything between sunset and bedtime. That may have been the reason why it was the custom in ancient times to invite people and then, if you were ready, to send a messenger to go and call them (see Lk 14:16). *Appointments* were seen in quite a different light from what we are used to. If Joy and Jack had only but known!

Station and position was also important in the society of the time. That was probably the reason why *time* was connected to the importance of a person. The inferior could not hurry the VIP nor bind him to a time. The distance between people was too great for that. Even the father of the house could not be hurried in this way, for the authority to make decisions lay with him. The subordinates had to wait until the important person decided to do something. It was his right and privilege to keep people waiting. When he decided that the time was *now*, then *now* meant *in time*. Thus there was a much vaguer concept of time in the society of the first century.

The time mode in the ancient Mediterranean world can therefore be described as *event time*, in the sense that time for something was ripe at the moment that it happened or when the important person made it happen.

That is why we do not read of *specific appointments* in the New Testament, but we do read of *intentions which are a little more circumscribed than usual* (see Jas 4:13-17). Paul lets the Romans know that he will go to visit them, but does not mention a day or a time (Rom 15:24; note the vagueness in 2 Jn 12; 3 Jn 13; *before winter* – 2 Tim 4:21; Tit 3:12; Jesus does not tell his disciples exactly when the Spirit is coming; they just have to go and wait in Jerusalem – Acts 1:4-5).
Closely connected to this is the fact that the Lord does not tell us when He will come again. He only says that we have to be patient and watchful (see Mt 24:43-44, 25:13; Jas 5:8), in other words, we do have to show that we take God’s intention to come, or his promise, seriously by being ready for the event. This is event time, in other words, it will happen when the time is right.

Why the Son says that He does not know the time of the second coming is naturally a very difficult question to answer (Mt 24:36). The ancient view of time, however, presents us with a possible and intriguing solution. The VIP decides when what will happen. Jesus is not showing ignorance, He is showing how important the Father is. If Jesus or the angels could bind the Father to a time, He had to be greater than the Father indeed!

We cannot tell God when to come. He will decide for Himself; it is the right of an important person to do that with an appointment. When the disciples ask Jesus about the reconstruction of the kingdom of Israel, Jesus answers that it is not for them to know when that will happen, for God has to determine the time for it. The same reply is given to the martyrs under the altar in Revelation 6:10-11. God does not allow himself to be bound to a time (contrary to what many people would like), but binds the time to Himself. He decides what happens when. This may be the background for the assertion that one day is like a thousand and vice versa (2 Pet 3:8), because God is greater and higher than time in the sense that He does not allow Himself to be bound to it. In the next verse (2 Pet 3:9) it is indeed said that God does not postpone his promise (and break it in the process), but in his mercy He decides that the time is not yet ripe. Thus we live within God’s appointment time. We can only see to it that we are ready (Rev 22:20; Mk 13:33-37). The vagueness about the second coming exactly confirms the general attitudes to time in the Mediterranean world of the first century.

Something that can possibly be seen in this context is the “exegesis” by the writer of Hebrews (Heb 3:7) of Psalm 95:7. He quotes the psalm which mentions today as the time when God warns his people to obey Him. As long as there is a today, the believers have to exhort each other to remain faithful to Him (Heb 3:13). This today, however, is not just one day, but a period of time – for as long as God determines
that it is *today or the right time*. (Note 2 Cor 6:1-2.) God is not the subordinate of time (see 2 Pet 3:8), and decides how long *today* will be.

The same authority over time and history is reflected in Revelation. After the heavenly glory which God promises has been described, Revelation 21:6 states, *It has already happened. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End.* God is above time; time is his subordinate. Thus he can, as in Revelation 21:6, *reach ahead* in time in divine prophetic fulfillment.

The control God or an important person has over time, in other words, that *the important person is the time* and not the other way around, is also seen in the handling of time in the Gospel according to John. There the *hour* is often mentioned, and usually refers to the death of Jesus. Jesus knows whether his hour has come or not (Jn 2:4; 7:6; 13:1; 17:1), which in the ancient Mediterranean concept of time shows that Jesus and his Father are in control.

