



Confirmation Workbook
2004

Part I
Our Common Story

Basic Books for Further Reading

Our Jewish Roots

Gordon McConville, *Old Testament Teach Yourself Series* (NTC Publishing Group).

Alec Motyer, *The Story of the Old Testament* (Baker Books).

F.F. Bruce, *Israel and the Nations: The History of Israel from the Exodus to the Fall of the Second Temple* (Inter-Varsity Press).

Bush, Hubbard & LaSor, *Old Testament Survey* (Eerdmans).

Jesus

Michael Green, *Who Is this Jesus?* (Thomas Nelson)

Gerald Bray, *Steps of Understanding: Key Events in Jesus' Life* (Christian Focus Public).

Tom Wright, *The Original Jesus* (Eerdmans)

The Challenge of Jesus (Inter-Varsity Press)

Markus Bockmuehl, *The Cambridge Companion to Jesus* (Cambridge University Press).

New Testament

F.F. Bruce, *The Message of the New Testament* (Eerdmans).

David Wenham, *Paul and Jesus* (Eerdmans).

Achtemeier, Green & Thompson, *Introducing the New Testament* (Eerdmans).

Discipleship

Michael Green, *Follow in His Footsteps* (Thomas Nelson).

Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy* (HarperCollins).

Stanley Hauerwas & William Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in a Christian Colony* (Abingdon).

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (Simon & Schuster).

Jesus' disciples were often full of fear and doubt. They also suffered for their allegiance to Jesus. He assured them that they would not be abandoned but be comforted by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit comforts us in our suffering, doubt and fear by praying with us and for us. What fears and doubts do you have? Have you suffered rejection or ridicule for your faith?

List what your church already does to make disciples? What other things could it do?

List what you do to reach out to others to make them disciples or better disciples?

What other things could you do? When and how will you begin to do these things?

What things in your life do you need to rearrange to grow as a disciple of Jesus?
Ambition? Money? Fear? Relationships?

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and love and the need for us to respond to others in the same way that God has treated us. Without that kind of response to others, our words are pointless.

Making disciples is a lifelong process that is never finished. In practice, churches and their leaders often emphasize different aspects of the good news of Jesus. Many churches encourage personal and public evangelism (i.e., proclaiming the good news) through one-to-one faith sharing, door-to-door outreach and public preaching on the streets or in stadium ‘crusades.’ Others seek to increase church membership with private schools, weekday childcare programs or contemporary ‘seeker’ services. Also, churches will reach out to their surrounding community by addressing social matters through programs like counseling groups, soup kitchens or health clinics. All of them seek to be faithful followers of Jesus, obedient to him with their words and actions.

For Reflection & Discussion

Read Mark 16:14-18
 Luke 24:36-39
 John 20:19-23
 Acts 1:6-8

Each author summarizes Jesus’ commission to his disciples. Compare each passage and briefly summarize what they emphasize about discipleship.

What, in your own life, has God done that you have shared with others? Forgiveness? Reconciliation? Healing? An answer to prayer?

The Great Commission

Jesus came to them and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." Matthew 28:18-20 (NRSV)

Shortly after his resurrection, Jesus instructed his followers to testify to the world all they had experienced and learned from Jesus about the kingdom of God. This commission (summarized above by the disciple Matthew) was to further what Jesus had already begun, that is, to make disciples from all places and nations of the world. *All* disciples are charged with this same task which is to make disciples of everyone from everywhere.

As the passage above indicates, God's resurrection of Jesus from death confirmed his appointment as the Messianic king with full authority over God's kingdom on earth and in heaven. He was, therefore, on equal footing with God the Father and the Holy Spirit and, as such, deserved the worship and allegiance due God alone. Jesus established baptism as the rite of initiation that demonstrates our participation with him in his death, resurrection and his new community in communion with God the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit. Since we are new people with a new hope for the future, we are dead to the old ways of coping through life and the old habits that only wind up as dead ends: addiction, gossip, anger, greed, lust, clinging to some people while blaming others, to name only a few. No longer can we manipulate people and things to get our way. With Christ, we are newborns of a new creation.

Jesus assured his disciples that, though he would ascend to his heavenly throne, they were not alone. They shared in God's new covenant and were united in a new relationship with God the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit. This is important because, as far as disciples go, they were often in the dark about things, afraid, full of doubt and rejected for their commitment to Jesus. Yet, the Spirit who directed, comforted and empowered Jesus graciously remains with his followers even now until the end of time (that is, the coming of Christ and the fullness of his kingdom).

