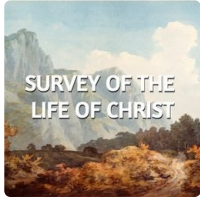


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Historical Sources and Background (Part 2)



Survey of the Life of Christ - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg discusses the historical sources and background related to the life of Christ. He notes that the gospels were written by various individuals, and questions the validity of those who promote radical ideas without factual basis. While John's gospel provides independent confirmation of the events in the synoptic gospels, there are discrepancies in the details. The Hellenization of Palestine during the time of the high priest Jason led to the emergence of different factions in the region, including the Hasidim and the Maccabeus family.

Transcript

This will be another introductory lecture to the study of the life of Christ. We, of course, will be looking at the Gospels themselves as the primary focus of our study of the life of Christ. But there are some things that are important for us to discuss before we actually get into the Gospels.

Last time, at the close of our last session, and it did close rather abruptly because the tape is unforgiving as far as how much time it gives us. I think I ended the lecture about four seconds before the tape ended. And we had only begun to talk about the Gospels and I didn't go very far because of the lack of time.

And I've had to decide whether we would revisit that subject or go on to the next. And I think we will do both. We'll revisit that subject briefly and then go on to the next.

The next subject will be a look at the historical background and historical setting of the life of Christ, which is taken for granted throughout the story in the Gospels, but which would not be commonly familiar to most of us if we didn't give it some special attention. And understanding the historical background and the cultural setting will give us much better access to some of the allusions and the assumed mindset of the writers of the Gospels and of the readers and of the people in Jesus' time. But I want to say a few more things about the Gospels before we talk about that.

And I mean the Gospels as sources. Remember, we were talking yesterday about the sources of information available to us from which we derive our knowledge of the events

of Jesus' life. And the Gospels, as we saw, were written by persons who were either eyewitnesses.

That was the case in the case of Matthew and of John. They were among the twelve or of persons extremely close to eyewitnesses. Mark, as we saw, actually wrote the Gospel according to Peter.

Mark wrote it, but he wrote it based upon his companionship and the information that he received from Peter. So in a sense, three of the four Gospels have come almost directly from apostolic writers from Matthew, Peter and from John. Luke is an exception because Luke may never have may never have seen Jesus.

Mark probably did. Mark was an inhabitant of Jerusalem and was probably someone at least who had seen Jesus, though Mark was not one of the apostles. Luke was not one of the apostles either.

But he traveled extensively with Paul, as we know. And Paul, on several occasions in company with Luke, went to Jerusalem and encountered the other apostles on those occasions. In fact, there if you would compare the travels of Mark, excuse me, of Mark and of Luke in through what we read in the epistles and in the and in the book of Acts and so forth, it seems almost certain that Luke would have visited Jerusalem and or Rome at times when Mark would have been there as well and could easily have consulted Mark, who was, of course, putting together gospel, the gospel according to Peter.

The real the real gospel of Mark, which is really Peter. And he would have also been able to meet and would have known personally the other apostles. And if Luke, being a careful historian, as he appeared to be, had occasion to talk to these eyewitnesses, we can be certain that he would have used that opportunity to great advantage to get the scoop, really.

And that's what he says at the beginning of his gospel, that others before him had, in fact, endeavored to do what he was doing. That is, write out historical narratives of the life of Christ. And he says only this.

He does not claim to be an eyewitness himself. He does not even claim that he's writing under inspiration. All that he's claimed was that.

Well, he says, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered to that to us. It seemed good to me also having had perfect understanding that would mean complete. He had a thorough knowledge of the subject of all things from the very first to write to you an orderly account.

So Luke professes to have known eyewitnesses and have had access to eyewitness accounts and to have himself a thorough knowledge of the subject. And so he had done

thorough research. And those who have studied the historical statements in both Luke and Acts have had occasion to be impressed with Luke's thoroughness and accuracy.

Many times his accuracy was questioned by skeptics. But later, archaeological discoveries would prove Luke was right all the time. And the skeptics and the critics were wrong.

We won't go into that in great detail, but I need to address the question of the radical criticism of the Gospels. And we had made allusion to this in the previous session. I just want to say a little bit more about it.

In the late 19th century in Germany, a school of thought arose that basically doubted that the Gospels were really written by their traditional authors or at their traditional times. Of course, if they were written by the traditional authors, they must have been written within that same generation of those who knew Jesus. But the radical critics began to assume, without any real proof at all, but just because it became the fashion of the day to do so, that the Gospels were written maybe a generation or two after the time of the apostles.

And that the apostolic names were attached to them simply for the purpose of giving credibility to them. And therefore, this was suggested early on, and scholars began to look for evidence that this was true. And of course, if it was true, which they began to assume to be the case without any proof, then it must be that the authors would have been affected by two things.

One would be various sources that had come down orally or in writing to them from earlier periods, and which had to be sorted among and edited and used as sources for the more complete or more final documents that we have as the Gospels. And also, of course, it is thought that the Gospels would have by this time been affected by the evolved beliefs of the church of a later generation. It is the most common belief among the most visible liberal scholars today that Jesus was a teacher, a Jewish sage of some kind, that he did not claim to be God, that he did not claim to be the son of God.

In fact, there are some who would say he never even taught anything about God or about morals or about anything like, well, maybe morals, but nothing religious, nothing about heaven or hell or any of that kind of stuff. That he never called men to repentance. This all of this is assumed at the outset.

And so people like the Jesus seminar come together to decide which things in the Gospels could be considered to be genuine, that Jesus said, based upon their fabricated image of who they think Jesus was. Obviously, if you and I decide beforehand that Jesus was a certain kind of a person and we make this assumption without reference to any of the evidence, and then we come to the evidence and edit it and say we accept this evidence as genuine because it fits our preconceived notion of what we think Jesus was.

And we reject these things because they don't fit our preconceived notion of what Jesus was.

Because this is the opposite of science. This is the opposite of historical responsibility. This is simply a case of ideology being promoted as if it were science or history.

And the Jesus seminar represents the most radical fringe of this trend. They do not even necessarily represent the consensus of liberal scholarship. They are the most radical types.

Radical and backwards at the same time because some of the views of the Jesus seminar are outdated. Even liberal scholars have gone past these views and don't hold them anymore. Others are simply the most radical kinds of ideas that are purported to be true without any real factual basis.

And this is something you need to understand because you will encounter in the media and you will encounter in scholarly works people who put forward these views of the Gospels that they are not early productions. They are late productions. According to this view, there were basically two sources.

That Matthew and Luke used in writing their Gospels. The theory goes like this. Mark or something called Proto Mark or early Mark was the first probably one of the first written documents of the life of Christ that we have any evidence of.

And Mark wrote this. Now Mark or somebody else using early Mark wrote what we have is the as the as the present Gospel of Mark. Also, it is assumed that Matthew wrote down just in Aramaic the sayings of Jesus without any storyline.

And this group of sayings might well be that which was identified by liberal scholars as the Q document, which has never been found and which no one really knows for sure existed, the Q document so-called because Q is the first letter in the German word fellow, which means source. And the whole reason for figuring this out is because of something that is called the synoptic problem. You will hear unless you get totally out of range of all discussions of New Testament studies, you will hear about the synoptic problem.

The first three Gospels are called the synoptic Gospels. The prefix sin means together. An optic, as you might well guess, because of the word optical and things like that, optic means to see and synoptic means to see together.

And the first three Gospels are so similar to each other in many respects that you can put them in parallel columns side by side and see to a large degree. The storyline following one another, not only does the storyline follow one another in the three synoptics to a large extent, this is not not the case throughout, but there's also cases where the same stories are told in essentially the same words by different writers. And

this has led many to believe that these gospel writers either borrowed from each other the actual wording of their accounts or that all of them borrowed from some earlier source that worded it just that way.