This certainly did not mean that ancient man could do as he pleased and that there were no limits to time. *Appointments* were then more vague than those we make today, but there were limits. Note the trouble Paul was in when he changed his mind about visiting the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 1:15-17. His line of defence was that God, who is greater than man, determined his time schedule and that the Corinthians should not draw the wrong conclusions about his loyalty to them as a group (see Lk 14:21). And the host did become angry when his guests stayed away from the feast, although he had not fixed a time. Yet it is assumed that there were limits within which the invited guests had to be ready for the host’s message that everything was set for the feast. This could also be the context of 2 Peter 3:9, where Peter is careful not to make it sound as if God has put off his promise to come again, which would mean that God will not fulfill his intention.

The story about the *tardy bridegroom* and the ten virgins is also a good illustration of this idea of time (Mt 25:1-13). The bridegroom did not tell his bride exactly when he would come. Yet she knew the *limits* – somewhere in the night. It was also typical of a bridegroom to take his time. It was his right as the central social person at the
wedding. He would then always be in time, for when he came it was in time. The story also shows that when the bridegroom comes, all who come after are late.

WINDOW 26
PROBLEMS! WHAT NOW?
Jack was amazed. Joachim differed from one of his friends, Moishe, about how a matter had to be understood. They fell into a serious argument, but it was more about what had been the custom with their parents and forebears, rather than an attempt to find a solution. When Moses and Abraham were also drawn into the argument, Jack felt that this was a bit much. After all, these were two adults who could think for themselves; they were living their own lives then and not in the past. He felt he had to help to get the conversation back on track. He chose his words carefully and showed them the consequences of their conduct, especially for the future. Jack felt afterwards that he had really summed up the problem and had presented them with a good solution with an eye to the future.

Yet their reaction amazed him. The other two looked at Jack in surprise, without saying a word, for a moment or two. Then, as if they had not heard him at all, they fell to arguing again.

Well then let them argue until they reach Adam under the tree! Jack thought, but it did not help him to shake off the feeling that he had made a very stupid remark in their eyes.

MEANING OF THE WINDOW
PRESENT, THEN PAST, THEN FUTURE!
We have already seen that time was viewed as event time. The time for something to happen was when it happened. That was why the people were people of the present. For them that day, the present, was the most important time. What was happening then was reality. When we think about it, we see that modern man has a quite different approach. We live for the future. We plan in detail; if we attain something, we look ahead to the next step; we live for our holiday in three weeks’ time, and so on. Matthew 6:34 reflects something of the mind of ancient man: Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Live in and for today!
When tomorrow becomes today, you can worry about how you will tackle the problems at hand. In any case, you already have today’s worries. Do not tackle tomorrow’s problems as well. Take each day as it comes. (This was wise counsel in a society where eight out of every ten people lived under the breadline and could not be sure that they would have wages enough to buy food.) However, in Matthew 6:25-34 Jesus says we are in God’s care. He is the one who decides about our future and our present, as is written in James 4:13-17. With this attitude, Jesus says, you have to pray for your daily bread (Mt 6:11).

Mediterranean man was therefore someone who strongly bound himself to the present. That was most important. Then the past followed. The past, however, directly influenced the present. Only after that the future became relevant, when the emphasis would be placed even more on the past. Yet this did not mean that the present was not the most important point in time for ancient Mediterranean man.

What happened when the problems in the present became so great that you did not know how to proceed? The answer was simple: search the past. The light from the past clarified the present. The past was the testing ground for the present. There the forebears of the people now living had struggled with life. Human nature, after all, remained the same and God extends across time. We could say that ancient man stood with his face to the past and his back to the future. This meant that he constantly had to measure his identity, all that happened to him, his conduct, and right and wrong, by what had happened in the past. That determined his present and bore him into the future. It was like a ship filling its sails with the winds of the past.

No wonder that Joachim and Moishe were so interested in the past. There lay their tradition of right and wrong. They had to steer their lives according to what they saw there. Moses was the important giver of the law, under which the Jews included the traditions (Jn 1:17; 7:22-23) and Abraham was the patriarch. If something could be taken back to Moses or Abraham, the problem was solved, for they were the forebears of Joachim and Moishe alike. Jack understood nothing of all this and that was why the two looked at him so strangely. Paul, however, understood it well. In Galatians 3-4 he uses Abraham as an important part of his argument. If Abraham
could be saved by faith, without the law (which only came afterwards, in Moses' time) then surely the same would be possible for us (Gal 3:6-7; see Rom 4).

