LESSON 2

THE CLOSING PERIOD OF THE APOSTOLIC AGE

Introduction

Robert Baker has divided the 65 years between the death of Jesus and the death of the last apostle into three periods:

Local witnessing (A.D. 30–45)
Missionary expansion (A.D. 45–68)
Westward growth (A.D. 68–100).[1]

The second stage in the development of the Apostolic Church came to an end when Paul died in A.D. 67 or 68. All the prominent apostles and early church leaders were dead with the exception of the beloved Apostle John who lived until A.D. 95 or 96. With his death, the Apostolic Age came to an end. Church development took on new characteristics after the death of the apostles who were the official teachers of the words of Christ.

During the lifetime of Paul, Christianity remained closely related to Judaism. He did not desire to alienate the Jews, but he saw the gospel as the fulfilment of Judaism and desired that all the Jews would enter the Kingdom through faith. In his Epistle to the Romans (chs. 9–11), he anticipated that the Jews who had rejected the gospel would respond in faith when they saw God's blessing bestowed upon believing Gentiles. Even as Paul approached Rome as a prisoner, he denied to Jewish leaders he had betrayed them. During the last third of the first century, Christianity became completely separated from Judaism. One of its struggles during this period was against the Jews. During the missionary career of Paul, Jewish legalism threatened to pervert the Christian doctrines.

In addition to the Jewish threat, Christianity had to be defended against speculative perversion. In the Epistle to the Colossians, perhaps Paul was combating Gnosticism, a philosophical perversion. Before his death, the Apostle John found it necessary to write a letter warning against this doctrinal error which was prevalent in Asia Minor. As Christianity expanded beyond the original group which followed Jesus, it struggled to define its doctrines in the midst of pressures exerted by Jewish legalism and philosophical Gnosticism.

An understanding of the Church in the last third of the first century requires a knowledge of the political activities of the Jews and Romans, of the continued expansion of the Church, and of doctrinal developments.

Political Events

The Jewish War (A.D. 66–70)

The Jewish nation identified national loyalty with uncompromising devotion to its religion. As God's chosen people, they had the conviction that they were destined to subdue other

Write the dates of the three major periods of Christian history in the first century.

Local witnessing_____

Missionary expansion_____

Westward growth_____

(Compare your answers with the text.)

One movement in the first century which threatened to pervert Christian doctrine was

_____

(Jewish legalism)

Another movement which threatened to pervert Christian doctrine in the first century was

_____

(philosophical Gnosticism)

[1] *A Summary of Christian History* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1959), pp. 8ff.

nations rather than to be subdued by them. The loss of political freedom was an offence to their religion. Their relation to Rome was not helped by the cult of emperor worship and Caligula's determination to set up his image in the Temple at Jerusalem. The procurators, incompetent and tactless Roman officials, added to the conflict. The fanatical Zealot party, a branch of the Pharisees, was unwilling to make peace with Rome; therefore, its determination to liberate Judaea resulted in the destruction of its beloved city and the end of sacrificial offerings.

In the battle which began in the streets when Florus brought the soldiers into Jerusalem, the Jews succeeded in gaining possession of the temple hill and in cutting the connexion of the Roman soldiers with the citadel Antonia. Agrippa II attempted to persuade the people to abandon their rebellion, but they refused to have anything to do with Florus. Customary sacrifices for the Emperor were suspended.

Some Jewish leaders opposed the rebellion and invited Agrippa II and his troops to come to their rescue. His troops were forced from the upper city, and his palace and that of the High Priest were burnt. The Roman cohorts took refuge in the towers of the Herodian palace. When they were forced to surrender, they were killed by the Jewish rebels. This action brought Gallus, governor of Syria, into Judaea with the twelfth Roman legion, two thousand choice men from other legions, six cohorts, four wings of cavalry, and additional auxiliary troops. Yet these forces were not sufficient to reduce the strongly fortified and bravely defended city of Jerusalem. Gallus gave orders for his troops to retreat. The Roman army was surrounded by Jews whose fierce attacks turned the enemy's retreat into a wild flight.

The Jewish victory squelched peace efforts, dispersed the conciliatory party, and united the Jews behind the revolt. To quell the Palestinian rebellion, Nero sent the able general Vespasian. The winter of A.D. 67 was spent in making preparations for the campaign. He sent his son Titus to Alexandria to bring a legion from there. In the spring of A.D. 68 Vespasian advanced to Ptolemais. After Titus arrived, Vespasian had three legions, twenty-three cohorts, six wings of cavalry, and the auxiliary troops of Agrippa- a total of sixty thousand men. The Jewish troops in Galilee lost heart and fled in panic. Sepphoris, the strongest point in the heart of Galilee, submitted. Only a few fortresses remained in the hands of the Jews. These soon fell and Galilee was brought under subjection by the Romans.

A band of Zealots under the leadership of Johanan escaped from Galilee at night and found refuge in Jerusalem. Johanan eventually gained the upper hand in Jerusalem. He imprisoned and slew all those suspected of willingness to make peace with Rome. The Christians were indifferent to the national cause; therefore, they fled from Jerusalem to a small community in Pella beyond the Jordan.

Since the Jews in the capital were battling among themselves, Vespasian was in no hurry to lay siege to the city. By the summer of A.D. 68, he had subdued Transjordan, Idumaea, and Jericho. He received news that Nero died on June 15th. This event caused further delay in laying siege to Jerusalem.

A third faction entered the conflict for leadership in Jerusalem as Simon bar Giora was forced into the city by the spreading conquest of the Romans in Judaea. He fought with Johanan for leadership but joined him in terrorizing the property owners.