And we're not talking about necessarily the words of Jesus, but actually the narrative where the story is being told, often the exact same words used by Matthew or Mark, Matthew and Mark or by Luke and Mark. One thing that's interesting is that the synoptics, in spite of showing this degree of what some would call dependence on one another for their material, because of the identical wording in some cases between the various Gospels, there is also the phenomenon of tremendous independence of the Gospels where they don't agree with each other exactly, where the wording is not only different, but the information is different. Now, when we say the information is different, that's not the same thing as the information is contradictory.

Two accounts of the same story can give different details without contradicting one another. In some cases, the difference is remarkable, so much so that it gives the profound impression that the gospel writers were not acquainted with each other's work. For example, Matthew and Mark mentioned that between Caesarea Philippi, where Jesus first announced his crucifixion would occur to his disciples, between that event and the transfiguration, I believe Matthew and Mark are the ones who say it was after six days.

That is, an event happens at Caesarea Philippi and after six days, Jesus takes three of his disciples up on the mountain where he was transfigured. Luke, on the other hand, doesn't say after six days, but in speaking of the same period, the same interval, he says about eight days later. Now, there's nothing contradictory between the expression after six days and about eight days, but they certainly are different ways of saying the same thing.

It certainly gives the impression that Luke was not very much influenced in his telling of the story by those who said after six days, because a person would not ordinarily think of after six days as being about eight. But when you think about it, about eight days would be not necessarily exactly eight days, that's why it says about eight days. About eight days might be nine days or seven days.

That's to be about eight days. When you say about eight days, you're not making any attempt to be precise. Certainly, seven days would be about eight days.

It would be about as close to eight days as you get without being eight days. And if it was, in fact, seven days later, would this not be the same as saying after six days? What comes after six days? The seventh day, does it not? So in saying in Mark and Matthew saying after six days, Jesus did this and Luke saying about eight days later, Jesus did that. We have, of course, not at all contradictory information, but such a different way of saying it, that it gives the impression that Luke was not the least bit affected or dependent upon Matthew or Mark for the way he tells his story.

And there are many things like this. This is what's called the synoptic problem. You've got, between the Gospels, remarkable cases where the same narrative is given, you know, sometimes several sentences in a row, verbatim, between two different Gospels.

And it would not be very common for two people telling a story to give verbatim accounts. On the other hand, you have these cases where they could have been much closer to each other and are very different in the way they say it. I mean, when two of the Gospels tell us there was an angel that met the women at the tomb and the other two Gospels tells there were two angels there.

There is no contradiction, because if there were two, there was certainly one. You can't have two without having at least one. So if there were, in fact, two angels, then there no one can call a person liar who said there was an angel there.

Just didn't mention there was another. But to to say it, those two ways are so different that some people mistakenly call that a contradiction. All it really is is a proof that the gospel writers were quite independent of each other, that they didn't depend heavily on each other.

And so the question, the synoptic problem is, how is it that these separate documents seem to exhibit a degree of dependence on each other? On the one hand, and on the other hand, seem to have remarkable cases of independence from one another. And various ways have been suggested to sort this out. The most common is to suggest that Mark is the earliest gospel and that Luke and Matthew both used Mark to a certain extent.

In the telling of their story, but also brought in information additional. Of course, Mark is the shortest gospel of them all. And where Mark is lacks material that is found in Matthew and Luke, that material is more often than not verbal teachings of Jesus.

What I mean is that where you'll find more material in Matthew than you find in Mark and more material in Luke than you find in Mark. That additional material is usually in the form of sayings and teachings of Jesus. Mark has most of the same stories, not all of them, but most of them.

And what Mark lacks is the bulk of teaching. And so the assumption is that there was another source available to Matthew and Luke that was maybe primarily just the teaching of Jesus. And that they supplemented Mark's gospel by adding these teachings.

This source that is mainly just teachings of Jesus is what they call the Q document. Now, as I said, and I want to make this clear, the Q document has never been found. No one has even has any real sure grounds for believing it ever existed.

It is a hypothetical document. You need to bear that in mind, because when you read Newsweek and Time magazine writing of the latest findings of the Jesus seminar, they're

going to talk about, you know, all the important role that the Q document played in the forming of the gospels. Well, no one even knows if the Q document ever even existed.

It is simply a hypothesis that has been made up to try to account for this additional material, which it is assumed Matthew and Luke brought in and added to their awareness of the events recorded in Mark. Now, all of this, of course, starts with the assumption that the gospels were not written by the persons who claim whose names they bear. Yet we saw from Papias and Irenaeus, two very early witnesses, both of them dying in the in the second century.

And certainly close enough to the events to know better than a modern scholar would know. They both admit and I should say affirm that Matthew, in fact, wrote. First.

Irenaeus said that while Peter and Paul were still preaching in Rome, now, Paul died in no later than 67 A.D., but Irenaeus said that while Peter and Paul were still preaching in Rome, Matthew wrote down the sayings of Jesus. Now, we don't know that all that he wrote was the sayings of Jesus. The Gospel of Matthew, as we have it today, might well have been the document that Irenaeus is talking about.

Certainly, the Gospel of Matthew is predominantly occupied with sayings of Jesus. That he would also have had some storyline to connect these sayings is not unthinkable. It could still be that Irenaeus would refer to this as a document of the sayings of Jesus.

And there is certainly no reason to reject the notion that Irenaeus is talking about what we now call the Gospel according to Matthew. And it was written during the time that Peter and Paul were preaching in Rome. Irenaeus said that after Peter and Paul were no longer there, Mark, who had spent time with Peter, wrote the Gospel of Mark according to what he learned from Peter.

So that would make the Gospel of Mark not the first gospel, but the second. And that Luke, somewhere in there, he does not put it chronologically, Luke also wrote his Gospel. And John wrote his Gospel while he was in Ephesus.

Now, according to this testimony, all the Gospels were written by their traditional authors. And frankly, I can't think of any reason to reject it. I don't know if someone would say, well, why is it that some of the passages are word for word verbatim between them? I don't know the answer for sure, but it is possible.

There's a couple of reasons. One could be it was inspired by the Holy Spirit. That's a novel suggestion.

But if the Holy Spirit inspired all of them, it is not impossible that he might have inspired the exact same words and phraseology in many cases. Although this is not an answer that can be just given flippantly as if it solves all the difficulties. Because if the Holy Spirit was so involved in the writing of the Gospels that he saw to it that some passages are

word for word the same in all the Gospels, it doesn't answer the question of why they aren't word for word throughout all of them.

I mean, the whole thing. Why would he choose these particular places to give word for word identity? I don't know. I can say this.

It's very probable that before any of the Gospels were written, that the stories of Jesus had been told and retold and retold verbally to the point that some of them probably had taken the form of a very standardized recitation and the exact words. You know, if you tell the same story over and over again to different audiences, eventually you begin to say it the same way after a while. You know, it begins to be something that gets formalized.

And it's entirely possible that before the Gospels were written, some of those stories became so formalized that the wording of them would almost inevitably be written down precisely the same by whoever heard them and wrote them. I don't pretend with these few words to solve the whole problem that many call the synoptic problem. But I would say that those who deny the traditional authorship of the Gospels.

Have bigger problems and bigger things to explain. Then do those who acknowledge the traditional authorship and of course, that traditional authorship is an important matter. To know whether we're reading something that was really eyewitness accounts of the life of Jesus or something that was simply the pious imagination of a later generation of Christians trying to make up a story or embellish the story of Jesus.

I also want to say something about the early date of writing. Luke, by all accounts, Luke was not the earliest gospel to be written. Even the liberal critics believe that Mark came before Luke.

