

(T) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. In this teaching series, you will have an opportunity to learn to know the Bible. As you listen to this programme, make notes in a notebook or record the programme.

Today's teaching is: THE ORIGIN OF THE NEW TESTAMENT – especially about THE ORIGIN OF THE GENERAL LETTERS AND REVELATION. After that we will explain how the copies of the New Testament books were transmitted. We will discuss the General Letters in the chronological order they were written.

POINT 1. THE LETTER OF JAMES

First. The founding of Jewish Christian churches.

Acts chapter 6,8 and 11 describe the origin of the Jewish Christian churches. Several different kinds of Jews lived in Jerusalem. The majority were ordinary Aramaic speaking Jews. Then there lived many so-called *Hellenistic Jews* in Jerusalem, that is, Jews who spoke Greek and had adopted the Greek culture (Act 6:1). Finally there were people who had converted to the Jewish faith. These were the so-called *God-fearing Greeks*, who were former heathen who had converted to Judaism and had adopted much of the Jewish culture (Act 17:4). These Greek speaking Jews and converts to Judaism originally came from Asia Minor, that is, modern Turkey, and Cyprus in the North and from Cyrene and Alexandria in the South. They even had their own synagogue in Jerusalem (Act 6:9; 11:20). In About A.D. 32-34, they especially argued with Stephen, who himself was a Greek speaking Jew who had become a Christian, but they could not stand up against the wisdom and power of the Holy Spirit by which he spoke. The Greek speaking Jews stoned him to death. A great persecution arose against especially the Greek speaking Jews who had become Christians in Jerusalem! These Greek speaking Christians scattered throughout Judea, Samaria and up the coast to Phoenicia, Cyprus and eventually to Antioch in Syria. Everywhere they went, they proclaimed the gospel to Greek speaking Jews and planted churches. These churches consisted of Greek speaking Jewish converts. It is to these churches that James writes his letter in the Greek language!

Second. The writing of a letter to these Greek speaking Jewish churches.

James was the brother of Jesus and although he was later the leader of the church at Jerusalem, he wrote his letter to the Greek speaking Jewish Christians "scattered among the nations" (1:1). He addressed his letter to all Christians in the world who had scattered from Jerusalem after the persecution that arose around Stephen. At that time he did not know of the existence of any Gentile Christians yet. This means that James must have written his letter before A.D. 44, the time when the Jerusalem church heard of the many Gentiles who were converted to Christianity in Antioch. We must conclude that James was written about A.D. 43-44 from Jerusalem to the Greek speaking Jewish Christian churches scattered among the nations. The purpose of James was very much the same as that of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, *to set forth the true standards of Christian living*.

POINT 2. THE LETTERS OF PETER

The apostle Peter wrote two letters. His first letter deals with the danger coming from the outside of the church, namely *persecution*. His second letter deals with the danger coming from the inside of the church, namely *false teachers*. Peter wrote his two letters to the churches founded by Paul, and probably during the time Paul was travelling to Spain. That is why he does not mention Paul personally in his letters.

The first letter of Peter.

While Paul was absent from Rome, Peter reappeared in Rome together with Silas and Mark (1 Pet 5:12-14). Mark was with Paul during his first Roman imprisonment (Col 4:10) and stayed longer in Rome. In Rome Peter received information about the churches in Asia Minor. The members were predominantly Gentiles. They were suffering severe persecution, perhaps mainly from the hands of their associates in daily life. Believing servants were being oppressed by their heathen masters, believing wives by their unbelieving husbands and entire Christian families by their heathen neighbours (4:12). Although we do not know if Peter ever worked in Asia Minor, as an apostle he had the duty to care for the churches wherever they were in the world. His purpose was *to strengthen the Christians in their suffering and to exhort them to live a godly life in view of their future hope*. The teaching of Peter with respect to the Roman government was so conciliatory that it would best fit the period before the summer of A.D. 64 when Nero's notorious persecution of Christians began. He wrote 1 Peter from Rome in about A.D. 62-63 to the churches in Asia Minor.

The second letter of Peter.

Peter wrote 2 Peter from Rome in AD 63 not long before he died (1:14) in the persecutions of Nero in Rome in A.D. 64. He wrote to the same churches in Asia Minor. His purpose was *to strengthen the Christians against false teachers and heresies.*

POINT 3. THE LETTER TO THE HEBREWS

We do not know who wrote this letter and to whom he wrote it. We also do not know when it was written or from where it was written.

