

# New Testament survey

## • Background

The events of the New Testament take place in the first 70 years AD. The land of Israel was under Roman rule and Pontius Pilate was the Roman governor at one stage. Rule was also delegated to a Jewish family, the Herods, who supervised the building of a massive temple in Jerusalem. The main religious leaders were the priests, pharisees, sadducees and scribes. The Jews were looking for a Messiah-king who would rescue them from foreign rulers and establish a universal and everlasting kingdom modelled on the great days of the kingdom of David.

## • Jesus of Nazareth

Jesus' mother, Mary from Nazareth, became pregnant supernaturally by the Holy Spirit. At the time of his birth there was a census and Mary and Joseph were at their home town of Bethlehem to be registered (Jesus was a descendant of King David who also came from Bethlehem about 1000 years before). Apart from a brief incident at 12 years old, we know little about the first 30 years of Jesus' life — he probably worked with his father, Joseph, as a carpenter and had some form of education.

## • Jesus — his ministry

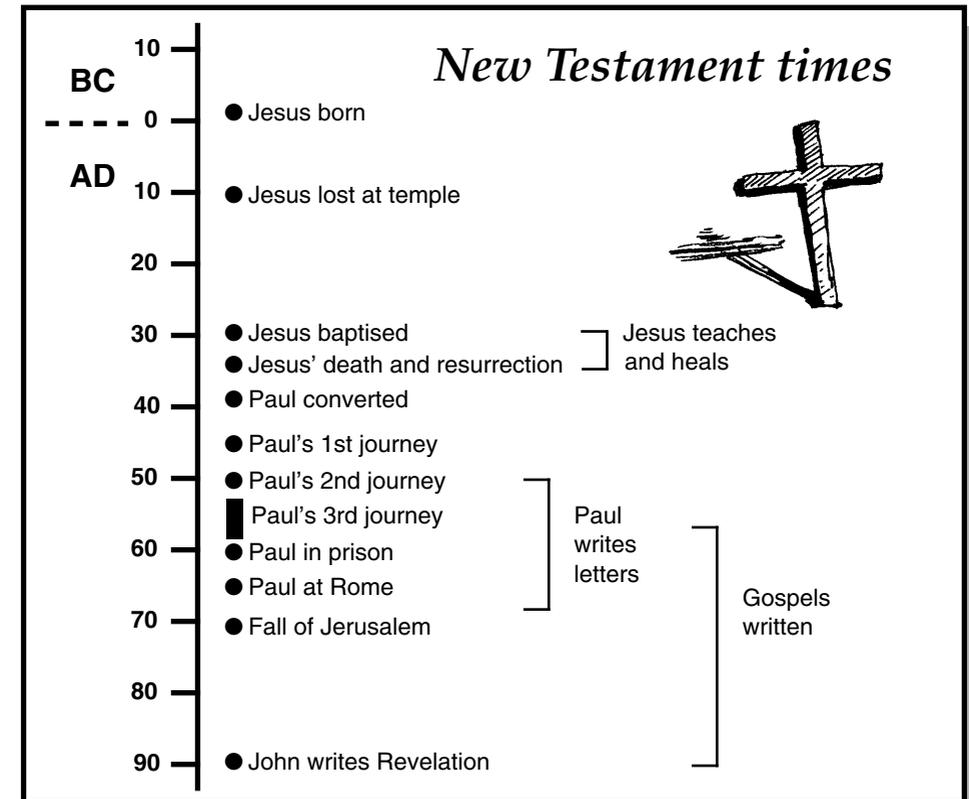
At about 30 years old, Jesus was baptised by John the Baptist and was tempted during a long fast in the desert. Then began two or three years of travelling, preaching and healing around the land of Israel. His message was radical — he preached about a kingdom but it was not a political kingdom, it was the Kingdom of God, a Kingdom not of this world. He concentrated on caring for needy individuals, healing and restoring dignity. He cut through the hypocrisy of the religious leaders and exposed their inconsistencies. He demonstrated his spiritual authority by casting demons out of people and performing miracles. He claimed to be the Son of God, to be one with God, and that faith in him was the only way for us to know God and have eternal life. He appointed 12 apostles to help him with his task who, with 70 others, also travelled around preaching and healing.

## • Jesus — his death and resurrection

His radical message greatly irritated the religious leaders who eventually arrested him and tried him with false witnesses. The Roman governor unwillingly agreed to have Jesus immediately executed by crucifixion. Jesus' body was placed in a friend's tomb. After 3 days the body disappeared and Jesus appeared in a resurrected form to his disciples over a few weeks before ascending into the sky before their eyes.

## • The early church

As a sequel to the gospels, the book of Acts describes the events after Jesus had gone, beginning with the arrival of the Holy Spirit to his waiting disciples. The believers continued the work of Jesus — the gospel was preached and many believed, people were healed and demons cast out by the power of God through the ministry of the apostles and others. A community of Christians developed which reflected the principles of love and living which Jesus taught.



## • Paul

The second part of the book of Acts relates the exploits of Paul who was an educated Jew from Tarsus who at first was vigorously persecuting Christians. After a dramatic conversion he became a strong defender of the Christian gospel with a particular mission to make the good news known to the Gentiles. He embarked upon a number of dangerous expeditions to preach the gospel from Israel to Greece. His stance offended the Jewish religious leaders and he was arrested in Jerusalem and eventually taken to Rome. There are several of Paul's letters preserved in the Bible — some are written to churches, others to individuals. There are also some letters by James (the brother of Jesus), Peter, John and Jude.

## • Revelation

The Bible finishes with this prophecy given by John the apostle. It starts with a message of warning and encouragement to seven churches. It then goes on to describe the events leading up to the second coming of Christ and the final judgment. The language is poetic and graphic and portrays the clear victorious establishment of the eternal kingdom of God and the defeat of evil.