Never abandoning us, Jesus sends us to teach others everything he proclaimed to his disciples about God, his kingdom, Jesus himself and us—especially our desperate need for compassion, mercy, forgiveness

Our Jewish Roots I

The message of Jesus began long before him in what Christians call the Old Testament. A 'testament' or 'covenant' is a promise that joins parties together such as a peace treaty or trade pact made between nations who swear allegiance to one another. God's promises, however, are not like a legal contract that can be ended if someone comes up short or violates the mutual agreement. As we shall see, God alone takes the initiative and pledges himself to his people unconditionally for, in the biblical story, there is no such thing as conditional love.

God called Abram, a childless seventy-five-year-old, promising to make him the first of a great nation of people through whom the entire world would be blessed. Trusting God's promises, he and his wife Sarah left their homeland for what is today the land of Israel. Though Abraham himself was a nomad who never had any land other than a burial plot, his grandson, Jacob (whose name God changed to Israel), and the clans of Jacob's twelve sons formed the nation of God's people. Famine, however, drove them into Egypt where they remained for over four hundred years. Long after the memory of their ancestor and protector, Joseph, died they were forced into slave labor under the Egyptians.

God heard the cries of His oppressed people and revealed himself to Moses, selecting him from among the Hebrews to liberate them from slavery. Moses' repeated appeals to release the Israelites and the severe warnings by means of disastrous plagues only tightened the pharaoh's grip on the people. So, in a dramatic rescue, God instructed the Israelites to prepare for a mass evacuation by packing their possessions and preparing a lamb roast the night before their 'exodus.' The lamb's blood was to be splashed on the door posts of the home to signal lives (for blood represents life) devoted to God who, in turn, would pass over the house (hence, the Jewish Passover festival). The oldest son of Egyptian families without the sign, however, died which forced the grieving Egyptians to release God's people. Their grief soon turned to revenge and, while trying to capture their slaves, God rescued the Israelites by miraculously bringing them through the Red Sea and drowning the Egyptian army.

This remarkable salvation of the tribes of Israel defined them as a nation of God's covenant people. They were a free people answerable only to God. Since they were *His* people, God described the kind of relationship they were to live out with their God, their neighbors and the land. For example, if God liberated them, then only He deserved their allegiance and worship. These commandments were given to Moses on

the Sinai mountain. It is important to emphasize that obedience to these commands would not obtain God's blessings since He had already promised himself to His people. Rather, like any personal relationship, if they were unfaithful to God or one another, naturally, the consequences would be disastrous. God did not say, "If you do this, *then* I will bless you." Instead, he said, "*Since* I love you, this is how you are to live as my people." To demonstrate their relationship, a large tent called a 'tabernacle' was made for God to dwell with his people and was managed by an entire tribe of priests who led Israel's worship.

Camping in a barren desert could not compare with all the comforts of Egypt so it was not long before the Israelites began to complain and reject Moses' God who had delivered them. Their mutiny led to a forty year exile from their promised land. They would have to learn to trust this God to protect and provide for them in the wilderness before they would be allowed to return to the land their ancestors inhabited.

For Reflection & Discussion

Read: Genesis 12:1-3; 15:1-21 Abraham
Exodus 2:23-3:12 Moses
11:1-9; 12:21-32; 14:5-31 The Exodus
20:1-17 Law at Sinai

What is a covenant?

A covenant was made by splitting an animal in two. Together, both parties would then walk together between the pieces. It was a solemn oath that meant if either party refused their responsibility to the other, they themselves should share the fate of the animal. In Genesis 15, why do you think that God passed between the pieces without Abram?

In your own words, summarize the basic message of Peter and the rest of the disciples.

Acts 2:41-47 describes the activity of the early Jerusalem church which included (1) teaching, fellowship, (2) the Lord's supper (Eucharist), (3) group prayer and (4) sharing with those in need.

What aspect of church life means most/ least to you? Why?

My church's strengths/ weaknesses in contrast to the Jerusalem church are:

Complete this statement: "I would bring more people to my own church if..."

The early Christians struggled to live out their faith in Jesus who had made them a new people without the divisions of race, sex and social standing. How does the Church struggle with these issues today? What relevance, if any, does the message of about Christ have for these divisions today?

