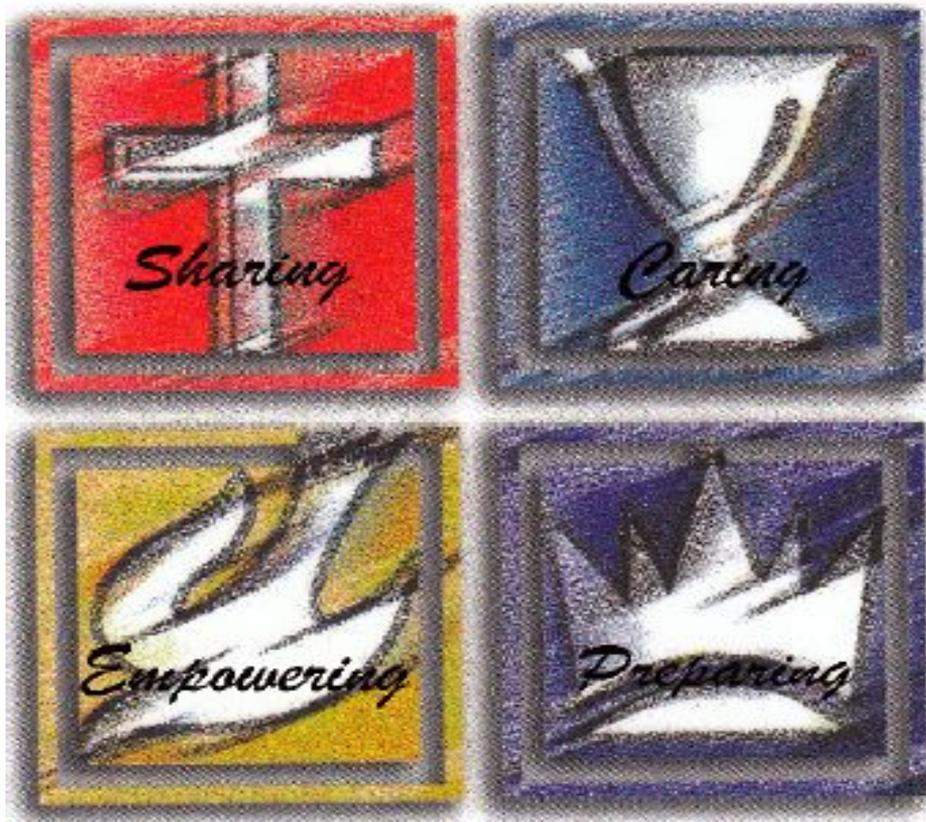


FOURSQUARE **MINISTRY TRAINING**



MODULE SEVEN

Rev. John Ballantyne B.A., B.Theol., Dip.Tchg

CHAPTERS:

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MODULE SEVEN: OVERVIEW OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

1. LIFE IN JESUS' TIME

The Holy Land in the time of Jesus

We come to know Jesus, and the New Testament better when we understand more about the nature of Jewish society – its politics, economics, religion, and so on – during his lifetime.

We come to understand and know Jesus much better if we learn about the world in which he lived out his life. In this way Jesus becomes more real for us. It is necessary to understand the political, socio-economic and religious situation in Palestine in his time. That was the world to which he related, with which he interacted.

Pilate's inscription

We read in John's Gospel (Ch 19): 'Pilate had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read: Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews. And it was written in Hebrew, Latin and Greek'. These words tell us something important about life in the time of Jesus, namely that he lived in a country which was not only Jewish but also very strongly influenced by Greek and Roman culture. That is why the inscription was written in three languages. Jesus himself, then, was part of that cultural situation which was Jewish, Greek and Roman.

A Greek world

The country in which Jesus lived was influenced by Greek culture. Alexander the Great, King of Macedonia in Greece (333-323 BC), extended his conquests right as far as India and left behind a great empire, ruled by his successors, who occupied Palestine and brought with them Hellenistic (Greek) language and culture, **and philosophy**, as well as their power.