In July of A.D. 69, Vespasian was proclaimed emperor by the legions stationed in the Orient. He returned to Rome by way of Alexandria where news came to him that Vitellius was proclaimed emperor by the army of the Rhine. Vespasian remained in Egypt

The Jewish War in A.D. 66–70 resulted because:

1. The loss of _____ freedom was a _____ offence to the Jews.
2. The cult of _____ worship offended them.
3. The _____ were incompetent officials.
4. The fanatical _____ party was unwilling to make peace with _____

(1. political, religious; 2. emperor; 3. procurators; 4. Zealot, Rome)

During the war, some Jewish leaders wanted to make _____ with Rome.

(peace)

A band of _____ under the leadership of _____ eventually gained control in Jerusalem.

(Zealots, Johanan)

A third faction in conflict for leadership in Jerusalem was _____ _____ _____ and his followers.

(Compare your answer with the text.)

and cut the grain supply to Rome. Vitellius was slain in December, and the way was made clear for Vespasian to become established as emperor. He left the conclusion of the war in Judaea to his eldest son Titus.

Siege was laid to Jerusalem early in A.D. 70. The bloody feuds continued within the city, and a third dictator, Eleazar, son of Simon, joined the struggle for power. The Jews were united, however, by the battering machines of the Romans against the unfinished third wall of the city. The Romans surrounded the city and prevented provisions from being brought in. The Jewish soldiers had less energy with which to fight, and the people began to die of famine. Eventually, the Romans broke through the third wall and gained entrance to the fortress of Antonia. The fortified temple area continued to stand. Daily sacrifices were offered morning and evening, but eventually they had to be discontinued because of lack of men to perform the sacred duties. Titus set fire to the gates of the outer temple area, gained entrance to the Temple, and spread the flames inside. Old men, children, priests and laymen were put to death. Johanan and Simon retreated to the upper city. When they refused to surrender, Titus burnt the area of Jerusalem occupied by his soldiers– the council house, the hall of archives, and the lower city down to the Pool of Siloam. Roman soldiers stormed the upper city, looting, killing, and using the torch as they went.

After the city fell, the remaining population, which had not perished by famine and the sword, was executed in gladiatorial combats or sold into slavery. The city was left in ruins with only three towers of the Herodian palace and part of the wall standing. Titus took 700 Jewish captives to Rome for his triumphal procession. Also, he carried the golden table of showbread and the seven-armed lampstand from the Temple. In Rome, the Jewish leader Simon was required to lead the procession of vanquished Jews, and then he was executed.

The effects of the war on Christianity

According to tradition, James, the brother of Jesus, led the church in Jerusalem until his martyrdom by the Jews in A.D. 62. During the Jewish War the church moved to Pella, a Gentile city east of the Jordan River, and survived there for a time under the leadership of Simeon, a cousin of the Lord. The Christians returned to Jerusalem when it was safe again. Little is known of the developments in this church during the next few years. A later tradition states that when Hadrian visited Jerusalem in 130, he found the group meeting on what was then called Mount Zion. Only Jewish Christians served as bishops until 135. After Hadrian commanded that Jerusalem be rebuilt as a Roman colony, Jews were forbidden in the city on "pain of death." The neutrality of the Christians during the Bar Cochba rebellion earned for them the Emperor's permission to remain in Jerusalem. The church gradually came under the Gentile influence, and a Gentile Christian bishop eventually presided in the city. In subsequent years, few Jewish Christians joined the band of believers because they could not accept the Gentile profanation of the Holy City or the fact that a Gentile bishop led the congregation.

The growing tension between Jews and Romans which led to the war also created conflict in the churches. Peter had refused to eat with Gentile Christians in Antioch. Paul was accused of having taken a Gentile into the Temple in A.D. 58, and his imprisonment resulted. It was necessary for him to appeal to Emperor Nero in order to avoid death at the hands of the Jews. Jewish hostilities towards Gentiles contributed indirectly to Paul's ministry in Rome while in chains. The early response of the Jews to the gospel was seriously retarded as a result of the accep-

During the Jewish War the church moved to _____, and the church eventually became _____.

(Pella, Gentile)

Is this statement true or false?
Few Jewish Christians joined the band of believers in Jerusalem after a Gentile Christian bishop became leader.

_____

(true)

tance of Gentiles into the churches. By the time of the Jewish War, the majority of converts were Gentiles. A few Jewish Christians gave up their Jewish identity and were absorbed into the Gentile Church, but the majority continued to live exclusive lives with distinct tendencies apart from the pure gospel. This Jewish Christian element eventually divided into groups known as the Nazarenes, the Ebionites, and the Elkesaites. A few were attracted to the speculative systems which developed into Gnosticism.

It appears that after the war, Christianity separated from Judaism and synagogues. At first, Christianity was regarded by Roman authorities as a branch of Judaism, which received the special concession of exemption from worshipping Roman gods and was given legal protection. Perhaps the hostilities of the Jews themselves made it evident during the Neronian persecution that a distinction existed between Christianity and Judaism. However, the Christians who were blamed for the burning of Rome were charged with arson, not with being members of an illegal religion.

The Christians ceased observing the Jewish Sabbath. As the churches became predominantly Gentile, perhaps there was less loyalty to the Jewish tradition of regarding the Sabbath holy. The first day of the week, the day of resurrection, was more significant to the Christians. The new day of worship added further to the distinction between Christianity and Judaism.

Jesus had predicted the destruction of Jerusalem. The Christians looked upon this event as a divine judgement on the Jewish people for their rejection and crucifixion of the Messiah. If the Jewish Zealots had become followers of Christ and had looked to God's power, rather than to the swords of men, for the establishment of His Kingdom, they may not have brought ruin upon their people. However, God was able to use the catastrophe of the Jewish War and the Jews' prejudice and hatred to further the gospel in the Gentile world. The forcing of Christians from Jerusalem resulted in the carrying of the gospel to other parts of the world.