And conservatives generally believe that Mark and Matthew both were written or Matthew and Mark were both written before Luke. But Luke was written quite early. And must have been by a very common reasoning.

Luke wrote two books, Luke and Acts. He refers to Luke as the first treatise or the former treatise when he writes the book of Acts. So it's clear that Luke was written before the book of Acts was written.

Yet the book of Acts closes without recording the death of Paul. Now, this is very peculiar in view of the fact that the book of Luke, the book of Acts, excuse me, does record the deaths of persons less important to Luke's purpose in writing than Paul. Furthermore, the last several chapters of the book of Acts are all about Paul's imprisonment, his appeal to Rome, his trip to Rome.

Of course, those last chapters are building up to the fact that Paul is going to stand before Caesar Nero. And who knows what will happen? He may die. He may be released.

But it's certainly the climax of the story. And yet the book of Luke or book of Acts closes with Paul arriving in Rome. And as it says, he remained two full years in his own rented house awaiting his trial date.

Now, consider this a. Why would Luke take the story so far of Paul and then not record his trial, not record what happened as a result of his trial? Not record his death. Well, the most logical, in fact, to my mind, the only sensible suggestion is because Luke wrote it before these things happened. He certainly would have included it otherwise.

Furthermore, we have a good way of knowing essentially how long Luke was in because Luke was with Paul in Rome at the time he finished the book of Acts, because the closing verses of Acts say Paul remained about two years in his own rented house. Now consider this.

After those two years, what happened? Either there were more years that he waited or there was a trial. Acts does not tell us whether after those two years the trial occurred or whether after those two years more time occurred and then there was a trial. All we know is that Luke takes us only two years into Paul's stay in Rome.

But certainly something happened after that. But Luke just doesn't tell it. The evidence certainly would indicate that Luke wrote this two years after Paul had come to Rome.

And all he could report at that point was that it had been two years. Paul spent two years waiting for his trial to come. Certainly something happened after that.

And it wasn't only two years. I mean, maybe maybe after two years, his trial occurred. But why doesn't Luke talk about that? The only reasonable suggestion that comes to my mind as a person trying to be as reasonable as possible is that Acts was written two years after Paul came to Rome.

And he came to Rome about the year 60 A.D. So Acts must have been written around 62 A.D. And Luke was written before that. Very probably around 60 A.D. And Luke is not believed by anyone to have been the earliest gospel, which means that Mark and Matthew may well both have been in existence. Luke mentions other people who had written the life of Christ.

Mark and Matthew may well have been among those that he had in mind. And that would put the writing of Mark and Matthew back into the 50s A.D. Some have thought that Mark could have even written his gospel as early as 50 A.D. Even if they were all written as late as 60 A.D. And it doesn't seem possible to date any of the gospels except John any later than 60 A.D. That's still only 30 years after the crucifixion of Jesus. That's only within 35 years of all the events recorded in the book, in the gospels, with the exception of the birth narratives.

And 35 years, there'll be a lot of people still alive. 35 years after the life of Jesus who had

been around when Jesus was there. I mean, consider this.

If you had been 20 years old in Palestine during the time of Jesus' activities, especially in Galilee, you would have heard of him. You probably would have seen him. He was famous.

Thousands of people followed him. He preached in all the synagogues. He did miracles.

He was the talk of the town. If you were 20 years old at that time, you would only be 55 years old at the time that the three synoptic gospels were written. Which means that you probably wouldn't have died yet.

Most people would probably still be alive who had seen Jesus, who were young adults at the time of his ministry. And for the gospels to be released at that early date and circulated. And by the way, Matthew was circulated among the Jews.

That is clear. The other gospels easily could have fallen in the hands of Jewish readers. It's certainly no reason to prevent that.

And yet for no one to refute them, for no one to come out and write the alternative story of Jesus, you know, say, you know, there are some strange stories going around about this guy, Jesus. Well, I happened to be there when he was preaching and he didn't say the things that these documents say. He didn't do those things.

This claim that thousands of people followed him around. We can't find any evidence for this at all. There were no witnesses.

I mean, it's just it's just really stretching our imagination to try to tell us that these things didn't happen. And yet the gospels were written and in circulation well within the lifetime of thousands of people, if not hundreds of thousands of people who could have had direct witness to who Jesus was and what he said and did. And yet no refutation ever was known to have come forward.

Therefore, there seems no reason in the world that I can think of to reject the gospel witness. Now, some people have thought that between the gospels, there are contradictions. The biggest claim contradiction is between the gospel of John on the one hand and the synoptic gospels on the other.

John's gospel differs significantly from the synoptic gospels. For one thing, the synoptic gospels record scores, at least dozens of miracles of Jesus. The gospel of John records only seven.

The synoptic gospels record ministry almost entirely in Galilee, with some exceptional cases of ministry in Piraeus and in Judea. John's gospel records ministry almost exclusively in Judea. The synoptic gospels record Jesus teaching about moral things,

teaching the multitudes about love for God and justice for their toward their neighbor and so forth.

Whereas in the gospel of John, there are lengthy discourses which focus very largely on who Jesus is, what his status is, that he's the son of the father and that he has authority to forgive sins and all that kind of stuff. And, you know, it is argued that the Jesus of the gospels of the synoptic gospels is not the same as the Jesus of the gospel of John. And everybody knows that John was written later than all the other gospels.

And so it is suggested, or was for a long time, and some liberals still suggest it, that John may have been written much later when a theological position about Jesus being God had developed in the church. Because you don't find in the synoptic gospels Jesus referring to himself as God, not by any direct statement anyway. You don't even have the synoptic gospels, the writers themselves mentioning that he is God or giving any clear evidence that they believed he was God.

It is claimed. Whereas John's gospel is all theological. It starts out with an affirmation that Jesus was God and that he came to earth as God incarnate.

And then it has all of the all the statements about Jesus declaring his equality with God are found in the gospel of John and his discourses are all about himself. And they say, well, listen, is that really the same Jesus we read about in the synoptics in the synoptic gospels? He's never talking about himself. He's always talking about justice and love and goodwill and mercy and behavior and ethics.

Whereas in the gospel of John, he hardly ever talks about that. He's always talking about himself and about God and about religious subjects. And so this dichotomy between John's gospel and the synoptic gospels has become a stumbling block to many people, mostly to liberals.

And I just want to comment about that. According to the tradition of the church, John spent his final years in Ephesus. It seems that he was arrested at one point.

His stay in Ephesus was interrupted by his arrest and his being banished to the island of Patmos, where he wrote the Book of Revelation. And then after his return from Patmos, he spent his final years in Ephesus again and lived to be a very old man. No one knows exactly when John wrote his gospel, but most think that John's gospel and his epistles were the latest books of the New Testament to be written.

Very possibly after his return from Patmos. If that is so, then the gospel of John is separated from the other gospels in time by decades and is a much later production. But that doesn't necessarily mean it is less accurate.

It was, after all, written by the disciple whom Jesus loved, who was intimate with the other disciples and with Jesus for three years or so, and who was an eyewitness of the

things that he records. There's no reason to believe that he had to have embellished it or modified or developed a theology that the other disciples did not know or believe or that wasn't true. The differences between John's gospel and the synoptics are easily explained, it seems to me.

For one thing, the differences in geography. Well, the synoptic gospels mostly record Jesus' activities in Galilee, but they do not deny that he also did ministry in Judea. In fact, they mention trips that he made to Judea, they just don't give much detail about them.

And the gospel of John that records much ministry of Jesus in Judea does not in any sense deny that Jesus ministered largely in Galilee and even mentions trips he made to Galilee, but doesn't give much detail. The type of discourses he gave truly are different in the gospel of John than they are in the synoptics. But you have to take into consideration the audience.