The effects of this Hellenisation continued right into the time of Jesus. Cities, temples, theatres and education centres were built on a Greek model, and Greek was the language of administration. The Greek city model influenced the situation politically. Greek cities were independent; they were a self-contained unit of free

citizens, having their own territory, ruled over by a council of citizens, at the head of which was an elected official. Some of these cities were built in Palestine.

A Roman world

Even though in the time of Jesus Rome was the political ruler of the Middle East world, Greek culture continued to shape it. In 63 BC Rome intervened in Palestinian affairs. Herod the Great was the king of Judea under the Romans (47-4 BC) but then Judea became a Roman Province, ruled by a Roman official who was called a 'procurator'. Herod Antipas was another subject-king who ruled in Galilee.

In the Gospels (Luke 2 and 3) there is mention of Romans, Roman soldiers and rulers.

Rule under the Romans was well organized as they had good skills of administration and were well disciplined. But sometimes there was great brutality under Pilate (a massacre in Lk., 13), under Herod the Great (Mt. 2) and also under Herod Antipas of Galilee (the murder of John the Baptist in Mk. 6). Pilate was the Roman procurator in Judea in the time of Jesus (26-36 AD).

A Jewish king complained to the emperor in Rome about Pilate, accusing him of 'insults, robberies, assaults, executions without trials, unending cruelty'. On one occasion, when the Jews opposed Pilate because he used money from the temple treasury to build an aqueduct (that is, a construction for supplying water) he had his soldiers mix with the demonstrators and cruelly beat them. Into such a violent world was Jesus born.

Socio-economic situation

Alexander's campaigns effected great changes even in Palestine. They opened up new trade-routes never before explored. The riches of the East began to flow westward in the succeeding centuries – minerals (gold, silver, copper, iron); frankincense (for religious worship); foodstuffs (corn, wine, oil, fish); textiles (especially linen) and luxury goods of all kinds. There was increased productivity everywhere due to better techniques in agriculture and mining and the like. It was easier to transport a variety of goods and seek more profitable markets, especially after the construction of roads.

New trade routes opened up people and nations to one another and people travelled more freely from one country, or region, to another. **Some of these routes passed through Palestine.**

The new wealth was mainly centred in trade and commerce, and this led to the emergence of a wealthy middle class who were in a position to profit from the new possibilities. Many Jews emigrated at this time to seek better conditions and greater wealth, and so many Jewish communities were established abroad and flourished.

Sometimes, however, there was unemployment in the cities. The peasant farmers were squeezed out of existence by competition from large landowners, and heavy taxes were levied for the support of a bureaucracy. This continued in the time of Jesus and was made worse when occupying armies took over some of the land.

Violence and injustice

Under the Romans taxes were imposed. For most Jews paying taxes to a Roman overlord meant giving to Caesar what belonged to God, namely, Israel's money and possessions (Mk. 12). Such taxes were an oppressive symbol of injustice. Taxes imposed by the Roman and Jewish authorities were exploitative and burdensome for

the people, especially for the small tenant farmers. Then there was the presence of the military. John the Baptist, like Jesus, enters into dialogue with them: 'Rob no one by violence or by false accusation and be content with your wages' (Lk. 3, 7).

The atmosphere of violence and social injustice leading to poverty, especially after the death of Herod the Great, made Palestine very unstable. It was at this time that revolutionary and discontent groups were formed.

Herod the Great

Power was all that mattered to Herod the Great. He put his own sons to death. He hired an army of foreign soldiers beyond the needs of the country as well as an army of informers to keep the people in check and permanent fear. A Jewish historian around that period, Josephus, writes about him: 'He sank the nation to poverty and to the last degree of injustice.'