First. The Hebrews were Christian converts from a non-conformist Jewish background.

The Hebrews were Jewish believers in Jesus Christ whose background was not so much the traditional normative Judaism of Jerusalem and its temple rituals as the non-conformist Judaism of communities like the Essenes and the community of Qumran. According to the historian Josephus, such Jewish communities distinguished themselves from other Jews when they performed their sacrificial duties by the superiority of the purifications that they habitually practised. It appears that the Jewish community in Rome preserved non-conformist features especially such as *baptisms* or *ceremonial washings*. As these Jews became Christians, some of these practices were taken over into the Christian community at Rome. According to Hebrews 6:2, the Hebrew Christians took a great interest in such *baptisms* or *ceremonial washings*.

Second. The letter to the Hebrews was sent to Rome.

In Hebrews 13:24 the writer sends greetings “from those from Italy”, which could mean that the letter was either written from Rome or to Rome. The church father Clement of Rome was acquainted with the letter to the Hebrews in A.D. 96. Therefore, according to our extant literature, the first place where the letter to the Hebrews appears to have been known, is Rome. Moreover, the book of Romans shows that the church at Rome had a Jewish-Christian base (Rom 11:13,18). As a whole the church at Rome had accepted the implications of the Gentile world-mission, but a small conservative enclave within it clung to the more conservative principles of traditional Judaism. It is in particular to these Jewish Christians in the church at Rome that the letter to the Hebrews is addressed.

Third. The letter to the Hebrews was written before A.D. 64.

In Hebrews 13:23 the writer states that Timothy has been released from prison, which means that the letter was written during the first century A.D. According to this letter the temple rituals were still continuing. Therefore the letter must have been written before A.D. 70, when Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed. In Hebrews 2:3, the writer speaks of himself and his hearers as probably belonging to the disciples of the apostles. These Christians could have been Jews and Gentile converts to Judaism, who came from Rome, who had been present at the Day of Pentecost and had heard the preaching and seen the miracles of the apostles. According to Hebrews 10:32-34, they had experienced persecution and this could refer to the expulsion of the Jewish Colony from Rome by Claudius in A.D. 49. The historian Suetonius wrote that Claudius expelled them because “they were constantly indulging in riots at the instigation of *Chrestus* (!)”. Priscilla and Aquila fled at this time from Rome to Corinth, where Paul met them in A.D. 50. A large scale eviction of this nature would inevitably have been attended by public insult, persecution, imprisonment and widespread looting by the people of Rome. According to Hebrews 12:4, these Christians had not yet been called to suffer death for their faith, as was the case during the persecution under Nero in A.D. 64. Thus, we conclude that the letter to the Hebrews was written before A.D. 64 to the Christians at Rome.

POINT 4. THE LETTER TO JUDE

Jude is the brother of James, the leader of the church at Jerusalem. He wrote his letter about A.D. 64-68 to the same churches in Asia Minor to whom the apostle Peter had written his two letters. His exhortation in verse 17, “Remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ foretold” concerning the false teachers most probably refer to the exhortations of the apostle Paul in 1 Timothy 4 and 2 Timothy 3 and particularly to the exhortation of the apostle Peter in 2 Peter 2. In this letter it seems as if these false teachers had already slipped into the Christian Church to do their destructive work. Peter’s purpose is *to warn the Christian churches to beware of false teachers.*

POINT 5. THE LETTERS OF JOHN

After the death of Peter and soon thereafter the death of Paul, the Lord provided another leader for the churches in Asia Minor, namely, the apostle John. Probably shortly after the beginning of the Jewish War against Rome in A.D. 66, when the Christians in Jerusalem moved to Pella, the apostle John and other people who had seen and heard Jesus moved to Ephesus in Asia Minor. The church father Irenaeus says that the apostle John lived and worked in Ephesus permanently

until the times of Caesar Trajan, who ruled from A.D. 98-117. After the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in A.D. 70, the influx of Gentiles together with their heritage of philosophical thought into the Christian Church was beginning to affect doctrinal teaching. John wrote three letters between A.D. 80-90 from Ephesus to churches in the region of Ephesus warning especially against the false teaching of Cerinthus, a particular form of Gnosticism. Gnostics were Christian heretics who claimed that those initiated into their cult possessed spiritual knowledge beside the knowledge that was revealed in the Bible.