In the synoptics, Jesus is addressing Galilean peasants on the hillsides, uneducated people, and talking to them about their need to live godly lives and just and merciful and honest lives. When he is in the gospel of John, his discourses are largely disputes with religiously trained professionals of the priesthood and of the Pharisees. And he is discussing religious topics with them.

One thing that is very clear is that Jesus was versatile, and there's no reason why one man couldn't be so versatile as he's depicted in the gospels. When among uneducated peasants, he speaks in plain ethical aphorisms, but when he's with the theologians, he is more than equal to debate with them on theological topics, which he does. One thing that's, I think, very important to note is that even the synoptic gospels record at least one instance of Jesus speaking in words that everybody acknowledges to be very Johannine.

That is very much in the style of the discourses found in the gospel of John. In Matthew 11, verses 25 through 27, and there are parallels to this in Luke, at that time Jesus answered and said, I thank you, Father. This is Matthew 11, 25.

I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in your sight. Now, verse 27.

All things have been delivered to me by my father, and no one knows the son except the father. Nor does anyone know the father except the son and the one whom the son wills to reveal him. Now, that statement, if anyone has saturated their minds with the gospels, if you've read the gospels thoroughly, that statement sounds like something lifted right out of the gospel of John.

That's just the kind of subject matter, just the kind of comment, just the kind of style of

speaking that fills the discourses in the gospel of John, but is not found very common in the synoptic gospels. However, this particular statement in the same form is found in Luke and in Matthew, both of them synoptics, and proves that at least the Jesus of the synoptic gospels was capable of speaking exactly like the Jesus of the gospel of John. Though the synoptic gospels do not record very many instances of his speaking in this manner, and John does, it is very clear that anyone who says that the Jesus of the synoptics could not be the same as the Jesus of the gospel of John is jumping to conclusions contrary to evidence.

Jesus was very versatile, and to different audiences he could discuss different matters in different styles. He could talk to the educated in a very philosophical and theologically sophisticated style, and to the common fishermen and peasants of Galilee he could talk in a very plain, simple style. We don't find any parables, really, in the gospel of John.

We find many parables in the teaching of Jesus in the synoptics. In the gospel of John, Jesus has many metaphors where he says, I am the good shepherd, I am the true vine, I am the door to the sheep, I am the bread of life, I am the resurrection of the life, and so forth. And you don't have any of those kinds of things in the synoptics.

Those are in John. So, there are truly differences between these gospels, but you know, the best explanation I know to account for these differences is not to jump to the radical conclusion that we have a different Jesus and that one of these gospels, namely John, is not as historically trustworthy as the others, but rather that John, writing his gospel years after the other gospels had been in circulation, and in his old age being requested by the elders of the church of Ephesus to write down, or at least to dictate for them to write down, the things that he remembered that were not recorded in the other gospels, might well dictate or write down his memoirs specifically emphasizing the things the other gospels had left out, not wishing to duplicate them unnecessarily. The other gospels had duplicated one another's material so thoroughly and had been in circulation for so many years by this time that it would add nothing for John to simply repeat the same stories.

But John had poignant memories from first-hand experience that had been omitted from the synoptic gospels and which apparently he thought would be a shame to have go to the grave with him. So he, in his late life, in all likelihood, wrote or dictated these stories that are in the gospel of John, which are just as true and just as authoritative as those found in the synoptic gospels, but which are written, as it were, as a supplement to the synoptic gospels. So as you study the synoptics, you'll find very little overlapping.

There's only two miracles in the gospel of John that are also found in the other gospels, the feeding of the 5,000, which is the only miracle besides the resurrection of Jesus that is found in all four gospels, and the other is the resurrection of Jesus, just the resurrection of Jesus and the feeding of the 5,000, the only two miracles that are found in all of the gospels, including John. There is no further overlap between John and the

miracles that he records and the miracles found in any of the other synoptics. So certainly John has the appearance of being no attempt to duplicate what was written in the earlier gospels, but rather it was deliberately an attempt to supplement them, to be an appendix, to provide information about the gaps left in our knowledge by the way the other gospels were written.

So the gospel of John is very essential in letting us know what the other gospels left out, and this is what I consider to be the status of the gospels as witnesses and as sources for the life of Christ. I believe them completely. I believe that they give a completely true account of the life of Jesus, and even if a person wished to doubt that the gospels were inspired, and by the way, I would think that someone would have the right to doubt that since they don't claim that they're inspired.

The gospels never make any claim at all to being inspired. Someone, therefore, I think would be at liberty to raise questions. Are the gospels inspired or not? Well, all I can say this, if one would choose to say no to that question, and I'm not saying no to that, I'm just saying if someone made that decision, then they should at least treat the gospels the way they treat Josephus or some other historical document.

And as such, even without any theory about them being inspired, just seeing them as historical records written by people close to the situation, they provide some of the most authoritative histories that one could ever hope for of anyone's life. Where three persons who were his friends, and a fourth person who knew his friends well, wrote independent accounts of his life, and confirmed so many things among themselves by their independent witnesses. We could say that even seen as nothing other than mere uninspired historical accounts, the four gospels would provide us with adequate reason to put our faith in this man whose life they describe.

And to reject their witness as historical is to evince a theological bigotry. I have sometimes said, and it has made people angry when I say it, that every person on the planet who is not a Christian is either ignorant of the facts or dishonest. Now, of course, those words are charged words.

I could say it more nicely than that, but I can't say it more truly than that. To say ignorant of the facts would mean that people don't know exactly what, you know, about Jesus. For instance, there's huge masses of humanity in the world who have never heard of Jesus.

They're ignorant of the facts. There are others who have heard of Jesus but don't know what he's all about. They don't know about the historical accounts.

They don't know what's in there. They're ignorant of the facts. There are others who do know what the historical accounts say, but they don't know the status of the accounts as to whether they're reliable or not.

These people are ignorant of the facts, too. But when one is not ignorant of the facts, when one looks at what the gospels are, what the corroborating evidence is from the Roman and the Jewish historians and so forth that corroborate so much of it, and, you know, can see quite objectively that we have tremendous information of a reliable sort, of a historical nature, about the life of Jesus, and then they still choose not to believe it, and they choose to discard the information, that's not being honest. That's why we call them either ignorant or dishonest.

If the truth is presented to you in a very responsible and convincing and really decisive way that allows no other reasonable conclusion, and you reject the conclusion of truth, then you're not being honest. And those people who reject Christ, they're either not honest enough to simply let the witness stand as it is and acknowledge it to be true, or else they're not informed enough to know that there is more reason to believe the witness of the gospels than there is to reject them. In fact, there's more reason to believe the witness of the gospels than there is to believe virtually any other historical record about any other historical person.

And in order to simply rule out the gospels, say, I don't believe what they say, is to apply a standard of skepticism to them, which is not applied, generally speaking, to other historical documents that are no more verifiable than the gospels, and usually much less so. People accept the historical records of other historical events, which records are much less reliable, much less corroborated than are the gospels. And to set the gospels apart as a separate set of documents that we choose to reject, even though we accept other historical records, is to show bigotry, is to show that we simply do not like what is in them.

It's not a matter of having reason to reject them, except that we don't have a taste for them. We don't like what they say. We would prefer to believe they are not true.

Now, if somebody wants to say that, no, they reject them on better grounds than this, the only grounds they could really give would have to be that the gospels record things that are hard to believe happen. A man walking on water, a virgin having a baby, a man with a word making the storm stop, a man feeding a multitude with a handful of food, a man rising from the dead himself. These kinds of things don't happen every day, and many people doubt that they could happen.

And if the truth were told, most people who reject the gospels do so for a little better reason than that they are convinced that such stories can't be true, because they don't believe those kinds of stories can be true. They don't believe in the supernatural. However, a rejection of the supernatural out of hand is simply a philosophical preference.