The Romans and the rulers appointed by them, such as Herod the Great, continued the policy of extreme exploitation of the land. Great estates forced back the peasant farmers and the number of landless tenants increased, particularly after the time of Herod the Great. Great estates in Galilee and other places were owned by the Jewish aristocracy of Jerusalem, in particular by the Sadducees.

Background of parables

This environment, in which Jesus lived and carried out his ministry, is reflected in his parables, which provide pictures of the poverty, violence and oppression that existed in his times. Absentee landlords (very rich people in Jerusalem had their property administered by others in their country estates), tenant revolts, debts and debtors, slavery, extortion, corruption, starving beggars, uncaring rich people, day labourers waiting around for employment, a widow badgering a corrupt judge to get justice – all these are situations described in the parables of Jesus which are based on real life in his day.

(Lk.12: the rich farmer who hoards grain; Lk.16: the rich man and Lazarus; Lk.18: the widow and the judge; Mt.18: debts and debtors; Mt. 20: the day labourers lining up for work).

Great landowners had much influence because of the volume of the crops, especially wine, oil, wheat. They employed a large workforce. Land was leased at a high price and this increased the poverty. Larger estates were often in the hands of royal or priestly families and of foreigners (from the Roman Empire living outside Palestine).

Fertile land

There were also great wheat crops grown for the Emperor in Palestine. The big estates were located principally in Galilee and Judea (Southern Palestine) around the river Jordan, and all these areas were very fertile. Skilled labour was centralised in Jerusalem. Taxes were a great burden for the poor.

Social Classes

In Palestine there were generally three social classes:

1. There were very rich people from the royal court and their followers: merchants, large landowners, tax-officers, bankers, families with inherited means and high priestly families
2. There was a small middle class: those working in small trades; craftspeople who

had their shops in the market; those of the fish trade. (In Galilee there was every kind of fish and there was a salted fish trade there which exported to cities even as far away as Rome.)

3. Then there were the poor. These were mainly of two kinds: (a) those who sought to earn their livelihood (e.g. slaves; day-labourers dependent on each day's work; people of the land, such as small tenant farmers and small landowners); and (b) those who lived on subsidy, partially or wholly: beggars, the sick, blind, lame, lepers, destitute, orphans and widows.

But there was a vast gap between the rich and the poor. This gap is well illustrated by the contrast between the rich man and Lazarus in Luke's parable (Lk. 16)

This provides a general picture of daily life in the time of Jesus.

2. The Gospels, Letters and Books of the New Testament:

1. The Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

Are like the four facets of a glorious diamond.. and Christ is that "Treasure"..
Father has the writers give their unique emphasis, so that between them they present the 'fullness' of Christ!

- Jehovah's King of the Jews, the promised Messiah and Saviour of the world;

(Matthew)

- The all-powerful Servant who suffers for mankind's sin and infirmities; (Mark)
- The Spiritual 'Eagle' who flies high in the glories of God's Spirit revelation to bring the Love of God to create True relationships. (Luke)
- The Son of Man immersed in the leading and empowering of the Holy Spirit. (John)

The Gospels were written to tell us about Christ's ministry (His doings and teachings) with a special focus on His birth and death. (Note how much space is devoted to the last week of His life.) They are divided into two sections: the Synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke--which share much of the same material) and the fourth gospel, the Gospel of John. Why are there so many gospels? The O.T. law required two or three witnesses to establish a fact, and it is because each writer has a different audience in mind with different perspectives that require a unique emphasis.

A. Matthew—Written in Judea initially to the Jews about 37AD. Matthew Presents Jesus as Jehovah's King of the Jews, the promised Messiah, and the Saviour of the World. He presents Jesus as the Messiah who fulfilled the O.T. prophecies (note the numerous O.T. quotations (*see the following Case Study*)). Matthew uses the phrase, "This was to fulfil ..." See Matt. 1:22. A key section for study is the Sermon on the Mount in chapters 5- 7, which contains Kingdom principles not only for the future--but for living life here and now.