Closely related to this was genealogy. Because the past was so important, someone's past, his genealogy, said much about him. That is why genealogy (family trees) was so important. In Matthew 1:1-17 the family tree of Jesus is taken back to father Abraham, and in Luke 3:23-28 back to Adam, the son of God. By looking at your past you knew who you were in the present and how you had to act then. With his family tree the Jesus' descent was gloriously and firmly written in the past. In the Gospel of John, the ignorant Jews refer to Jesus' humble origins in Nazareth (Jn 1:46), in Galilee (7:52), and as being only the son of Joseph and Mary (Jn 1:45; 6:42; Lk 3:23; Mt 13:55-56 par). The Jews' surprise stemmed from the fact that Jesus was breaking away from his past by what He said and did.

Often tenets or laws are referred to as old, as when John in his first letter writes of the old law the believers have been taught (1 Jn 2:7; cf also Mt 5:21,33). Moses had given laws from of old (Acts 15:21) and that is why they could not be queried. (The old serpent, Satan, was, of course, also there from of old – Rev 12:9; 20:2. This did not mean that he was good, but that the past had clearly shown what kind of being he really is.) Jack did not realize that the past was so important in the ancient world. (Today when someone says that there is an old book on a subject, we usually understand it in a negative way. Things are simply developing too fast for us to hold on to old knowledge.)

The important role which the fulfillment of parts of the Old Testament play in the New Testament, was also linked to people's ideas about present and past. The quotations from the past have to clarify what happens in the present. Because the past and present are on a continuum, the past throws light on the present. If something happens now, the past is the framework within which the present can and must be explained. The present is therefore important in the light of the past (Acts 3:17-20; 1 Pet 1:10-12). Note how often it is said in Matthew 1 and 2 that the word was fulfilled (Mt 1:23; 2:5, 15, 18, 23). This is what is meant in 2 Timothy 3:16 when Paul says that Scripture is God-breathe so that we can direct our lives according to it. (See also Jn 5:39.)
The idea that God has always been there, is still there, and will be in the future, is the warranty for the bond between present and past. In Revelation 1:4, 8; 4:8 it is said (note the order) that He is the one who is, who was, and who is to come. In Revelation 11:17 and 16:5 the reference to the future is left out, because the future is determined by the present and the past. Herein also lies the essence of Christian hope. Christian hope is not something which lies primarily in the future. The effects of hope do lie in the future, but its roots and certainty are in the past. If the Christian asks why he has hope for the future, he has to look at the past. The programme for the future has been written into the past. In this programme, as Revelation presents it, Jesus has already attained victory; He has already clinched our participation in the New Jerusalem. We as modern people bind hope only to the future, but then hope becomes uncertain, without foundation, just as someone might say: “I hope it rains tomorrow”, yet he has no certainty about the matter. Christian hope is never uncertain, for it is firmly anchored in the events of the past. Paul tells the Colossians that their hope is safe in heaven with God. Therefore, as certainly as God is there and keeps his promises, so with much certainty they can hope for eternal life (see also Col 3:3-4; Eph 1:18; 1 Pet 1:3-4; Heb 6:18).

Hebrews 11:1-12:3 is probably one of the loveliest images in the New Testament. Among other things it expresses this certainty of hope because hope is firmly anchored in the past. The believer is shown the whole crowd of believers in the past who have already run the course. The most important person in this crowd is Jesus Himself. By taking strength from the example of heroes of the faith in the past, the believer can continue his struggle in the present. In this way the past interprets the believer’s present and makes his struggle in faith more bearable.

The shoe can also be put on the other foot. In Jude and 2 Peter 2 people are reminded of how God punished wicked people and wicked angels in the past. The past shows what God does to the godless. The people who are now behaving so wickedly should note what happened to the godless in the past!

That is why the New Testament has a verb tense which we can call the coming present or the realized future. Something which has yet to happen is spoken of as if it has already happened. After all, what is to happen in the future have already been
written into the present and the past – for Christians, especially in the life of Jesus. In Revelation 21:6 it is written about the New Jerusalem and all that goes with it, *It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega* (see Rev 16:17). Ancient Mediterranean man was very aware of the future, but it was a future clarified by the events of the present and the past.