No one can prove that there is no supernatural. And I mean, how could anyone ever prove such a thing? It can't be proven. It can't even be tested.

The only way you would know if supernatural things have happened or not is not by doing some kind of test in a laboratory, but by having adequate witnesses to the event. If there is adequate witness to the fact that an event happened, then we have reason to believe it did happen. The fact that we think it improbable or formerly thought it was impossible for such things to happen does not change the fact that we have competent witnesses who have no obvious evidence to be gained by lying, who have affirmed that such and such a thing happened.

To say it did not is simply to call the witnesses liars because we have a preference. And that is essentially why most people who reject the gospels do so. They have a preference.

They don't have proof or even good evidence against the historicity of the gospels. So our sources are good. Let's move along now and talk about what I said earlier I'm going to get on to.

And that is we need to connect somehow. Our knowledge of the Old Testament with the time of the New Testament. If you don't do if you don't study what we're about to discuss here, you will have, let's just say, a disjunction in the narrative between the close of the Old Testament and the opening of the new.

Hopefully Christians read both the Old and the New Testament. And if you read the Old Testament, it follows the history of, first of all, the human race from Adam. And then, of course, more particularly of the Jewish race from Abraham on.

And you read of Abraham's offspring going into Egypt and coming out of Egypt under Moses and being established as a mighty nation, eventually conquering the land of Canaan, occupying it, fighting to preserve it against invaders and enemies. And then there's civil strife and the nation splits into two in the days of Rehoboam. So you've got the northern kingdom of Israel, the southern kingdom of Judah.

Then in 722 BC, you've got the Assyrians overrunning the capital of the northern kingdom. That would be Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel is overrun in 722 BC by the Assyrians. And that's the end of that.

And all that's left is the kingdom of Judah. And they stay around for 120 or so years more. And then they are overrun by the Babylonians who have risen to power and conquered the Assyrians.

So the Babylonians then take the Jews from Jerusalem in 586 BC into Babylon. And as the historical information in the Old Testament comes to a close, 70 years of captivity have transpired in Babylon. And a certain number of Jews at the end of that time return to Palestine and rebuild the temple in the days of Zerubbabel and Joshua, the high priest.

And the narrative of the Old Testament closes with this post-exilic community of Israel,

rather small. Most of the Jews are still in Babylon or in the nations that they were scattered to. A very small remnant have come back to Jerusalem, have rebuilt it, built the temple again.

You have the days of Ezra and Nehemiah where the Jewish religion is purified and reformed by these leaders. And the story closes. Now, the story closes about 400 years before the New Testament story opens.

And therefore, in the Bible, there is a what we could call the silent years. God sent no prophets. There's no revealed history from any prophetic writer of those 400 years from the post-exilic period of Ezra and Nehemiah to the time of John the Baptist and Jesus in the beginning of the New Testament.

Now, that wouldn't be too significant if not for the fact that everything changed historically and politically between the close of the Old Testament and the beginning of the New. For example, in the Old Testament, the story closes during the Medo-Persian Empire. Now, the Jews had been conquered by the Babylonians during the Babylonian Empire, but then Babylon had been conquered by Medo-Persia and Cyrus.

Now, when the Old Testament closes, the Medes and the Persians are still running the world. But when the New Testament opens, the Medes and the Persians are nowhere to be found. The new conqueror and ruler of the world is Rome.

And without knowing what happened in those 400 years between the Old and the New Testament, we would not know how this transpired. What happened to the Medes and the Persians? And how did Rome happen to become so powerful? Why is Israel now occupied by Rome? Well, as we study the intertestamental period, we find that the Medes and the Persians were eventually conquered by the Greeks. And the Greeks were conquered by the Romans.

And the Romans conquered Palestine. And so much change. There's a tremendous turnover politically in world events in the Mediterranean world in those silent years.

So that something's entirely different by the time the New Testament opens. Another thing you'd notice if you didn't know the intertestamental period, you'd notice that the Old Testament writers wrote in Hebrew. But the New Testament writers wrote in Greek.

And the question legitimately arises, well, why did the Jewish people of God change languages? Why did they always write in Hebrew before? And now that the New Testament is on, they're writing in a different language. Why did they give up their sacred national language? Well, of course, we get the answer to that by studying the intertestamental period, too. Alexander the Great conquered the region about 320-something or 330-something B.C. And he instituted Koine Greek as the universal language of the empire.

So that by the time the disciples lived, even a little while after that, the Jews translated the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek. And so the disciples lived at a time where many Jews were using the Greek Old Testament, speaking Greek as at least one of their languages, and naturally writing in Greek as well. That transpired in the Middle Period.

Another thing, in the Old Testament, when it closes, the Jews have their temple, but it's the only religious site of worship. It's the only site of worship that God ever ordained that we know of. By the time the New Testament opens, everybody goes to synagogues.

There are no synagogues in the Old Testament. And yet they're everywhere in the New Testament. In all the Jewish cities, Jesus preaches in the synagogues.

In all the Gentile cities, when Paul's traveling throughout the Roman Empire, he goes to the synagogues. There are no synagogues in the Old Testament. Where did these come from? Well, they arose also in the Intertestamental Period.

And there are many other things that are different. You have in the New Testament the Pharisees and the Sadducees, very prominent. They are not anywhere to be found in the Old Testament.

And so, the study of the Intertestamental Period fills the vacuum in our knowledge about why things are as they are at the opening of the New Testament, when they were not that way at all at the close of the Old Testament. And so, I'd like to briefly fill in those gaps for you, if I might. I thought I had a handout for you about this, and of course, it would be much more advantageous to have one.

But in looking over the handout, there are several things about it that made it unacceptable. So, I'll either eventually present another one to you, or you'll have to take notes feverishly. The Old Testament, therefore, closes in the Persian Period, during the reigns of the Medes and the Persians.

The Persians conquered Babylon in 539 B.C. Cyrus marched in, conquered the city of Babylon, which was at that time ruled by Belshazzar. He was executed that night. The Persians took over.

They were much to be preferred over the Babylonians in many respects. And one of the most merciful things seen done by Cyrus, the Persian conqueror, was that all the peoples that Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian, had taken out of their countries and deported to Babylon and surrounding areas, Cyrus made a decree that they could all go home. Now, most significant for our concern is that this affected the Jews.

The Jews were permitted by Cyrus to go back to Israel and to rebuild their temple in Jerusalem. The Jews were not the only people who were given such permission. Cyrus gave a general decree that the expatriates from foreign countries that had been brought against their will into the Babylonian regions could go home if they wished to.

Now, of course, you have to realize that most of these people had been resettled 70 years earlier. That means two or three generations had been born in their new homeland. And most of the Jews and probably most other foreigners didn't have any interest in leaving.

They had homes. Some of them had children and grandchildren there. Many of them had businesses.

They'd been making a living there for a long time. They were a part of the community. And there was, you know, unless they had very strong religious sentiments to go back and build the temple, there was very little to motivate them to go back.

And so very few Jews did. Zerubbabel led the first wave of exiles back to Jerusalem from Babylon. According to Scripture, about 42,000 Jews went with Zerubbabel back to Jerusalem, 42,000.

And they eventually rebuilt the temple. They began rebuilding it in 536 B.C. And then they were opposed by many of their neighbors, the Samaritans, which, by the way, are a new group that arose during the intertestamental period, too. The Samaritans were sort of the local half-breed Jew slash Gentiles who, after the Assyrians had displaced the northern kingdom of Israel and had imported foreigners to come in to repopulate the land, some of the remnant of the nation of Israel had intermarried with the local pagans and so forth.

And the people who inhabited the region then were sort of a half-breed Jew and half-Gentile and were known as the Samaritans in Jesus' day. But these Samaritans opposed the rebuilding of the temple in the days of Zerubbabel and even wrote letters of complaint to the Persian emperor asking him to stop it and so forth. And it was stopped for a while.