In the midst of the rebellion, John left Jerusalem and journeyed to Ephesus. James the Just was killed as tensions increased. With the loss of prestige by the churches of Jerusalem and Antioch, Ephesus became the recognized centre of Christianity with the Apostle John as the undisputed leader.

The reigns of Vespasian and his sons (A.D. 69–96)

Vespasian (A.D. 69 to 79) was not a brilliant man, but he possesed the virtues of tenacity, honesty, and industry. Some historians have evaluated him as one of the best of the emperors; he devoted his attention to the proper work of administration and useful public works. After the subjugation of the Jews by the destruction of approximately a million and the enslavement of a hundred thousand, Vespasian relented towards them and allowed some previous immunities. They were required to pay a head tax of two denarii (40 cents) for the support of the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus.

The principate of *Titus (A.D. 79–81)* was without significant incidents regarding Christianity. The Senate recognized Titus immediately upon the death of his father. During his rule of two years, he proved himself worthy of the high office. The natural calamity of the eruption of the volcano Vesuvius took place during his reign, burying the cities of Pompeii, Herculaneum, and Stabii in ashes and lava and thus preserving part of the Roman culture for excavation in modern times. Much of the city of Rome was devastated again by a fire which lasted three days.

Domitian (A.D. 81–96) became emperor upon the death of his older brother Titus. Since he was overly ambitious to rule, he had

After the war, Christianity separated from

_____ and the_____ .

(Judaism, synagogues)

The day of worship became_____

instead of_____.

(Sunday, Saturday)

A result of Christians' being forced out of Jerusalem

was the spread of the_____ to other parts of the world.

(gospel)

With loss of prestige by the churches of Jerusalem and

Antioch, _____ became the recognized

centre of Christianity, and the Apostle _____ was the recognized leader.

(Ephesus, John)

been prevented from participation in government by his father Vespasian and his brother Titus. After taking office, he soon revealed his strong autocratic, arrogant, suspicious, and cruel tendencies. Vespasian had refused to be worshipped, but Domitian insisted upon being worshipped and being addressed by the titles "God," and "Lord and God." He regarded secret assemblies for worship as treasonous; therefore, he instituted a system of espionage and encouraged slaves to betray their masters. Opposition from the senatorial body resulted in his distrust of them. The result was bloody executions towards the end of his reign.

Domitian instituted repressive measures against the Christians perhaps because they resisted emperor worship and stood aloof from society. It is uncertain whether his persecution and martyrdom of Christians extended beyond Rome, but his insistence upon deification and worship may have been enforced by government officials in the provinces. The relatives of Jesus were denounced, imprisoned, and carried to Rome as members of the royal house of David. They were questioned regarding their political affiliations and finally dismissed as poor and harmless.

Many prominent persons were executed on false accusations of treason and charges of atheism. Domitian's cousin, Fladius Clemens, became a victim of the charge of atheism and was put to death. Clemens' wife Domitilla, a niece of Domitian, apparently was an active Christian and was banished. It is possible that the ex-consul Manius Acilius Glabrio also suffered as a Christian. These incidents revealed that Christianity was not limited to the outcast and poor but had received a hearing by government officials. Domitian's death came as a result of the plotting of his wife Domitia and two praetorian prefects.

It is not likely that a general persecution of Christians was attempted in Domitian's reign; however, his expressed hostility to Christianity and efforts to enforce worship of himself possibly gave rise to acts of persecution in many communities. The Apostle John's exile to the island of Patmos is commonly placed during his reign. According to Irenaeus (about 130–200; bishop of Lyons), who was acquainted with Polycarp of Smyrna, a disciple of the Apostle John, the Book of Revelation was written near the end of the reign of Domitian (c. 95). Perhaps the Neronian persecution is referred to in Revelation 6:9: "I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held." Revelation 17:11 probably refers to Domitian: "And the beast that was, and is not, even he is the eighth, and is of the seven, and goeth into perdition" is probably a reference to Domitian.

Irenaeus stated that the Apostle John spent the latter years of his life at Ephesus and lived to the time of Trajan (A.D. 98). The Gospel and three Epistles which bear his name are ascribed to the last years of his life. According to Clement of Alexandria (c. 200), John wrote a "spiritual gospel" to supplement the Synoptics. Irenaeus represented him as writing a polemic against Cerinthus, a noted heretic of that day.

Church Expansion

Obstacles to expansion

Christianity began in a small conquered nation which had never been important politically. In the tenth century B.C., Israel had achieved a domain of considerable dimensions under David and Solomon. At the time of the birth of Christ, Israel was reduced to a remnant of two of the original twelve tribes and was known by the Greek name of the largest of those tribes, Judaea.

The reigns of Vespasian and Titus were not as oppressive to Christians as the rule of_____.

(Domitian)

Domitian instituted repressive measures against the Christians and attempted to force them to worship_____.

(him)

Write in the blanks the names of the emperors to which these verses in Revelation probably refer:

Revelation 6:9 _____

Revelation 17:11 _____

(Compare your answers with the text.)

Jewish culture was also perpetuated in Galilee; however, that area appears to have come under greater Gentile influence than Judaea.

The expansion of the Church in the latter part of the first century is not well documented. Reliable information reveals that Christianity moved rapidly across the Roman Empire during the first century, but expansion was by no means world-wide. It made little progress in the Persian Empire which lay east of the Roman Empire. Since the two were enemies, Christianity's association with the Roman brought automatic opposition from the Persians. The vast domains of India and China had their distinctive civilizations, and Christianity had little effect on them.