Here we also find the basic premise of apocalyptic (the expectation of the future) as it is found in Revelation. When Jews (and Christians) began to suffer, they judged their situation in the light of the past. The past taught them that God does not fail his people. That is why problems in the present were seen as temporary. Some time or other God would come (in the future), bringing glory and salvation (see Phil 1:6). The history of the people of God (and especially the cross of Jesus for the Christians) proved that God would not forget his people. Because the past has spoken, the believers could expect something in the future. It is not strange that there are more allusions to the Old Testament in Revelation than there are verses in the letter – indeed, the events in the present and the future lie rooted in the past. (Note how Paul uses the events of the past to encourage the believers who are facing the present and the future in Rom 8:31-39.)

A lovely story is recorded in Luke 24:13-35 and it reflects the attitude of Mediterranean man in this connection. Two of Jesus’ apostles are on their way to Emmaus after Jesus has been crucified. They are earnestly discussing the things that have happened in Jerusalem. In Luke 24:21 they say they once hoped that Jesus would save Israel. Now He has failed them! But although they have apparently been wrong to put all their hope on Jesus, yet God will save Israel, even though He will not do it through Jesus. The rumour about the resurrection also upset them, and did not convince them of anything. And why? They have not linked these things with what is written in Scripture. The past has not spoken to them yet. Then Jesus starts with Moses and the prophets (it reminds us of Joachim and Moishe), and shows them all that is relevant to his life. After that, they too can talk about seeing the Lord. In the light of the past (the Scriptures), the strange events surrounding the crucifixion in Jerusalem start making sense to them. The quotations from the Old Testament and the fulfillments were of the greatest importance to ancient Mediterranean man. The Old Testament is indeed the pillars on which the New Testament is built.
SUMMARY OF MACRO-WINDOW 4
ON THE ROAD OF THE PRESENT THROUGH THE PAST TO THE FUTURE

Ancient Mediterranean man focused mainly on the present. He had to survive from day to day. The past was a mirror held up to the present. If problems came, they were solved in the light of the past. That is why the Scriptures, prophecies, and genealogy were so important. Although people were aware of the future, it was not so important.

For modern man the future, and good planning, is very important. He wants to know exactly what is going to happen. Ancient Mediterranean man was not so tied to time. Appointments were much less exact and punctuality in the modern sense did not exist. Time was measured by the conduct of important people. It did not pay to be hasty or impatient. Planning was not greatly valued. The future was experienced in the present. Tomorrow would be tackled when it arrived. If you wanted to build a tower, you would make sure you had enough materials in the present. Our faith and hope are based on the fact that Jesus paid for all our sins, and therefore we can now live in the certainty of having eternal life.
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The Acts of Thecla

“The Acts of Paul and Thecla (Acta Pauli et Theclae) is an apocryphal story of Paul's influence on a young virgin named Thecla. It is one of the writings of the New Testament Apocrypha. It was written in the second century. The discovery of a Coptic text of the Acts of Paul containing the Thecla narrative suggests that the abrupt opening of the Acts of Paul and Thecla is due to its being an excerpt of that larger work. It is attested as early as Tertullian, De bapistero 17:5 (c 190), who inveighed against its use in the advocacy of a woman's right to preach and to baptize. Tertullian states that these Acts were written in honour of St Paul, by a presbyter of Asia, whose fraud was identified, and he was degraded from his office, at a date about 160 CE. Many surviving versions of the Acts of Paul and Thecla in Greek, and some in Coptic, as well as references to the work among Church fathers show that it was widely disseminated. In the Eastern Church, the wide circulation of the Acts of Paul and Thecla in Greek, Syriac and Armenian is evidence of the veneration of Thecla of Iconium. There are also Latin, Coptic and Ethiopic versions, sometimes differing widely from the Greek. “In the Ethiopic, with the omission of Thecla's admitted claim to preach and to baptize, half the point of the story is lost.”