Christ's Church endured trouble not only from outside but also from within. From the beginning, pretenders like Simon and hypocrites like Ananias and Sapphira have tried to exploit the people of God for their own selfish purposes. Letters were written by the apostles and other Church leaders to tackle the many problems that arose. These letters show that the even the early Church was not above scandal and division. Still, it was and remains a place of healing and reconciliation.

The early Church's most memorable internal struggle, however, was to express its faith in Jesus in new situations without weakening its message and, thereby, divide God's people. The question at issue was, if Gentiles became disciples of Jesus and members of God's promised kingdom did they, then, become Jews and, therefore, need to observe the laws of Israel? Paul, who was once the Church's leading persecutor and had become its leading spokesperson among the Gentiles, argued that, because of Jesus, there could be no special status before God whether by ethnic birthright or performance of the law. Only those who trusted Jesus the Messiah and, therefore, were in relationship to him by faith had any standing before God. The rescue of creation was entirely God's initiative and effort, accomplished finally in the crucified and resurrected Messiah Jesus who had begun a new humanity. This new humanity implied that the segregation of Gentiles from Jews, women from men, slaves from masters was broken down by Jesus. Religious heritage, racial background, social standing or gender were of no ultimate importance in God's kingdom. This was first realized by Peter in his dramatic vision though he and others with him had to be reminded by Paul.

The four gospels, the Acts and letters of the New Testament show how the good news of Jesus could address a variety of people in different situations with different problems. Despite the internal controversies and resistance against the early Christians, the good news of God's deliverance and the hope for all creation continued through the empowering presence of God's Spirit who, through Jesus' disciples, changed lives and entire communities. It is a message that continues today.

For Reflection & Discussion

Read Acts 1-11, 15:1-35. Record what interested or puzzled you for discussion.

List the Ten Commandments (See BCP, 317-318). Notice the prayer inserted in the Prayer Book which asks the Lord to "have mercy upon us and incline our hearts to keep this law" as well as to "write all these thy laws in our hearts, we beseech thee." Obviously, these laws are intended to be kept by God's people. But, according to the prayer, the only way they can be kept is with a change of heart that God alone can give. Beside each commandment that is listed, briefly explain its importance.

Because they felt God had left them to suffer in the wilderness, the Israelites became anxious and, wanting to go back to their old way of life, brought out their old gods to comfort them. During times of stress, loneliness and grief, we often question whether God is present or concerned and try to fill the emptiness with good but, finally, unfulfilling things like food, alcohol, shopping, sex, religious activity, a career, even children and grandchildren. What kind of emptiness do you often feel and how to you try to fill it?

Like the word 'cancer,' 'sin' refers to many things—all equally destructive and deadly. It is often used of the things we do wrong but it refers to much more. It's not that we are sinners because we do bad things. Rather, we do sinful things because, like addicts, we are sinners who cannot help ourselves. At our deepest psycho-genetic levels, we are wounded people who wound others. In some area of our lives, we come up short; we feel alienated and broken. We are deeply conflicted within and with others. When we are honest with ourselves, we recognize we often distrust God more than ourselves and think that what we feel and do is more important than our relationships with God and others. It is relieving to realize we are sinners. It means we and those around us need forgiveness and grace more than anything else.

Because we do not always obey the commandments, they show us our need for God's merciful acceptance and generous love realized in Jesus. Jesus himself referred to his own broken body and blood as initiating a new covenant. What do you think he meant by this?

The Early Church in the New Testament

The experience of the reality of the resurrected Jesus turned his frightened and scattered followers into outspoken missionaries. Initially, however, they thought that, since God raised Jesus from death, surely he would liberate Israel from Roman occupation and establish a kingdom that would bring God's blessings to the nations. Instead, in a deliberate act, Jesus removed himself from among his disciples and the world by ascending into the heavens. He instructed them to testify to what they had experienced and proclaim it throughout the world. But first they went to Jerusalem to await the long-anticipated Spirit of God promised by the Old Testament prophets, John the Baptist and Jesus. The Spirit would create new hearts and change lives forever. While his disciples were praying, God's Spirit came in the sound of rushing wind, like the wind of God that hovered over the earth and was breathed into humanity at creation, breathing the new life of God's new creation into Jesus' followers. God now resided in his people who, in relationship with Jesus, were the new temple of God. Immediately, the disciples began announcing the good news of Jesus the Messiah to the Jews in the city including many of who were visiting from other countries to observe the harvest festival called Pentecost.