POINT 6. REVELATION

The church father Irenaeus says that Revelation was written toward the end of the reign of the emperor Domitian. He reigned as Caesar over the Roman Empire from A.D. 81-96 and during the last three years of his reign he persecuted the Christians. Domitian insisted that he be worshipped as a god and he increasingly opposed the growth of Christianity. His opposition foreshadowed social, economic and religious conditions such as Revelation prophesied. Although the true Author of Revelation is God through Christ, Christ through an angel revealed it to John and John wrote it down about A.D. 95-96. On the one hand the book encourages persecuted Christians and on the other hand it warns careless and negligent Christians, who were tempted to lapse into an easy conformity to the world.

The purpose of the book is *to comfort the militant church in its struggle against the forces of evil*. The theme is the victory of Christ and his Church over the dragon and his helpers.

POINT 7. THE TRANSMISSION OF THE COPIES OF THE NEW TESTAMENT BOOKS

First. The original New Testament Greek manuscripts.

The original New Testament documents were probably written on *papyrus*, a thin and fragile kind of paper made from the reeds of the papyrus plant, which grew in the marshes of Egypt and the Middle East. These documents were inscribed by hand "with pen and ink" (3 Jn 13). All the original books of the New Testament were written in the Greek language. A hand-written document in the Greek language is called a *Greek manuscript*.

They were usually transmitted by messengers to the churches or persons for whom they were intended. According to Colossians 4:7-9, Paul sent Tychicus for the express purpose that the church may know about his circumstances ... and tell them all the news about him ... and everything that is happening there.

Second. The earliest copies and collections of the New Testament books.

The Greek text we possess today has been transmitted to us by making hand-written copies over a period of more than 1400 years until the printing press was invented and used. After many years of use, these hand-written copies would begin to tear and become too old for use. So people carefully made hand-written copies of these original documents. After many more years of use also these hand-written copies became too worn-out for use. So again new hand-written copies were made of these old copies, etc. Although we no longer possess the infallible original documents of the various books of the New Testament, nevertheless very ancient copies have been preserved to us that are less than two hundred and fifty years separated from the time of original composition! These ancient copies are very much closer to the date of the originals than is the case of any other ancient records. Thus Christians have great confidence in the reliability of the New Testament documents!

Copies of the Gospels and the Letters of Paul must have been made and circulated at an early date. In 2 Peter 3:2,15-16, the apostle Peter knows of the Gospels and the Letters of Paul. He speaks of "the words given by the Lord through his different apostles", and also of "all the letters of Paul". It is probable that the first 'Two Gospels' and 'the Letters of Paul' were already transmitted as *two collections before A.D. 64*, because they never appear singly in manuscript form. One church father, Justin Martyr, wrote that by about A.D. 140 the Gospel of Luke was separated from Acts and combined with the other three Gospels to make "a fourfold life of Christ". The General Letters and Revelation did not belong to any collection, because they do not appear in the same sequence in the works of the earliest church fathers. They were gradually drawn into the larger collection with the others, until the whole New Testament as it now exists, emerged in the early third century.

Third. The copying of the New Testament books.

The books of the New Testament were first copied either by private individuals for their private use or by professional scribes (writers) for churches and monasteries. Usually, copies were made one at a time. As the demand increased, it is likely that trained slaves transcribed a number of copies simultaneously from dictation. In the process of transcription, errors crept into the manuscripts and these errors were perpetuated by later copyists, so that a large number of variants of copies appeared. However, the fact that we have so very many copies of the New Testament books makes it probable that the original text would be preserved in some of these copies.

After Christianity virtually became the state religion of the Roman Empire in A.D. 313, the emperor Constantine ordered that 50 copies of the whole Bible should be made and distributed to the larger churches in the cities of the Empire. These copies became the so-called “authorised editions” and served as the text which was copied by thousands afterwards.

Between the fourth and twelfth centuries, the New Testament was published either in portions such as the Gospels or the Letters of Paul, or occasionally in complete volumes of the whole New Testament or whole Bible. Because papyrus was too frail for use in public services or in monastery libraries, the scribes (writers) generally used thin sheets of calfskin, called *vellum*, or sheepskin, called *parchment*, to write on. These materials were used until the age of printing in the fifteenth century.

ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK

First. During the next week, read through Matthew chapters 15-21.

Second. See the workbooks “Go and build Christ’s Church” and Internet on www.dota.net

Third. Listen every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY on the radio to “Discipleship training on the air”.