The author sets this story about Paul into the framework of the Book of Acts, but this text is ideologically different from the New Testament portrayal of Paul. The extravagant praise of virginity, however, was a running thread in many brands of Early Christianity. Here, Paul is described as travelling to Iconium, proclaiming “the word of God about abstinence and the resurrection”. Paul is given a full physical description that may reflect oral tradition: in the Syriac text “he was a man of middling size, and his hair was scanty, and his legs were a little crooked, and his knees were projecting, and he had large eyes and his eyebrows met, and his nose was somewhat long, and he was full of grace and mercy; at one time he seemed like a man, and at another time he seemed like an angel.” Paul gave his sermons in the house of Onesiphorus in a series of beatitudes, by which Thecla, a young noble virgin, listened to Paul's “discourse on virginity” from her window in an adjacent house. She listened, enraptured, without moving for days. Thecla's mother and
fiancé, Thamyris, became concerned that Thecla would follow Paul's demand “that one must fear only one God and live in chastity”, and they formed a mob to drag Paul to the governor, who imprisoned the apostle. Thecla bribed a guard to gain entrance to the prison, and sat at Paul's feet all night listening to his teaching and “kissing his bonds”. When her family found her, both she and Paul were again brought before the governor. At her mother's request, Paul was sentenced to scourging and expulsion, and Thecla to be killed by being burned at the stake, that “all the women who have been taught by this man may be afraid.” Stripped naked, Thecla was put on the fire, but she was saved by a miraculous storm which God sent to put out the flames. Reunited, Paul and Thecla then traveled to Pisidian Antioch, where a nobleman named Alexander desired Thecla and offered Paul money for her. Paul claimed not to know her, and Alexander then attempted to take Thecla by force. Thecla fought him off, assaulting him in the process, to the amusement of the townspeople. Alexander dragged her before the governor for assaulting a nobleman and, despite the protests of the city's women, Thecla was sentenced to be eaten by wild beasts. To ensure that her virtue was intact at her death, a Queen Tryphaena, took her into protective custody overnight. Thecla was tied to a fierce lioness, and paraded through the city. She was then stripped and thrown to beasts, which were provided by Alexander. The women of the city again protested against the injustice. Thecla was protected from death, first by the lioness who fought off the other beasts, and then by a series of miracles (during which she appeared to baptize herself), until finally the women of the city and Queen Tryphaena intervened. Thecla returned to Paul unharmed. One ending describes Thecla as dwelling in a cave for the next 72 years, then traveling to Rome to be buried with Paul."

Appendix 2

3 Corinthians
The Third Epistle to the Corinthians is believed to be a pseudepigraphical text under the name of Paul of Tarsus. It is also found in the Acts of Paul, and was framed as Paul's response to the Epistle of the Corinthians to Paul. The earliest extant copy is Bodmer Papyri X. In the West it was not considered canonical in the 4th century CE, becoming part of the New Testament apocrypha. In the East, in the Syriac Orthodox Church, Aphrahat (c 340) treated it as canonical and Ephraem of Syria (died 373) apparently accepted it as canonical, for he wrote a commentary on it. The Doctrine of Addai includes it, however it was not included in the Syriac Peshitta translation of the Bible (but nor were 2-3 John, 2 Peter, Jude, or Revelation, which are almost universally recognized as canonical). Although part of the Oskan Armenian Bible of 1666, it was in an Appendix to the Zohrab Armenian Bible of 1805 which follows the Vulgate canon, and it is not currently considered part of the Armenian Orthodox New Testament. It was not part of the canon list of Anania Shirakatsi in the 7th century but is part of the canon lists of Mechitar of Ayrivank` in the 13th and Gregory Tat`ew in the 14th. The text is structured as an attempt to correct alleged misinterpretations of the earlier First and Second Epistle to the Corinthians of which the author (usually called “pseudo-Paul”) has become aware due to the (similarly dubious) Epistle of the Corinthians to Paul. According to the preceding part of the Acts of Paul, when the letter was written Paul was in prison, on account of Stratonice, the wife of Apollonian. In particular the epistle seeks to correct the interpretation of the phrase “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God” by which some taught that the resurrection of the dead could not be physical. Gnostics were known for quoting this part of 1 Corinthians, infuriating Christians such as Irenaeus who wished to claim that the dead were physically, rather than spiritually, resurrected. Irenaeus remarked “All heretics always quote this passage”. It is thought that the argument of the Gnostics won so much ground that some orthodox Christians felt the need to forge 3 Corinthians to counter them. According to the Catholic Encyclopedia

The ancient Syrian (Edessene) Church revered as canonical a Third Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians, which is accompanied by a letter from the pastors of that Church, to which it is an answer. But about the beginning of the fifth century the Syrian Church fell under the influence of the Greek, and in
consequence the spurious letter gradually lost its canonical status. It was taken up by the neighboring Armenians and for centuries has formed a part of the Armenian New Testament. Latin and Greek writers are completely silent about this pseudograph, although Greek and Latin copies have been found. It was obviously suggested by the lost genuine Pauline letter referred to in I Cor. v, 9; vii, 1. It was composed by a Catholic presbyter about 160-170, and is a disguised attack on some of the leading errors of Gnosticism. This correspondence long had an independent circulation, but recently it has been proved that the document was incorporated into the Acts of St. Paul (q.v.).