The response to their message was mixed. Those who believed the message formed the early congregation (or 'church') of God's people. And while many were convinced, most were not. Outright hostility against the growing movement brought on beatings, imprisonment even assassination. Others argued to hold back, to wait and see if the movement would die out on its own or genuinely blossom with God's blessing.

The radical claims of the apostles and other church leaders raised tensions in Jerusalem to new heights. One devout religious scholar named Saul ('Paul' in Greek) took matters into his own hands by leading a campaign endorsed by Jerusalem's high priest against the movement, purifying the synagogues of those who claimed that Jesus was the Messiah. By driving many of the disciples out of Jerusalem, the persecution spread the message about Jesus to the Samaritans and Gentile (i.e., non-Jewish) people. The northern city of Antioch gradually became the center of activity. It became the base for missionary outreach to the Gentiles in the Greco-Roman world and it was here where Jesus' followers were first called Christians.

supporters as they reentered Jerusalem from their camps in nearby towns. They were shocked by the verdict but it was too late. For six hours, Jesus was publicly humiliated, crucified as a failed revolutionary until he died, and then quickly buried so not violate the rules of the Sabbath.

The morning after the Sabbath, a few women went to the tomb to ensure a proper burial. However, they and the rest of the disciples were stunned and considerably distressed at the news that his corpse was no longer there but was, in fact, raised from death. For most Jews, resurrection from death was supposed to come for everyone at the end of time when God would transform his creation and establish his rule of justice and peace. Jesus' resurrection meant, then, that the kingdom of God was now already launched and that God's renewal of his creation had begun in the resurrected Jesus, the crucified Messiah. Those followers who trusted him were considered newborns of a new creation inaugurated in Jesus. They were part of a new Israel with a new temple (that is, Jesus himself) and a new covenant which granted forgiveness of sins and access to God who gave them a new commandment of love.

For Reflection & Discussion

Read Mark 11-16. Record what interested or puzzled you for discussion. How has your reading changed your view about Jesus?

Do you think the resurrection of Jesus actually happened or is it just a way of saying that his memory lives on in our lives? What did resurrection mean for the Jews?

If Jesus was raised as the Messiah who inaugurates God's kingdom, what does that mean for us today?

Our Jewish Roots II

Under the leadership of Moses' assistant and successor, Joshua, the Israelites emerged from the desert and began a long, difficult and often violent settlement which was never fully realized. Despite some significant victories, they long remained a band of tribes among others who struggled for the fertile lowlands of Canaan which was occupied by many tribes such as the Philistines. Over time, many of the Israelites adopted the cultural and religious practices of their neighbors, forgetting the God who delivered them and the way of life they had learned in the wilderness. This weakened the unity and political stability of the Israelites, making them and their farms vulnerable to the attacks of their enemies. During especially bleak periods, God would call upon people like Samson, Deborah and Samuel to act as judges of Israel. These freedom fighters liberated the Israelites from their enemies and for a brief time, at least, returned their trust and worship to their God whom they abandoned.

Centuries of clashes and widespread instability, however, mounted pressure to establish an Israelite king who would unite and protect the confederation of tribes which were, up to that point, bound together by a common God, tabernacle and law. Instead of trusting God to be their protector, they hoped to take matters into their own hands with a human king to govern them like their neighbors had. The reign of God's chosen kings Saul, David and Solomon brought stability to the region and expanded the land of the Israelites. God promised David he would be the first of a great kingdom which would bring blessings to the world. Under David and especially his son, Solomon, Jerusalem became the center of government, trade and religious life as the tabernacle was replaced by a magnificent temple with luxurious detail, elaborate music (psalms) and learning. However, religious and moral corruption as well as internal struggles for control became so intense that the kingdom split into two rival realms: Israel in the north and Judah in the south.