As Christianity extended beyond the borders of its origin, it confronted religions which were rooted deeply in the old and politically powerful cultures and states. Zoroastrianism was associated with Persia. Hinduism and Buddhism were native to India. Confucianism was integrated into China's culture. Polytheism was traditional in the Graeco-Roman culture. Since idols were prevalent in the Roman Empire, it is not surprising that the people concluded that Christianity was an atheistic superstition because Christians had no idols. Cultures are slow to give up established customs. When Christianity challenged ancient traditions, it was strongly opposed.

Christianity experienced political opposition from its inception. Herod the Great attempted to put Christ to death soon after His birth. His death was brought about finally by the political intrigue of the Pharisees and Sadducees who put pressure on Pilate, the Roman governor, to condemn Christ officially. Apparently Christians were expelled from Rome in A.D. 49 by Emperor Claudius. Christians would not obey the laws of the State if they were in conflict with the laws of God. The Christian congregation in worship was viewed as a secret association or unlawful corporation. The consistent refusal to worship the emperor brought charges of treason.

The "followers of Jesus" refused to live the sensual life of the Romans of their day. Because the worship of Christ included no human or idol as a representative of God, the Christians were labelled as atheists. Christians were opposed by the pagan population of the Empire because they challenged the traditional beliefs. They proclaimed the equality of all men before God and spoke out against the social classes and the institution of slavery. They proclaimed the sacredness of marriage and family life and condemned the infidelity and the divorce on the Roman scene. Christianity stressed the ideal of separation of Church and State. Roman worship was polytheistic while Christians worshipped only one God. The miracles of healing and restoration brought charges of witchcraft, sorcery, and magic which were considered illegal. Christianity honoured useful labour, and this was contrary to the popular attitudes towards work. The Christians were blamed for the pestilences, floods, and earthquakes which were attributed to the angry gods seeking revenge against the people for permitting the Christians to destroy shrines and renounce pagan customs. Those who made their living on trades from idol worship— the Ephesian silversmiths, those who sold animals for pagan sacrifices, the procurers, the poisoners, the fortune-tellers, and the temple priests— accused the Christians of ruining their trades. Families were divided into believers and non-believers. It is little wonder that there were periods of intense, and oftentimes widespread, persecution against the young Christian Church.

Pagans reacted against the Christians with accusations of infanticide, cannibalism, incest, and atheism. These charges grew out of a misunderstanding of Christian love which was given an erotic interpretation by the pagan world. The Lord's Supper was interpreted as the eating of the actual flesh and drinking of the

By the end of the first century, Christianity had spread across the Roman Empire but had little effect on—

P_____, I_____, C_____.

(Compare your answers with the text.)

Match religious traditions with cultures.

____1. Zoroastrianism	a. India
____2. Polytheism	b. China
____3. Confucianism	c. Persia
____4. Hinduism and Buddhism	d. Graeco-Roman culture

(c-1, d-2, b-3, a-4)

Roman rulers brought _____ opposition to Christianity.

(political)

Many people were unwilling to give up cultural_____ in order to accept Christianity.

(traditions)

Pagans accused Christians of being atheistic because of their opposition to_____.

(idols)

blood of Jesus. The Christians' opposition to idols led pagans to believe Christians were without a god. This charge of atheism was an outgrowth of an earlier feud between Jews and Greek writers in Alexandria who construed the Jewish horror of idolatry as godlessness.

Church expansion up to 100

The Book of Acts records that on the Day of Pentecost Jews from ten Roman provinces and regions and from five regions outside the Roman Empire were present to hear the gospel. Acts does not indicate whether the gospel was carried back to Parthia, Media, Elam, Mesopotamia, and Libya. Of the Roman provinces and the regions in Asia Minor, Jews are mentioned as coming from Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia. Egypt and Cyrene in North Africa are mentioned. In addition, Rome, Crete, Arabia, and Judaea are listed as being represented by Jews and proselytes. Although no record indicates how far Christianity had spread in the areas represented, Luke does mention that men from Cyrene eventually went to Antioch and preached to the Greeks (Acts 11:19–20). This reference implies that as a result of Pentecost, Christianity was dispersed widely, possibly beyond the Roman Empire.

From accounts of Paul's missionary journeys and references in his epistles, we know that the gospel was carried to Macedonia, Achaia, and possibly to Spain also. This rapid expansion of Christianity took place within 35 years of the death of Christ. The degree of penetration in those areas or any extension beyond them in the latter part of the first century is unknown. The First Epistle of Peter does speak of Christians in Bithynia, Pontus, and Cappadocia. Christians are also referred to as being in Tyre and Sidon. As previously noted, tradition states that other apostles carried the gospel to Parthia, Ethiopia, India, and Scythia.

Rapid expansion of Christianity took place within_____ years of Christ's death.

(35)

Doctrinal Developments

Doctrines of the apostles

A comparision of the Book of Hebrews, the Johannine and the Pauline writings, and the Petrine epistles reveals that some differences existed in the teachings which were emphasized. However, they were not contradictory.

The doctrines of the Apostolic Church were based on what the apostles understood Jesus to have taught. Many of Jesus' fundamental doctrines had been taught in Judaism; however, He departed from Judaism at significant points. The Synoptic Gospels emphasize that Jesus' concept of righteousness, salvation, and the Kingdom of God was significantly different from that of the Pharisees. On the other hand, He agreed with them that there is *one God* who is creator of nature, man, and life. This God is in control of the universe. He is righteous, loving, and redemptive. Jesus taught that men are alienated from God because of their sins. God entered into a covenant with man in which He promised to protect, provide for, and deliver man if he would live righteously and worship only Yahweh. Man's unrighteousness caused God's presence and protection to be with-drawn from Israel. That presence and redemptive power would be returned when Israel became righteous. God's ruling over His people is the essence of the Kingdom.