(see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Third_Epistle_to_the_Corinthians)
Appendix 3

The Epistle of Barnabas

The *Epistle of Barnabas* is a Greek treatise with some features of an epistle containing twenty-one chapters, preserved complete in the 4th century *Codex Sinaiticus* where it appears at the end of the New Testament. It is traditionally ascribed to Barnabas who is mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles, though some ascribe it to another Apostolic Father of the same name, a “Barnabas of Alexandria“, or simply attribute it to an unknown early Christian teacher. A form of the *Epistle* 850 lines long is noted in the Latin list of canonical works in the 6th century *Codex Claromontanus*. It is not to be confused with the Gospel of Barnabas. The most complete text is in the *Codex Sinaiticus* (= S; 4th century) and the *Codex Hierosolymitanus* (= H; 11th century), which are usually in agreement on variant readings. A truncated form of the text in which Polycarp’s *Epistle to the Philippians* 1.1-9.2 continues with Barnabas 5.7a and following, without any indication of the transition, survives in nine Greek manuscripts (= G; from 11th century onward) and often agrees with the old Latin translation (= L) against S and H.

1. Until 1843 eight manuscripts, all derived from a common source (G), were known in Western European libraries: none of them contained chapters 1 to chapter 5.7a.

2. The 4th century *Codex Sinaiticus*, in which the Epistle and the Shepherd of Hermas follow the canonical books of the New Testament, contains a more complete manuscript of the text, which is independent of the preceding group of texts.

3. The 11th century *Codex Hierosolymitanus* (“Jerusalem Codex” – relocated from Constantinople), which includes the Didache, is another witness to the full text. This Greek manuscript was discovered by Philotheos Bryennios at Constantinople in 1873, and Adolf Hilgenfeld used it for his edition in 1877.

4. There is also an old Latin version of the first seventeen chapters (the Two Ways section in chapters 18 to 21 is not present) which dates, perhaps, to no later than the end of the 4th century and is preserved in a single 9th century manuscript (St Petersburg, Q.v.I.39). This is a fairly literal rendering in general (but sometimes significantly shorter than the Greek as well), often agreeing with the family G manuscripts. There are also brief citations from the Epistle in the
writings of Clement of Alexandria, and a few fragments of the Two Ways
Material in Syriac and elsewhere.

Toward the end of the second century Clement of Alexandria cites the Epistle. It is
also appealed to by Origen of Alexandria. Eusebius, the first major church historian,
however, recorded objection to it, see Antilegomena, and ultimately the epistle
disappeared from the appendix to the New Testament, or rather the appendix
disappeared with the epistle. In the West the epistle never enjoyed canonical
authority (though it stands beside the Epistle of James in the Latin manuscripts). In
the East, the Stichometry of Nicephorus, the list appended by the 9th century
Patriarch of Jerusalem to his Chronography, lists the Epistle of Barnabas in a
secondary list, of books that are antilegomena – “disputed” – along with the
Revelation of John, the Revelation of Peter and the Gospel of the Hebrews. The first
editor of the epistle, Hugo Menardus (1645) advocated the genuineness of its
ascription to Barnabas, but the opinion today is that Barnabas was not the author.
Many scholars today believe it was probably written in the years 70 – 131, and
addressed to Christian Gentiles. In 16.3-4, the Epistle reads: “Furthermore he says
again, ‘Behold, those who tore down this temple will themselves build it.’ It is
happening. For because of their fighting it was torn down by the enemies. And now
the very servants of the enemies will themselves rebuild it.” This passage clearly
places Barnabas after the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE. But it also
places Barnabas before the Bar Kochba Revolt of 132 CE, after which there could
have been no hope that the Romans would help to rebuild the temple. The document
must come from the period between the two revolts. The place of origin remains an
open question, although the Greek-speaking Eastern Mediterranean appears most
probable (Treat). Although the work is not gnostic in a heterodox sense, the author,
who considers himself to be a teacher to the unidentified audience to which he writes
(see e g, 9.9), intends to impart to his readers the perfect gnosis (special
knowledge), that they may perceive that the Christians are the only true covenant
people, and that the Jewish people had never been in a covenant with God. His
polemics are, above all, directed against Judaizing Christians (see Ebionites,
Nazarenes, Judaizing teachers). In no other writing of that early time is the
separation of the Gentile Christians from observant Jews so clearly insisted upon.
The covenant promises, he maintains, belong only to the Christians (e g, 4.6-8), and
circumcision, and the entire Jewish sacrificial and ceremonial system are, according to him, due to misunderstanding. According to the author's conception, Jewish scriptures, rightly understood, contain no such injunctions (chapters 9-10). He is a thorough opponent to Jewish legalism, but by no means an antinomist. At some points the Epistle seems quite Pauline, as with its concept of atonement. It is likely that, due to the resurgence of Judaism in the early second century, and the tolerance of the emperor Hadrian, Christians, such as the text's author, felt a need to resist Jewish influences polemically. In this case, the author seems to aim to demonstrate that Jewish understanding of the Mosaic legislation (Torah) is completely incorrect and can now be considered superseded, since in the author's view the Jewish scriptures foreshadowed Jesus and Christianity when rightly understood.