And although they started rebuilding the temple in 536 B.C., they stopped because of opposition. And for 16 years, they made no progress on it. During that 16 years, they built their own homes and built up the Jewish society, but they did not build the temple.

However, in 520 B.C., which was 16 years after they started the project, the Jews were encouraged by the prophets Haggai and Zechariah to begin building the temple again, and they did, and they completed it by 516 B.C. The stories of Esther and Ezra and Nehemiah and the book of Malachi, the prophet, all belong to this period, and we can see from the study of Ezra and Nehemiah as well as the book of Malachi that even the exiles who returned and built the temple soon lagged in zeal. Apparently, they did not experience the kind of prosperity they hoped they might. The blessing of God did not appear to be on them quite as much as they hoped.

Their crops failed in some cases. They lived on meager rations. Some of them got

disappointed with God about this.

Some of them stopped paying their tithes. Some said there's no profit in serving God. The prophet Malachi had to come rebuke them about that.

Some of them began to divorce their wives and marry foreigners, and sometimes this marriage to foreigners caused a cultural compromise so that their children weren't even raised knowing the Hebrew language and probably the Hebrew religion either. And this had to be addressed by some of these men. So, as the Old Testament closes, we see already the returned exiles who've come back from Babylon are having their own period of lukewarmness coming on, defection, but there are men of God addressing this, calling them back to repentance and in some measure succeeding.

And so it closes and the Persian period is still there. Now, the Persian period came to an end when Alexander the Great, who was a Macedonian or a Greek, conquered the whole region that had been once the Persian Empire. Alexander, in a space of 12 years as a young man, I think he was about 20 when he started, in about 12 years conquered the whole Persian Empire.

Nothing seemed to be able to stop him. He apparently was a brilliant strategist as well as a very aggressive commander. He destroyed all resistance to his rule between 334 BC and 332 BC.

And he Hellenized the culture, which means he brought in Greek customs and Greek language. He felt he could unite his empire better by everyone speaking the same language. And although most local nations retained a knowledge and a use of their own local languages, they all essentially had to learn Greek in order to participate in international commerce.

And Koine Greek, there's been several periods in the Greek language. Koine Greek was the period of Greek introduced by Alexander the Great and which was still prevalent in the days of Jesus. The Gospels and the rest of the New Testament were written in Koine Greek.

Koine means common and it was a language of the common people. Alexander, after conquering the world, died at age 33 in the year 323. And when he died, his two sons were assassinated and this left a power vacuum.

He was the undisputed ruler of his empire during his lifetime. But with his sons dead and him dead, it was not clear who would succeed him. And there were four generals who had served under him who, for a while, fought among themselves as rivals.

Each of them wanted to succeed Alexander, but none of them was strong enough to depose the other three. And so, as it turned out, they came to a mutual agreement that they would divide the empire among themselves. These four generals are sometimes

called the diadochoi.

They're the successors to Alexander, and they divided up his kingdom four ways. Their names were Ptolemy, spelled P-T-O-L-E-M-Y, and Solanus was a second one, S-E-L-E-N-U-S, Solanus. And then there's Lysimachus, or Lysimachus, spelled L-Y-S-I-M-A-C-H-U-S.

And last of all, there was Cassander, C-A-S-S-A-N-D-E-R. From Ptolemy, there arose a dynasty of rulers who ruled in Egypt. And from Solanus, there arose, in the region of Syria, a dynasty called the Seleucids.

For many centuries, the rulers in Egypt were named Ptolemy. Ptolemy I, Ptolemy II, Ptolemy III, and so forth, on up the numbers. In Syria, the rulers were called the Seleucids, and their names were alternately called Seleucus or Antiochus.

There was Seleucus I, followed by Antiochus I, followed by Seleucus II, who was followed by Antiochus II. Then there was Seleucus III and Antiochus III, and so forth. Now, I won't talk about Cassander and Lysimachus because their dynasties don't affect the story of Israel.

They don't contribute to our knowledge of what was happening to bring about the circumstances that we find in the New Testament. But we have, of course, Egypt, ruled by the Ptolemies, south of Israel. And you've got Syria, to the north of Israel, ruled by the Seleucids.

And remember, the Seleucids were either named Seleucus or Antiochus, depending on alternate generations or whatever, alternate rulers. For the first hundred years after Alexander's death, Israel was under the control of Egypt, under the Ptolemies. Actually, for 122 years.

This was essentially from 320 to 198 BC. From 320 to 198 BC, Israel was controlled by the Egyptian dynasty, the Ptolemies. For this period of 122 years, things went pretty well for Israel.

There was a large Jewish population in Alexandria, Egypt. And the Ptolemies gave the Jews a lot of freedom to practice their religion. It was during this period of the Ptolemies, we call this the Egyptian period, since we had the Persian period.

Then there was the Greek period, briefly, under Alexander. And now we call this the Egyptian period, where the Jews were ruled over by the Egyptian Greek rulers. During that time, the Old Testament scriptures were translated into Koine Greek.

It was the Septuagint. The Greek Old Testament was translated during this period of time, while the Jews were under the control of the Egyptians. And that was probably around 285 BC.

No one knows the exact year, but it was around 285 BC, probably, that this happened. Now, after a while, the Syrians, who were making war frequently with the Egyptians, because the Seleucids wanted to control the territory of the Ptolemies, the Seleucids came down, and in war, they gained control of Palestine. They gained control of the Jewish state.

And it pretty much remained in their control, for the most part, for a very long time. We could call this the Syrian period. And this is a very important period, because it was during this period that the Maccabean revolt occurred.

And that is one of the more important things that happened during the intertestamental times. Under the Syrians, the Jews had to serve the Syrian kings Antiochus and Seleucus, numbers 3, 4, 5, 6, and so forth. Antiochus III, the Syrian ruler, Antiochus III defeated Egypt in war in 198 BC, and gained control of Palestine, which is what ended the Egyptian period and began the Syrian period.

Now, at that time, among the Jews, there arose two parties. Some of them were pro-Egyptian, and some pro-Syrian. That is, some of the Jews thought it was better to be under Egypt, and some thought it was better to be under the Syrians.

The pro-Egyptian party was called the House of Onias. These were more conservative. These were Jews who wanted to keep their customs more.

They had a lot of freedom under the Egyptians to do this. The House of Onias, that's spelled O-N-I-A-S. And then there was the House of Tobias, was the other party among the Jews, and they were pro-Syrian.

They tended to be a little more into bringing in Greek culture and compromising on their Jewish distinctives. So it's kind of a conservative party and a liberal party among the Jews at this time of transition from the Egyptian rule to the Syrian rule. The House of Onias was pro-Egyptian.

The House of Tobias pro-Syrian. At a later date, and we are skipping to some important things, there was an Antiochus IV. He was not the next ruler after Antiochus III, but he was a ruler that came up in 175 B.C. and his control continued until 163 B.C. Antiochus IV is also known as Epiphanes, Antiochus Epiphanes.

You may have heard that name before. Epiphanes was a nickname he gave himself. It means something like illustrious one.

His political enemies in mockery called him Antiochus Epimanes, because Epimanes means the madman. And so he called himself Antiochus Epiphanes, the illustrious one. Those who didn't respect him much called him Antiochus Epimanes, the madman.

And he was something of a madman. Very hostile to the Jews, and he did wage wars

against Egypt, which were unsuccessful. And it made him angry, and it made him take his hostilities out on the Jews many times.

You see, every time there was a war between Syria and Egypt, someone had to march through Israel to get there. Israel was sort of the buffer zone between those two states. And so the Jews were the hapless victims of invasion every time there was a war between the Syrians and the Egyptians.