Matthew, called Levi, is the son of Alphaeus, and the brother of James (the 'less'). Matthew is a publican and preached in Judea for 15 years, going to Ethiopia and other lands afterwards. He did not suffer martyrdom.

B. Mark- He writes between 57-63 AD, but where from is unknown. He presents Jesus Christ as the busy, but suffering Servant of God who demonstrates supernatural power over nature, disease, demons, etc. Written to the Romans. This book is the shortest--yet most active of the Gospels. The key section for study is Jesus' warning against religionism in Mark 7 (*very pertinent for people today*). Remember that John Mark was the disciple over whom Paul and Barnabas has a 'barny' as to whether he should be included in their next missionary journey. In the end Paul went alone, and Barnabas took John Mark. The 'concept' of serving Christ involves 'suffering' for His servants, is here championed by our Saviour in serving God.

The word '**straightaway**' is used by Mark more than the other three Gospels combined. There is no **genealogy of Christ** because who gives the genealogy of a servant? It is a Gospel of deeds and works..actions speaking louder than words! Details of Jesus' servant-hood are exemplified in..

- Fatigue (4:38; 11:12)
- Sympathies (6:34; 8:2)
- Love (10:21)
- Composure (4:38-40)
- Solitude (1:35; 6:30-32)
- Wonder (6:6)
- Grief (3:5)
- Sighing (7:34; 8:12)
- Anger (3:5; 10:14)

C. Luke writes between 58-63AD but the place where this occurs is unknown. Luke, the 'beloved physician', presents Jesus as the Son of Man Written for the Greeks. **Christ is the ideal man...who is:**

- **The friend of outcasts** (5:29; 7:29-37)
- **Compassionate** (7:13; 13:1)
- **Neighbourly** (10:30)

He writes, picturing Christ as full of compassion, **and full of the Holy Ghost, and totally dependent on the Father** for Divine Ministry to everyone, especially the poor and sinful. This is the most complete gospel, written entirely in chronological order. Luke also wrote the Book of Acts as well.

Luke is possible the Lucius referred to in Romans 16:21, Acts 13:1, and is therefore a relation of Paul.

D. John—'Jesus is God!' John wrote this Gospel about 90AD from a place that hasn't been pin-pointed. John presents Jesus as the Divine Deity.. the Son of God. It is written to the whole world. He gives a theological portrait of Christ's Deity.

Jesus is God has multiple witnesses..

- Father (John 5:32-37)
- Son (8:14; 18:37)
- Holy Spirit (15:26; 16:13-15)
- The Written Word (1:45; 5:39-46)
- Works (5:17,36; 10:25; 14:11; 15:24)
- John the Baptist (1:7; 5:32-35)
- Disciples (15:27; 19:35; 21:24)

John becomes the perfect Apologist against Greek Philosophy, when he declares (John 1:1) '**In the beginning was The Word, and the Word was with God, and The Word was God**'. The key is in the use of the Greek word 'logos' which translated means 'word'. Greek Philosophy which dominated wisdom and thinking throughout the known world was made up of words 'logos'. However Jesus is presented as the God of all wisdom 'The Logos'.. so

in one tiny verse John destroys the importance of Greek philosophy and philosophers; and places Jesus and His Words as Supreme Truth.. because He is God, not ' a god' like the Greeks thought their own philosophers to be.

An example of Apologetics: (The defence of the Gospel) Jehovah's Witnesses have rewritten the Christian Bible to eliminate Jesus as one of the uncreated Trinity.. and declare Him to be created by Jehovah. They also indicate that 'The Lord's Supper' was only given to the eleven in the Upper Room and not for us as Christian Believers today. In spite of Christ's Words.. "do this in Remembrance of Me"; and "as often as you do this you show forth the power of My death, until I come again". They also insist that they 'work with the Holy Spirit' as opposed to Christ's Spirit indwelling them.