The author quotes liberally from the Old Testament, including the apocryphal books. He quotes from the New Testament gospels twice (4:14, 5:9), and is in general agreement with the New Testament presentation of salvation-history. He quotes material resembling 4 Esdras (12.1) and 1 Enoch (4.3; 16.5), which did not become part of the Biblical canon except in some traditions (e.g. 1 Enoch is considered scriptural in the Ethiopian church). The closing Two Ways section (chapters 18-21), see also Didache, which contains a series of moral injunctions, presents "another gnosis and teaching" (18.1) in relation to the body of the epistle, and its connection to the latter has given rise to much discussion.

(see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epistle_of_Barnabas)
Appendix 4

The Apocalypse of Peter

The recovered Apocalypse of Peter or Revelation of Peter is an example of a simple, popular early Christian text of the second century; it is an example of Apocalyptic literature with Hellenistic overtones. The text is extant in two incomplete versions of a lost Greek original, one Koine Greek, and an Ethiopic version, which diverge considerably. The Greek manuscript was unknown at first hand until it was discovered during excavations directed by Sylvain Grébaut during the 1886-1887 season in a desert necropolis at Akhmim in Upper Egypt. The fragment consisted of parchment leaves of the Greek version that had been carefully deposited in the grave of a Christian monk of the eighth or ninth century. The manuscript is in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo. The Ethiopic version was discovered in 1910. Before that, the work had been known only through copious quotes in early Christian writings. In addition, some common lost source had been necessary to account for closely parallel passages in such apocalyptic literature as the (Christian) Apocalypse of Esdras, the Vision of Paul, and the Passion of Saint Perpetua. The terminus post quem – the point after which the Apocalypse of Peter was written – is revealed by its use of 4 Esdras, which was written about 100 CE; it is used in Chapter 3 of the Apocalypse. The intellectually simple Apocalypse of Peter, with its Hellenistic Greek overtones, belongs to the same genre as the Clementine literature that was popular in Alexandria. Like the Clementine literature, the Apocalypse of Peter was written for a popular audience and had a wide readership. The Muratorian fragment, the earliest existing list of canonic sacred writings of the New Testament, which is assigned on internal evidence to the last quarter of the second century (175-200), gives a list of works read in the Christian churches that is similar to the modern accepted canon; however, it also includes the Apocalypse of Peter. The Muratorian fragment states: “the Apocalypses also of John and Peter only do we receive, which some among us would not have read in church.” The Muratorian fragment is ambiguous whether both books of Revelations were meant as not received, or just Peter's. The Apocalypse of Peter is framed as a discourse of the Risen Christ to his faithful, offering a vision first of heaven, and then of hell, granted to Peter. In the form of a nekyia it goes into elaborate detail about the punishment in hell for each type of crime, later to be
depicted by Hieronymus Bosch, and the pleasures given in heaven for each virtue. In heaven, in the vision,
People have pure milky white skin, curly hair, and are generally beautiful
The earth blooms with everlasting flowers and spices
People wear shiny clothes made of light, like the angels
Everyone sings in choral prayer