Almost always the Egyptians, excuse me, almost always the Syrians were the aggressors, and they came down and invaded. It wasn't so much that they were coming against Israel, although sometimes they were, because of perceived loyalty to the Egyptian side that they found in the house of Onias. Actually, when Antiochus Epiphanes came to power as ruler over Syria and over Palestine, he displaced Onias, who was the priest, the high priest.

Remember, the house of Onias were pro-Egyptian. Well, Antiochus was a Syrian, and he took Onias out of office as high priest and replaced him with his brother Jason, who was more of a Hellenizer, more of one who would cooperate with the bringing in of Greek culture. And at that time, Onias' brother Jason, the new high priest, encouraged Hellenization of the Hebrew culture to the point that they actually built a gymnasium in Jerusalem, such as they had in the Greek cities for the Greek games.

This bothered the more devout Jews because they followed the Greek customs of the young men running races in the Colosseum nude. You might think this is unlikely because we are so Christianized in our sensitivities, but the Greeks ran in their Olympic games in the nude. And many Jewish boys, of course, because there was a Colosseum in town and because there was great glory and fame attached to being an athlete, many of the Jewish boys chose to participate in these games and in these races and would run in the nude, much to the consternation of the more devout Jews in town.

Furthermore, because the Jewish boys were circumcised and the Greeks were not, many of them had surgery done to remove the marks of their circumcision surgery so that they would appear uncircumcised. I'm not sure how this is done. Don't ask me.

I don't know how that's done. But at these Greek games that were run in Jerusalem, in the Colosseum there, they would do invocations, that is prayers to the gods, to the Greek gods at the races. The people of Jerusalem began to adopt Greek dress styles, which were not as modest as the Jewish ones.

They began to give their children Greek names. Even among Jesus' disciples, there were two of them that had Greek names. Philip and Andrew are Greek names.

So obviously their parents, though Jewish, had chosen Greek names for their children. That began about the time of Antiochus Epiphanes and when Jason the Hellenizer was

the high priest. So these trends toward Hellenization were advanced during the time that Jason was high priest.

Now there was a movement that arose to oppose this Hellenizing trend. There were Jews who believed that Hellenization was bad for the Jewish religion and was basically disloyal to the Jewish God. Those who rose up to support more pure Jewish culture were called the Hassidim, which means pious ones.

The Hassidim. And this was a party of Jewish religious persons who wanted to halt the advance of Hellenization into the Jewish land and culture. The Hassidim actually were a party that developed eventually into the Pharisees.

The word Pharisees means separated ones. And though no one knows exactly when the transition took place, all historians agree that the Pharisee party traced their spiritual lineage back to the Hassidim in the days of Antiochus Epiphanes, who resisted Hellenization. On the other hand, the Sadducean party in the days of Jesus, which were much more liberal and tended to corroborate more with the enemy, with the Romans in Jesus' day, they trace their theological roots back to this time also as the party that promoted Hellenization to the house of Tobias and so forth.

And so these parties that you find as fixtures in Palestine in the Gospels began to emerge at this time with different names. The Hassidim resisting Hellenization were the forerunners of the Pharisees. And the general trend toward Hellenization was continued in essentially in later days by the Sadducean party.

Now, Antiochus had, of course, put Jason into position as the high priest. But a guy named Menelaus offered to pay Antiochus a large sum of money, bribed him basically to give him the priesthood. So for money, Antiochus replaced Jason with this rival, Menelaus, which is spelled M-E-N-E-L-A-U-S, just because Menelaus could bribe him more.

So we can see that the priesthood was no longer hereditary as it was supposed to be under the law, but it was given to the highest bidder by the Syrian ruler. Now, we have then Menelaus is the new high priest, but not for long, because Antiochus Epiphanes went down to war against Egypt around 170 B.C. And he hoped to conquer Egypt and he almost did. But outside of Alexandria, when he probably would have conquered the city, the Romans, who were just at this time rising to power as a world power, sent a fleet of ships over to intercept Antiochus and to keep him from conquering Alexandria.

The Romans did not wish to see, although they didn't control Alexandria, the Romans did not wish to see Antiochus become more powerful. And he had in his earlier life spent time as a hostage in Rome. His father, I believe it was, had been conquered in a battle in Rome, and he had been taken as a hostage.

So he had lived in Rome for a while in his earlier life and had a tremendous respect for the Roman power. And what happened is that Antiochus was down in Egypt ready to besiege Alexandria and conquer it. And the Roman fleet arrived and the Roman commander actually drew a circle in the sand around where Antiochus was standing and said, do not step outside this circle until you've commanded your troops to return to Syria.

And, of course, Antiochus had two choices. One was to do as he was told and be humiliated. The other was to try to make war against the Romans who were giving him the ultimatum.

Well, he chickened out. He didn't make war with the Romans and he did retreat, but he was under great embarrassment. And his embarrassment he took out on the Jews as he marched back towards Syria.

And he slaughtered a whole bunch of them. Twenty two thousand troops were sent into Palestine to kill a whole bunch of the Jewish people. Just slaughtered 40,000 men and took women and children as slaves.

At that time, actually on December 25th, 168 B.C., he intruded into the Jewish temple, established an altar to Zeus there, the Greek chief god, and sacrificed a pig, which, of course, to the Jews is an unclean animal. But Antiochus had a pig sacrifice to Zeus in the in the holy place in the temple of the Jews. This was and is referred to in the book of Daniel by way of prophecy as the abomination of desolation.

Because of this defilement of the temple, the Jews stopped using the temple. They considered it was defiled and could not be used again until such a time as they could throw off the Syrian yoke and rededicate it and purify it. At that time, Antiochus Epiphanes made Judaism outlawed, an illegal religion.

He made it a capital offense to circumcise your children, to observe Sabbath or the Jewish festivals, or to possess the scriptures. Now, imagine if you were a Jew at that time, hoping, one of the Hasidim, trying to be faithful to scripture, and it made it punishable by death to circumcise your child, and yet the scripture commands you to do so. Punishable by death to keep Sabbath or the Jewish festivals, although the scripture commands it.

And punishable by death even to have the scriptures. Obviously, this was a time of great crisis. This is the period of time that Daniel spoke about.

He spoke about it prophetically because he didn't live to see it. But in Daniel chapter 11, this period of time is predicted by Daniel. And let me see if I can find the verses.

Let's see where it is here. It says in verse 32, Daniel 11, 32, those who do wickedly against the covenant, he, that's Antiochus Epiphanes, shall corrupt with flattery. That is,

of course, those Jews who sided with Antiochus in the Hellenizing process.

Daniel calls them those who do wickedly against the covenant. Says, but the people who know their God shall be strong and carry out great exploits. That's the Hasidim.

And those of the people who understand shall instruct many. Again, that's the Hasidim teaching the right ways in the midst of this time of compromise. Says yet for many days they shall fall by the sword and flame by captivity and by plundering.

Now, when they fall, they shall be aided with a little help. But many shall join them by intrigue. And some of those of understanding shall fall to refine them, purify them and make them white until the time of the end.

Because it is still for an appointed time. So Daniel predicted that there would be this crisis where many of the righteous ones would fall. And they did.

Many of the Hasidim were slain in cold blood because they were keeping Sabbath and they wouldn't lift a sword to defend themselves on the Sabbath. And because they did not cast off their Sabbath observance, they were just executed right on the spot. It was a time of great trial, obviously, for the Jews who desired to be faithful to God.

At that same time, Antiochus made it mandatory to offer sacrifices to idols. And he instituted temple prostitution, as the Greeks had in their temple. So in the Jewish temple, temple prostitution was made mandatory.

So you can see what a crisis this was. This is 186 years before Christ. I mean, 168, excuse me, 168 B.C. And it was at that time, Daniel said, they'll be helped with a little help.