He does this by demonstrating through several key signs and speeches that Jesus is God (Deity) come in the flesh in order to save His people from sin. John states his purpose very clearly in John 20:3 to bring readers to saving faith in Jesus Christ. (*No wonder so many have been saved through passages like John 1:12 and 3:16!*) Almost half of the Book is about the last week of Jesus' life. A key phrase in John is "I am...". John writes it from the perspective of **relationship with Jesus bringing revelation..**(*"the disciple whom Jesus loved"* 13:23; 19:26). **John is the writer who 'flies like the eagle' in the Spirit; and cries out in his heart for the sons of God to be as one with each other, as Jesus and the Father are one.**

John is an Apostle (Matthew 4:21), and brother of James

- He is present with James and Peter on several occasions (Mark 5:37; 9:2; 14:33)
- He shows Intolerance (Mark :38; Luke 9:49-56)
- He prepares the Passover (Luke 22:8-13)
- Is present at Jesus' Trial (John 18:15-16; 19:26-27)
- Present at the Tomb (John 20:2-8)
- Received the Baptism with the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:13-2:11)
- Entrusted with Mary (John 19:26)
- Was with Peter in the Temple (Acts 3)
- In Jail (Acts 4-5)
- Sent to Samaria (Acts 8:14-17)
- Was a pillar in the Church (Galatians 2:9)
- Wrote the Gospel of John; 1,2,and 3 John and Revelations (Revelations 1:9)
- He is supposed to have died a natural death at the age of 100.

The Gospel of Matthew:

A Case Study relating to God's differing emphases found in the four Gospels.

The general thrust of Matthew's Gospel record is to establish, on behalf of the Hebrews, that Jesus of Nazareth is the promised Messiah prophesied in the Old

Testament Scriptures. The Greek New Testament lists approximately sixty-eight Old Testament references cited in the Gospel of Matthew.

In addition, the technical expression, “**it is written,**” in the perfect tense (gegraptai), is found nine times (2:5; 4:4, 6, 7, 10; 11:10; 21:13; 26:24, 31). It is employed in the sense of “it stands written,” and is used to express the authority and present validity of what was written .

Twelve times Matthew cites Old Testament prophecy in conjunction with the term “**fulfilled,**” together with such phrases as “**that it might be fulfilled**” or “**was fulfilled,**” “**is fulfilled,**” “**should be fulfilled.**” The following represents a sketch of these texts.

- i) **Matthew 1:22 Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call His Name ‘Emmanuel’ which being interpreted means..”God is with us”.**

The apostle cited Isaiah 7:14 and declared that the supernatural conception of Mary, as a virgin with whom Joseph had not been intimate, was that which **fulfilled** what the Lord had spoken “through the prophet” in foretelling the nature of Jesus’ birth.

- ii) **Matthew 2:15 And they remained in Egypt until the death of Herod**
When Herod had ambitions to murder baby Jesus, Joseph was warned to take the child and his mother and flee to Egypt until such a time as it was safe to return to Canaan. Joseph followed the instruction. He remained there until Herod’s death “**that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through his prophet, saying, ‘Out of Egypt did I call my son.’**” The quotation was from Hosea 11:1.
- iii) **Matthew 2:17 In Rama there was a voice heard, lamentation and weeping and great mourning.. Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted because they are not.** – When the vicious Herod murdered the male babies two years old and under in Bethlehem, a cry of anguish went up from from the hearts of the inhabitants of the region. Matthew says: “Then was **fulfilled** that which was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet.” Jeremiah 31:15 was cited.
- iv) **Matthew 2:23 And He came and dwelt in a city which is called Nazareth** – Herod died. When Joseph heard that Archelaus was reigning in his father’s place, he was fearful. Being warned of God, he traveled into northern Palestine and settled in Galilee, in a city called Nazareth, “that it might be **fulfilled** which was spoken through the prophets, that he should be called a Nazarene.”
- v) **Matthew 4:14 And leaving Nazareth, he came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is upon the sea coast...**– After Jesus heard that John the Baptist had been delivered up, he left Nazareth and went to

Capernaum, near the region of Zebulun and Naphtali in order that a prophecy “might be **fulfilled** which was spoken through Isaiah the prophet,” namely that Galilee of the Gentiles might see a great light (Isaiah 9:1-2).