The punishments in the vision each closely correspond to the past sinful actions in a version of the Jewish notion of lex talionis, an “eye for an eye”, that the punishment may fit the crime. Some of the punishments in hell according to the vision include:

- Blasphemers are hung by the tongue.
- Women who “adorn” themselves for the purpose of adultery, are hung by the hair over a bubbling mire. The men that had adulterous relationships with them are hung by their feet, with their heads in the mire, next to them).
- Murderers and those that give consent to murder are set in a pit of creeping things that torment them.
- Men who take on the role of women in a sexual way, and lesbians, are “driven” up a great cliff by punishing angels, and are “cast off” to the bottom. Then they are forced up it, over and over again, ceaselessly, to their doom.
- Women who have abortions are set in a lake formed from the blood and gore from all the other punishments, up to their necks. They are also tormented by the spirits of their unborn children, who shoot a “flash of fire” into their eyes.
- Incidentally, those unborn children are “delivered to a care-taking” angel by whom they are educated, and “made to grow up.”
- Those who lend money and demand “usury upon usury” stand up to their knees in a lake of foul matter and blood.

The Revelation of Peter shows remarkable kinship in ideas with the Second Epistle of Peter. It also presents notable parallels to the Sibylline Oracles while its influence has been conjectured, almost with certainty, in the Acts of Perpetua and the visions narrated in the Acts of Thomas and the History of Barlaam and Josaphat. It certainly was one of the sources from which the writer of the Vision of Paul drew. And directly or indirectly it may be regarded as the parent of all the mediaeval visions of the other
world.” The Gospel parables of the budding fig tree and the barren fig tree, partly selected from the parousia of Matthew 24, appear only in the Ethiopic version (ch 2). The two parables are joined, and the setting “in the summer” has been transferred to “the end of the world”, in a detailed allegory in which the tree becomes Israel and the flourishing shoots, Jews who have adopted Jesus as Messiah and achieve martyrdom. There is also a highly contentious section which explains that in the end God will save all sinners from their plight in Hell: “My Father will give unto them all the life, the glory, and the kingdom that passeth not away, ... It is because of them that have believed in me that I am come. It is also because of them that have believed in me, that, at their word, I shall have pity on men... “Thus, sinners will finally be saved by the prayers of those in heaven. Peter then orders his son Clement not to speak of this revelation since God had told Peter to keep it secret: [and God said]”... thou must not tell that which thou hearest unto the sinners lest they transgress the more, and sin. Clement of Alexandria considered the Apocalypse of Peter to be Holy Scripture. Eusebius, Historia Ecclesiae (VI.14.1), described a work of Clement's that gave “abridged accounts of all the canonical Scriptures, not even omitting those that are disputed, I mean the book of Jude and the other general epistles. Also the Epistle of Barnabas and that called the Revelation of Peter.” So the work must have existed in the first half of the second century, which is also the commonly accepted date of the canonic Second Epistle of Peter.[9] Although the numerous references to it attest to its being once in wide circulation, the Apocalypse of Peter was ultimately not accepted into the Christian canon.

The Gnostic Apocalypse of Peter

The Gnostic Apocalypse of Peter, not to be confused with the Apocalypse of Peter, is a text found amongst the Nag Hammadi library, and part of the New Testament apocrypha. Like the vast majority of texts in the Nag Hammadi collection, it is heavily gnostic. It was probably written around 100-200 CE. Since the surviving text, although likely to have been translated from an original Greek version, is in Coptic, it is also known as the Coptic Apocalypse of Peter. The text takes gnostic interpretations of the crucifixion to the extreme, picturing Jesus as laughing and warning against people who cleave to the name of a dead man, thinking they shall become pure. The text disagrees with the Orthodox Church's doctrine of Salvation. According to this text: “He whom you saw on the tree, glad and laughing, this is the living Jesus. But this one into whose hands and feet they drive the nails is his fleshly part, which is the substitute being put to shame, the one who came into being in his likeness. But look at him and me.” It is unclear whether this text advocates an adoptionist or docetist Christology, but based on its literary parallels with the Second Treatise of the Great Seth, it may well subscribe to the latter.

(see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gnostic_Apocalypse_of_Peter)