Well, I'll tell you where that little help came from. It happened in what's called the Maccabean period, which is the next period to consider. Following the Syrian period is the Maccabean period.

And in a little village of Modin, a few miles from Jerusalem, an officer of Antiochus Epiphanes came and set up an altar there and required the people there to offer sacrifices to idols on it. First, he had Mattathias, who was the old priest who lived in town there. He ordered him to offer a sacrifice to the idol and Mattathias refused.

Another Jew stepped forward and volunteered to do it. But Mattathias, the priest, killed the Jew who stepped forward to offer the sacrifice. And Mattathias' five sons killed the officer.

And obviously that would be interpreted as an act of war, to kill the Syrian officer as well as the Jew. And so Mattathias and his five sons and a ragtag group of patriots ran off into the mountains and lived in the woods and began to run guerrilla raids against the Syrian

troops and amazingly beat them. Over a decade they worked at this.

And this is called the Maccabean Revolt. The reason it's called Maccabean is because one of the five sons of Mattathias was a man named Judas, whose nickname was Maccabeus. There were five sons and each of them in turn would get killed.

Mattathias got killed in battle against the Syrians and one of his sons would take over and he'd get killed in battle and the next son would do it. And the most effective of the sons leading the revolt was Judas Maccabeus. And so it's sometimes called the Maccabean Revolt.

Maccabeus actually means the hammer. And no one knows for sure why Judas was so named. Some think it might have to do with the crushing victories that he accomplished over the Syrians.

Others have soberly suggested it had to do with the shape of his head. Some people think his head was so shaped as to give him the nickname the hammer. In any case, over a long period of time, virtually all the sons were killed in battle.

Some of the stories are rather interesting. One of them was named Eleazar. He actually rushed through a line of Syrian troops once and stabbed an elephant that Antiochus was riding on, hoping that Antiochus would be dismounted and then he'd kill Antiochus.

But the elephant fell on Eleazar and he was crushed to death under the elephant and Antiochus lived. There's a lot of wonderful stories about this period of war. It's found in the book of First Maccabees, which is not in the Bible.

It's actually in the Catholic Bible. It's part of what we call the Apocrypha, but it's considered a reliable history. And of course, Josephus records these things too.

Anyway, finally, Antiochus died in 163 BC. And there were then continuing civil wars between the Maccabees and the Syrians. Judas Maccabeus was killed in 160 BC.

And he was succeeded by Jonathan, his brother, who eventually assumed the high priesthood. And then his brother Simon obtained the high priesthood. And Simon, this is when the Jews gained their independence.

He united the high priesthood with the governmental control, political headship. Under the law of Moses and in the days of David and so forth, you would have the priesthood would be Levites and the kings would be of Judah, of the tribe of Judah. But these were Levites, these Maccabeans.

And Simon, when he became high priest, also united the political headship of the government under himself. He made himself king also. So you had a non-Judean king there.

And for a while, the high priesthood and the political headship remained sort of in the same hands. There were internal struggles among this family. They were called the Hasmoneans, as well as the Maccabeans.

The revolt was called the Maccabean Revolt. The family was called the Hasmoneans because of their grandfather. Actually, the grandfather of Mattathias, the priest, was Hashmon.

And so we have what's called the Hasmonean dynasty, starting with Simon, the son of Mattathias and his successors. Simon's son-in-law assassinated him and his two sons. And the office of the high priesthood and kingship fell to his third surviving son.

His last surviving son, I guess, John Hyrcanus. And that brings us up to what's called the Roman period and brings us to conditions that were set up and were in place at the time of Christ. From 63 to 70, from 63 B.C., let me put it that way, the Palestine came under the Roman power.

The Romans were conquering most of the world around that time. And in 63 B.C., they conquered Palestine. They still allowed the Jews to maintain a fair degree of self-rule.

And yet there were all these internal strifes within Palestine. But in the Hasmonean dynasty, there was assassinations and this kind of stuff going on. So eventually the Romans appointed a king over the region.

This man was not a Jew. He was half Edomite. And he was not welcomed by the Jews.

His name was Herod the Great. And he was appointed to be king in Palestine in the year 40 B.C. But the Jews whom he was appointed to reign wouldn't have him and they fought against him for three years. He actually had to wage war with his own subjects for three years and he beat them and was capable of coming to power and became king of the Jews in 37 B.C. And so Herod the Great was a Roman appointee, although he was an Edomite by race.

Now, he was a cruel and jealous ruler, although he is thought to have been a very effective ruler in many respects. And he did much for the Jewish culture. He basically rebuilt the city of Jerusalem out of marble.

And he also did a lot to embellish the temple in Jerusalem. It became one of the wonders of the world. Again, as it had been in the days of Solomon because of the things he did.

However, he was very paranoid and he had secret police and informants throughout Jerusalem always looking out for traitors. There were curfews. People couldn't stay out after dark.

He imposed very high taxes to help pay for these building projects he had. It was in 20

B.C. that he began building the temple, rebuilding it or embellishing it. He was a very paranoid and jealous man.

He actually killed many people that he suspected were plotting against him. Some of them may have been. He killed all the remainder of the Hashemonian family line because he figured that they would be rivals to authority there.

He killed his own wife, Miriam, whom he at one time really loved, but she was a Hashemonian, so he had her killed. He killed two of his own sons or three of his own sons, actually. In fact, so much so that Caesar Augustus, who had appointed him, joked that it was safer to be one of Herod's pigs than one of his sons.

Because as an Edomite descended from Abraham, he wouldn't eat pork. And so his pigs were safer than his own sons were. And there's a sort of a play on words.

It's either in Latin or in Greek, the word for pig and the word for son are very similar sounding words. So the emperor said of Herod, it's safer to be one of his pigs than one of his sons because he killed his own sons. He is, of course, the Herod who was ruling when Jesus was born.

And he is the one who had the infants of Bethlehem slaughtered in an attempt to get rid of Jesus. It was because of Herod's cruelty that an angel warned Joseph to take Jesus to Egypt for a short time. And while in Egypt, that is while Jesus was in Egypt, there was a change because Herod died around the year 4 BC, which means Jesus was obviously born sometime before that.

And he was replaced by three sons. The emperor didn't want to give the same degree of authority to his sons that he gave to the father, Herod the Great. So his kingdom was divided among three sons.

Herod Archelaus controlled Judea and Samaria. But he was removed in 6 AD because of mismanagement of his government. He only ruled there for ten years and he was cruel to the Samaritans.

And so he was removed from power and replaced with a governor based in Caesarea. Pontius Pilate was the fifth governor of the region. There were four before him and they replaced Herod Archelaus who was deposed in 6 AD.

Antipas is the Herod who is found in the Gospels. The Herod who killed John the Baptist. He ruled Galilee.

He was the son of Herod the Great. And then there was Herod Philip who is not significant in the Gospels. He ruled the regions of north and east of Palestine.

As I say, Archelaus in the year 6 AD was replaced by Roman procurators. Pilate was the

fifth of these. Felix and Festus who are found in the Book of Acts were the eleventh and twelfth of them.

And this brings us up to date with the political situation in Israel at the time. The Greek language was now the language of the empire. The Roman government was the power that ruled the empire.

The Jews had established synagogues in foreign lands which were local meeting places, sort of like what we call local churches. And while the Sadducees ruled the temple, the Pharisees pretty much governed the synagogues. And so there was a division between the Pharisaic and the Sadducean party at the time of Jesus.

We'll have more to say as we study the Gospels about the distinctives of those parties. But that brings us pretty much up to date on the changes that occurred in those 400 years from the time of the close of the Old Testament to the beginning of the New. It also brings us to the end of our allotted time.

So we'll have to close with that.