The Pharisees thought that man would become righteous by observing legalistic traditions related to the Law. Jesus taught *righteousness* would come through man's repenting and receiving atonement which would be provided by His death on the cross. The Pharisees thought the *Kingdom of God* would be

nationalistic and located geographically in Palestine. Jesus taught that it is universal and includes God's children from every nation.

Christ taught that *salvation* is God's accomplishment under the New Covenant. Salvation (deliverance) cannot be separated from the doctrine of the Kingdom. The New Covenant made it possible for sinful man to have fellowship. God provided for man's sinfulness through the work of His Son. His resurrected Son is the reigning Messiah who will bring the Kingdom to a consummation by defeating Satan and his powers in the Day of the Lord. The Kingdom will be consummated when God's elect from every nation have been rescued from Satan and transferred into the Kingdom. The *Holy Spirit* replaces the spirit of evil which controlled man's life for sin. He enables man to live righteously. The doctrine of the indwelling Holy Spirit reached a mature expression in Paul's doctrine "Christ in you, the hope of glory," and John's description of the Father and Son sending the Paraclete who would be the eternal Father and the Son abiding with His people.

Baptism in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit replaced the ceremonial traditions of Judaism. Baptism pictures a cleansing from sin, a burial because of death to sin, and a resurrection to a new life made possible by the indwelling Spirit. The *Lord's Supper* pictures the New Covenant in which sinful man's acceptance by a holy God is effected by the sacrificial offering of God's Son. The shed blood, symbolized by the cup, represents the giving of His life in sacrifice. His body, symbolized by the bread, represents the new fellowship between God and man established in Christ. It is a communion–a meal in which God and man join together or meet in Christ's body.

Jesus spoke of establishing His *Church*, that is, His "called-out assembly" (Matthew 16:18ff.). The Church is to be aggressive and victorious; the gates of Hades (death) cannot stand against it. Death is the power of Satan which imprisons man in the realm of the unseen (Hades). Satan's power to destroy fleshly man cannot destroy the Church which is built on Christ who defeated death by His resurrection.

The New Testament Church recognizes *two officers:* ministers (elders, bishops, pastors–cf. Acts 20:17–28) and deacons (cf. Phil. 1:1). Both words mean servant. The officers are chosen by God and endowed with appropriate spiritual gifts. On the basis of their divine call and spiritual qualifications, they are recognized and selected by the church. As servants, they are to lead the Church to follow its Master who was the Suffering Servant. As the Church assumes its role of preaching the gospel in all the world, it will be opposed by the power of evil and can expect struggles and threats of death. The officers are to train and lead the Church in fulfilling its servant role in building the Kingdom of God. The calling of officers is not to an official position (official rank or status) but to a responsible task. They are to develop and mature the members (saints) for ministering (Eph. 4:11f.). The difference in officers and members is functional and not levels of honour and authority. Leaders are accountable to God for accomplishing the responsibility given them.

The apostles followed Jesus as well as Jewish tradition in acknowledging the *authority of the Old Testament.* As a result of the transfiguration experience and a recognition of His divinity, Jesus' words came to be recognized as containing greater authority than even the Old Testament. The disciples recognized the presence of God in Jesus. Even though they were monotheistic in belief, they were not inconsistent in calling Jesus, God. They had known Him as human also. The recognizing of Jesus' divine nature and the experiencing of the power He sent in the Holy Spirit caused the apostles to accept His authority and to go forth

Righteousness comes through man's

r_____ and j_____ by Christ's death on the cross.

The Kingdom of God is _____and

includes God's children from every_____

(repentance, justification, universal, nation)

Salvation is_____ from sin and entrance into God's Kingdom by_____.

The doctrine of the Holy Spirit was expressed by Paul as "C_____ in y_____."

(deliverance, faith, Christ, you)

Baptism is a picture of–

_____ from sin,

_____ because of death to sin,

_____ to new life.

The Lord's Supper represents Christ's

_____ and new _____

with God.

(cleansing, burial, resurrection, sacrifice, fellowship)

The two church officers recognized in the New Testament are:

_____, or pastors, and

_____.

(ministers, deacons)

to conquer the world in His name. His teachings and the inspired interpretation of them in the epistles of the apostles came to be recognized by the Church as the authoritative revelation of God. These writings comprise the New testament.

Special emphases in Paul

Paul emphasized that, contrary to the teachings of the Pharisees, salvation is not man's accomplishment through the works of the Law. Paul concluded that man is so sinful that even his best effort falls short of the glory of God. Man's only hope is in what God does for him in Christ; salvation is by grace through faith. Man appropriates God's gracious work through faith; therefore, man is justified or made righteous by faith.

Paul's writings emphasize that Christ is the Messiah and is divine in nature. Christ Jesus was in the form of God, even equal with God, but he emptied Himself (*kenosis*, kenotic theory of the Incarnation) of His divine position and power and took upon Himself the form of a servant in the likeness of man (Phil. 2:6f.). As a man, He became the Suffering Servant on the cross. Because of His obedience, He proved Himself worthy as the righteous Messiah, and God resurrected and exalted Him to rule over the Kingdom. The power of His reign will bring every man into subjection: "Every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:10f.).

Paul emphasized that Christ was _____ with God but became the S _____ S_____ on the cross. God exalted Jesus in the _____ to rule over the_____.

(equal, Suffering Servant, resurrection, Kingdom)

Unanswered doctrinal questions

Although John expressed the relationship of Jesus and God as Son and Father, he did not explain how there can be one God, yet the Son and the Father are both God. He did state that they are one, but he also quoted Jesus as saying that the Father was greater than He. The Church was confronted with the problem of defining the divine and human natures of Christ and His relation to God. The Church was required also to explain the meaning of Christ's death. The Jews had expected the Messiah to be victorious and powerful. His death was incomprehensible and required the explanation of how He could be Messiah and yet experience death. Also, the need arose to explain how His death dealt with the sin of man.