- vi) **Matthew 8:17 When the evening was come, they brought unto him many who were demon-possessed; and he cast out the spirits with his word, and healed all that were sick** – While Jesus was in the vicinity of Capernaum, many who were possessed of demons were brought to him. He cast out the evil spirits and healed the sick, “that it might be **fulfilled** which was spoken through Isaiah the prophet, saying, ‘Himself took our infirmities, and bare our diseases’” (53:4).
- vii) **Matthew 12:17 A great multitude followed Him, and he healed them all.. and commanded them not to make it known who He was** – In one of the Jewish synagogues in which Jesus was visiting, the Jews taunted him by asking whether or not it was lawful for him to heal a certain man with a withered hand on the Sabbath. The Savior did heal the man and the Pharisees plotted as to how they might destroy him. Perceiving such, the Lord moved on, but continued to heal many, although urging the crowds not to publicize him. This was done “that it might be **fulfilled** which was spoken through Isaiah the prophet” (Isaiah 42:1ff).
- viii) **Matthew 13:14 Therefore I speak to them in parables, because they seeing, don’t see; and being able to hear don’t hear, neither do they understand**– As the antagonism against Jesus began to intensify, the Master began to teach in a more obscure manner by the use of parables. The disciples were mystified about the shift in teaching procedure, hence asked why he was teaching by means of these illustrations. Christ explained that such was due to the hardened nature of the people’s hearts, and that Isaiah’s prophecy of this stubbornness was being “**fulfilled**” (Isaiah 6:9-10).
- ix) **Matthew 13:35 All these things Jesus spoke to the multitudes in parables; and without a parable he didn’t speak to them.**– In a subsequent context the Lord again emphasized that his parabolic teaching was that “it might be **fulfilled** which was spoken through the prophet, saying, ‘I will open my mouth in parables. I will utter things hidden from the foundation of the world’” (cf. Psalm 78:2).
- x) **Matthew 21:4 You shall find an ass and a colt with her, loose them and bring them to me.. and if anyone says anything to you, say The lord has need of them, and immediately he will give them to you** – On Sunday morning of the Passion week, Jesus rode into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey, thus demonstrating his humble station as a soon-to-be-inaugurated king over his spiritual kingdom. Matthew states that this happened “that it might be **fulfilled** which was spoken through the

prophet” (Zechariah 9:9).

- xi) **Matthew 26:54, 56 Jesus said to the multitudes..have you come out with swords and staffs as though to take a thief? I sat with you daily in the Temple, teaching you, and you never touched me there.**– When Judas led Jewish officials to the garden in order to apprehend Christ, Peter attempted to defend the Lord with a sword, even cutting off the ear of the high priest’s servant. Jesus admonished his disciple to put up his sword. These events must transpire in order that the plan of redemption be consummated. In so doing, the Scriptures “should” and “must” be **“fulfilled.”** No specific Old Testament passages are cited; rather, the references are to general Messianic texts pertaining to his death.

- xii) **Matthew 27:9 And Judas when he betrayed Jesus, when he saw that Jesus had been condemned to death repented himself and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders saying “I have betrayed innocent blood”.**– Finally, Matthew alludes to a passage that depicts Christ’s betrayal for the price of thirty pieces of silver, which **“fulfilled”** an Old Testament prophecy (see Zechariah 11:12-13).

Summarizing the Evidence

We have surveyed twelve instances in which Matthew referenced the Old Testament, asserting, both generally and specifically, that various events in the ministry of Jesus were previewed in the Old Testament and fulfilled during the lifetime of the Saviour.