Another great challenge to the Church was to explain how men, who are born into the Kingdom by faith but continue to live in the world, can be victorious over their worldly natures. What happens in conversion to make it possible for man to live a new life? What is the relation of the Church (the people) to the world which is controlled by sin? What happens if a member of the Church reverts to the ways of the world? Church history is a record of man's attempt to answer these questions and to share the good news with the world.

Three doctrinal questions which are unanswered in the New Testament are:

1. How can there be_____ God, yet the S_____ and F_____ are both God?
2. What is the relation of the _____ and_____ natures of Christ?
3. What is the meaning of Christ's _____, and how did it deal with the_____ of man?

(1. one, Son, Father; 2. divine, human; 3. death, sin)

The Appearance of Heresy

The gospel was spread in a world influenced by Jewish and Greek concepts of life. The question of wisdom in Judaism concerned how to conduct one's life each day, and the answer was to live by rules and laws which were given religious sanction. Greeks questioned the nature of ultimate reality and man's relation to it. Answers varied, but usually focused on the relation of material and spiritual existence. Jewish thought was characterized by the practical, concrete, and this-worldly concerns of daily life. Greek thought was characterized by the speculative, abstract, and

Write *Greek* or *Jewish* in the following blanks to make correct statements.

1. _____ thought was characterized by the speculative, abstract, and metaphysical nature of existence.
2. _____ thought was characterized by the practical, concrete, and thisworldly concerns of daily life.

(1. Greek, 2. Jewish)

metaphysical nature of existence. Christianity could not gain converts from societies influenced by these thought systems without facing the danger that some of the new converts would combine their old views with their new experience in Christ. A heretical movement known as Ebionism developed from the Jewish influence, and sources of a second heretical development, Gnosticism, remain uncertain. Apparently Greek thought contributed to Gnosticism which emphasized knowledge, but it was probably a syncretism composed of: (1) Hellenistic philosophy, (2) Oriental mystery religions, (3) Persian Zoroastrian dualism, (4) heterodox Judaism, and (5) Christianity.

Christianity was confronted with the need to define its nature. Was the experience in Christ primarily a mystical relationship with the Lord in the realm of the Spirit, or was it primarily obedience to a moral code which embraced some of the Jewish Law? Paul emphasized the former, but other Jewish Christians emphasized the latter. Many Jewish converts tended to remain within the Jewish fold.

Ebionism

The first doctrinal struggle of Christianity was to define its relationship to Judaism from which it came. The New Testament reflects three positions taken by Jewish Christians:

1. The group represented by Paul continued to observe Jewish customs but did not see that such practices were essential for salvation and did not require the Gentiles to submit to them.
2. The heretical group reflected in the Epistle to the Colossians appears to have combined Jewish legalism and Hellenistic speculation in a type of Jewish Christian Gnosticism.
3. The opponents of Paul, Pharisaic Jewish Christians, insisted that Christians observe the Mosaic Law and rejected Paul because he did not make it binding on Gentiles. They insisted on Gentiles' becoming Jews (as proselytes) before they could become Christians. This group, known as Judaizers, insisted that Gentiles should submit to circumcision as an initiatory step into Jewish Christianity, observe the Sabbath, distinguish between clean and unclean foods, and observe the rules distinguishing between the descendants of Abraham and the Gentiles.

Paul opposed the superficial righteousness based on works of the Law. He insisted that in Christ righteousness is God's provision for sinful man, to be appropriated through faith. Although the issue was settled officially by the Church in the Council at Jerusalem, the position of the Judaizers remained alive. It was later perpetuated by the Ebionites.

From Paul's writings we know that Jewish Christians were relatively poor. He encouraged the Gentile churches in Macedonia and Achaia to take up offerings for those facing poverty and famine in Jerusalem. Their flight to Pella to escape death during the Jewish War would have added to their poverty. Later writers came to refer to Jewish Christians as "the poor" (Hebrew--*ebyon*, ebion). This designation eventually came to be used by the pagan world as a contemptuous appellation. When part of the Jewish church became a separate and heretical movement, it was referred to as Ebionism. In the fourth century, Epiphanius, Jerome, and Theodoret made a distinction between the Ebionites in the Jewish church and the Nazarenes. These writers indicated that the Ebionites flourished, especially east of the Jordan.

Although the New Testament reflects Ebionite tendencies in those who emphasized the Mosaic Law, the full development of the heresy came in latter centuries. In spite of the efforts of Paul,

Underline Paul's emphasis concerning one's experience in Christ.

1. obedience to a moral code
2. a mystical relationship with the Lord in the realm of the Spirit

(2)

Match the position which was taken on the relationship of Christianity to Judaism with the believers who held that position.

____1. Insistence that Gentiles become Jews before they could become Christians.
____2. Belief that practice of Jewish customs was not essential for salvation although they continued to observe them.
____3. Combination of Jewish legalism and Hellenistic speculation.

a. Jewish Christian Gnostics
b. Judaizers or opponents of Paul
c. Paul and his followers

(b–1, c–2, a–3)

Ebion meant "the _____" and was applied to Jewish Christians.

(poor)

Jewish Christianity appears to have become completely separated from orthodox Christianity within a century. Irenaeus (about 180) described the Ebionites as Jewish Christians who insisted upon the observance of the whole Jewish Law, rejected Paul as a heretic, and used only the Gospel of Matthew. "Their teaching agreed with that of Cerinthus and Carpocrates, denying the virgin-birth, and regarding Jesus as a mere man."[2]

The increasing emphasis on the deity of Christ by non-Judaizing Christians hastened the separation of the Ebionites.

The Ebionites agreed that Jesus was the Messiah, but their doctrine of the person of Christ recognized Him only as the human son of Joseph and Mary. The Holy Spirit in the form of the dove lighted on Him at His baptism to qualify Him as the Messiah. Ebionism divided into several groups with differing emphases. The teachings of John's Gospel apparently refuted Cerinthus, who was educated in Alexandria but was active mainly in Asia Minor. He held that the world was not made by God but by an ignorant being. He denied the supernatural birth of Jesus, but he did attribute to Him special justice, prudence, and wisdom. He taught that at Jesus' baptism, the Christ descended upon Him in the form of a dove after which Jesus announced the unknown Father and wrought miracles. The Christ departed from Jesus before His crucifixion so that only the human Jesus suffered and rose from the dead. Regarding the Kingdom, Cerinthus taught that the Kingdom of Christ would be set up on the earth after the resurrection and that flesh dwelling in Jerusalem would again be subject to desires and pleasures—a thousand years for marriage festivals.

The Nazarenes and Elkesaites

Some of the Jewish Christians of the second century were called Nazarenes. They appear to have been more orthodox than the Ebionites and acknowledged the supernatural birth of Christ. A third group was referred to as Elkesaites. They insisted on a strict observance of the rites and teachings of the Mosaic Law; therefore, they opposed the Pauline Epistles. Simon Magus is portrayed in frequent encounters with Peter who confronted him in argument and drove him away. Peter defended God and the righteous men of the Old Testament. Elkesaites did not consider that the Old Testament Scriptures were infallible but contained much that was false. Simon Magus argued that if evil and the devil exist and God is maker of all things, then God is the author of evil. Peter argued that the devil was created by God, but God did not create evil. Evil arose as a result of freedom of choice between good and evil. The Elkesaite branch of Jewish Christianity contained Gnostic elements.

Gnosticism

The First Epistle of John reveals that some in Asia Minor denied the deity of Christ: "Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also" (2:23). Many antichrists were already in the world (cf. 2:18-20). They had separated from Christianity because they were not in accord with Christians.

Irenaeus described the Ebionites as Jewish Christians who insisted upon observance of the whole Jewish _____, rejected_____ as a heretic, and used only the Gospel of _____.

(law, Paul, Matthew)

Underline the words which make these statements true.

1. The Ebionites said Jesus (was, was not) the Messiah.
2. They recognized Him as (divine, human).
3. They believed the Spirit at Jesus' baptism (qualified, did not qualify) Him as the Messiah.

(1. was, 2. human, 3. qualified)

Two other groups of Jewish Christians in the second century were called N_____ and E_____

(Nazarenes, Elkesaites)

[2] J. G. Wilheim Uhlhorn, "Ebionites," *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia*, Vol. IV, p. 57.

Apparently others denied the reality of the Incarnate Word amd claimed that Christ was only an apparition (Docetism– a denial of he humanity of Christ). John assured the Christians of the physical reality of the Word which could be heard, seen, and touched (see 1 John 1:1ff.).

The origin and nature of Gnosticism have been debated by scholars. Gnostic is a transliteration of the Greek word for knowledge. Earlier scholars held that Gnosticism was an outgrowth of Greek philosophy which distinguished between the world of ideas and the world of sense experience. Plato proposed that only ideas which exist in the mind of God are perfect and permanent. The physical world consists of material which contains the element of evil and is equated with imperfection, destructibility, and temporariness.
Material is an emanation from God; it is a product and image of reason. More recently, scholars have concluded that Gnosticism was a syncretism of the teachings of Hellenistic philosophy, Oriental mystery religions, Persian Zoroastrian dualism, Christianity, and heterodox Judaism which arose out of the debris of shattered Jewish apocalyptic hopes. Religious life in the Near East was undergoing a change between 300 B.C. and 300 A.D. Gnosticism may have been the result of a process of syncretism as ideas and convictions from various religions mingled together. It was not so much another religion as an atmosphere or a religious outlook which could be identified as one characteristic within very diverse religious and intellectual movements.

The basic element in Gnosticism was knowledge (*gnosis*)– primarily self-knowledge, a recognition of the divine element which constitutes the true self. Such knowledge comes by revelation and leads to salvation– to be freed from the ignorance and despair of this world. This quest for knowledge resulted in the following points:

1. The true perfect God is unknown: He is not the Creator of this world of imperfections.
2. This imperfect world is produced by an imperfect god «a god who is less than the Supreme Being».
3. The true and essential being of man belongs to and with the perfect God but through some unaccountable mischance finds itself situated in this imperfect world and subject to the powers of this world.
4. Through knowledge of himself and through awareness of his separation from God, the Absolute Perfection, man must be set free from the tyranny of evil and be returned to the world of the true God.[3]

Judaism and Christianity contributed to Gnosticism by providing the concept of man's knowing God through revelation. A basic principle of Gnosticism was the doctrine of a knowledge supernaturally attained, an immediate vision of truth in which the nature of God, the relation of the spiritual and material, and the origin of good and evil could be explained. The Gnostics claimed a mystical experience whereby they apprehended the true nature of God and entered into fellowship with Him. This special knowledge was shared with others in magical passwords, secret names, and mystical rites. The special knowledge con-

The word gnostic is a transliteration of the Greek word for_____.

(Compare your answer with the text.)

Recent scholars have concluded that Gnosticism was a syncretism of the teachings of–

1._____ philosophy

2._____ mystery religions

3._____ Zoroatriam dualism

4. C_____

5. heterodox _____

(1. Hellenistic, 2. Oriental, 3. Persian, 4. Christianity, 5. Judaism)

A basic principle of Gnosticism was the doctrine of knowledge _____ attained.

(supernaturally)

[3] W. C. van Unnik, *Newly Discovered Gnostic Writings* (Naperville, III.: Alec R. Allenson, Inc., 1960), p. 22.

cerned escape from the world of evil at both physical and metaphysical levels. The metaphysical world was regarded as filled with hostile powers which caused evil in this material world. The goal of the Gnostic was to escape life in the lower physical world which was ruled by demons and spiritual darkness. This goal could be accomplished by asceticism, which attempted to bring the physical body under control by punishment, or libertinism, which was based on the conclusion that the higher spiritual life is not affected by the indulgences of the material body. Basic beliefs of Gnosticism were:

1. Dualism: Matter regarded as evil could not have been created by the Supreme Being.
2. Docetism: Since matter is evil, the divine Christ could not have had a real body but was only an appearance.
3. Emanations: Since the Supreme Being is good, He could not come into contact with evil matter; therefore, material creation was through a series of aeons or emanations from the Supreme Being. The Demiurge or world-framer was the most degraded of the emanations.
4. Esoteric knowledge: Man's state and salvation were in proportion to his knowledge of the supposed mysteries.
5. Contempt for the flesh: Many practised rigid asceticism to overcome the flesh while others held that the spirit was not affected by the indulgence of the flesh.[4]

Early Christian tradition related special systems of Gnosticism to Simon Magus of Samaria, his disciple Menander, the Syrian Saturninus, Tatian who wrote the "Diatessaron" (a combination of the four Gospel narratives into one), the Alexandrian Basilides, the Egyptian Valentinus who appeared in Rome, and Marcion who went from Pontus to Rome. The views of Marcion and Valentinus will be examined in the next lesson.

The effects of Gnosticism

Heretical teachings forced the church leaders to set up certain standards to be acknowledged by anyone who claimed to be a Christian. These standards emphasized the Apostles' Creed, the compilation of the Canon of the New Testament, and apostolic succession. The defence of the Christian faith led to the writing of apologies and the formation of Christian dogmas expressed in philosophical terminology. The mystical element of Gnosticism caused the Church to develop more elaborate ritualism in its services, and the attitude of Gnosticism towards the flesh influenced Christians towards a greater degree of asceticism which eventually developed into monasticism.

Identify the five primary beliefs of Gnosticism as *docetism, emanations, dualism, esoteric knowledge,* or *contempt for the flesh.*

_____1. Matter is evil and could not have been created by the Supreme Being.
_____2. Practice of asceticism.
_____3. Christ could not have had a real body.
_____4. The imperfect world was created by an imperfect God, the Demiurge.
_____5. Man's salvation is conditioned on his knowledge of the supposed mysteries.

(Compare your answers with the text.)

Some of the effects of Gnosticism were:

1. establishment of standards for _____,
2. defence of the Christian _____,
3. more elaborate _____ in services,
4. asceticism which later developed into _____

(1. Christians, 2. faith, 3. ritualism, 4. monasticism)

[4] See A. H. Newman, *A Manual of Church History* (Rev. ed., Philadelphia: The American Baptist Publication Society, 1933), p. 183, for a fuller discussion of their beliefs.

Home Study Exercise

Basic activity (Levels 1, 2, and 3). After reading the study guide text, answer the following questions.

1. Name three periods of Christian history in the first century. _____

2. Name two movements which threatened to pervert Christian doctrine in the first century. _____

3. Give four reasons for the Jewish war in **A. D. 66-70.** _____

4. Name three factions among the Jews during the war. _____

5. How did the Jewish-Gentile conflict affect Christianity? _____

6. How did Domitian treat the Christians? _____

7. To which emperors does the Book of Revelation apparently refer? _____

8. How far did Christianity spread by the end of the first century? _____

9. What opposition did Christianity encounter in its efforts to expand? _____

10. Give a one sentence statement of the following apostolic doctrines:

    (1) Righteousness _____

    (2) The Kingdom of God _____

    (3) Salvation _____

    (4) The Holy Spirit _____

    (5) Baptism _____

    (6) The Lord's Supper _____

(7) Church officers

11. What did Paul emphasize about Christ?

12. Name three doctrinal questions which are unanswered by the New Testament?

13. Name three Jewish Christian groups reflected in Scripture.

14. Give the meaning of the word *ebion* and Irenaeus' description of the Ebionites.

15. What did the Ebionites believe about Jesus?

16. Give the meaning of the word *gnostic* and its probable origin.

17. List five primary beliefs of Gnosticism.

Supplementary activity (Levels 2 and 3). Read pages 26–34 in *A Summary of Christian History* by Baker and answer the following questions.

1. Name six early Christian writings other than the New Testament and tell why they are important.
2. Explain how the doctrines of the Judaizers differed from those of Paul.
3. What were the central doctrines of Gnosticism and what position did they afford Christ?
4. What evidences in the New Testament are there of the Gnostic threat?
5. In response to the Gnostic threat, how did Christianity define its essential elements?

Advanced activity (Level 3). Read pages 38 and 39 in *Documents of the Christian Church* by Bettenson and answer the following questions.

1. Give the approximate date of Papias and compare his attitude towards written and oral tradition.
2. What does Papias reveal to be the source of Mark's doctrine and where was his Gospel written?

3. What information does Papias give concerning the Gospel of Matthew?

Seminar Discussion

1. How did the Jewish War affect Christianity?
2. What were the attitudes of Vespasian, Titus, and Domitian towards Christians?
3. What obstacles did Christianity encounter in its early expansion?
4. How far had Christianity expanded by the end of the first century?
5. What doctrines were established by the close of the first century and what doctrinal questions were yet unanswered?
6. Was Ebionism of Gnosticism the greater threat to Christianity?