Despite some periods of prosperity and religious renewal, these divided kingdoms gradually became spiritually, morally and politically weaker. Cut off from the temple in the south, Israel adopted the gods of its neighbors and established its own centers of worship in the north. In the south, even though Judah had the temple, its God was largely replaced by the gods of its military and trade partners. The protests of many prophets like Elijah, Isaiah and Jeremiah over the political, moral and religious corruption of the kings and their people fell on deaf ears. The prophets recognized that, as things worsened, the safety of Israel and

Judah was at stake as their neighboring nations, Assyria and Babylon, became superpowers and would eventually overtake their land which served as an important trade route to Africa. God, however, promised a new covenant which would forever change things. There was a desperate need for a change of heart, a radical transformation of human lives, God's people and, finally, the world. But, before things would change they would only get worse.

The Assyrians destroyed the northern kingdom and took its people into slavery. Many refugees headed south to Judah for safety but, more than a century later, it too was overrun by the Babylonian empire. In a devastating blow, God's Temple and city were destroyed and waves of Jews were deported to Babylon. It seemed as though God was frustrated and had finally given up on his unfaithful and rebellious people. Some listened to the message of the prophets that God was not finished with them. They longed for the restoration of the kingdom with a new covenant and a new temple where God would once again dwell among his people.

After sixty years of exile, the Jews' prayers were beginning to be answered when a Median King, Cyrus, overtook the Babylonians and allowed them to return to their land. First, the temple was rebuilt though it was a mere shadow of its former glory. Eventually, Jerusalem was rebuilt despite both the opposition of non-Jews who occupied the land during the exile and the lack of interest by many Jews who married them. This sparked a religious renewal strongly devoted to the Hebrew Scriptures, especially the law, which strengthened their commitment to the God who would one day transform his people and the world.

For Reflection & Discussion

Read Judges 2:1-4:23. The accounts of the Judges make the point that a judge is a liberator who sets things right—a very different notion of judge than what we think of today. Contrast this with what we often think of when we hear that 'God is a Judge.'

Jesus the Messiah: Part II

After more than three years of gathering and, often, losing support, Jesus entered Jerusalem for the annual Passover festival as a parade of followers hailed him as a king going up to the capital for his coronation. But instead of riding upon a king's horse, he chose a donkey. As the new king, he began his reform of the city by purifying the temple, clearing out the corrupt system of money changers that exploited the people. Then he went even further by predicting that the temple, the very place where God would rule among his people and bless all the nations of the world, would collapse. Jesus publicly challenged city officials, exposing their hypocrisy of twisting the law for their own advantage. He warned them that, by refusing to listen to him, the city and its landmark temple would face total ruin—all hell would break loose. That was exactly what the city's leaders wanted to prevent. Fearing a violent crackdown by the Romans against the entire city because of Jesus and his explosive popularity, they tried to publicly discredit him and, when that failed, they looked for a more permanent solution.

Jesus and a few of his followers sensed the inevitable; he would be killed. In Israel's past, God used pagan nations to judge his rebellious people as he did with Babylon at the time of the exile. In a similar way, Jesus saw himself as the Messiah, that is, Israel's true representative who would put himself under the judgment of the Romans (and God) in place of the people. During the Passover ceremony, he linked his own death with God's liberation of his suffering people from Egyptian slavery. Like the bread that was broken and wine that was poured out, his death would bring deliverance through a new covenant. A new exodus was about to happen but he would go alone. Betrayed by one of his own while the rest of his disciples scattered in fear, Jesus was left to suffer the abuse of his accusers who wanted to have him silenced.

Jesus endured a series of false charges and conflicting statements before the council of chief priests, city leaders and their lawyers until he testified that he was the Messiah, that is, the Son of Man whom the prophet Daniel expected to overthrow the violent and corrupt nations of the world (including Israel) and establish God's rule. The civic leaders were enraged but did not have the authority for execution and needed the permission of the Roman governor, Pilate, to carry it out. However, Pilate did not consider Jesus to be a threat to the empire and wanted to avoid the entire matter. But after a few failed attempts to release Jesus, Pilate appeased the city leaders and their mob of supporters. By morning, Jesus was sentenced for execution. The news spread to many of Jesus'

List any three parables from the reading and comment on what they teach about God's kingdom.

Read Amos 2:4-16 & Hosea 4:1-4 which describe some of the injustices committed by God's people. List the charges from God's indictment against them.

Read Jeremiah 31:1-14, 31-34 which describes God's promise to restore the exiles and establish a new covenant. Describe this new covenant.

What do you think Jesus meant when he said that the "Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many?" (Mark 10:45)

Given the rebelliousness of God's people, how would you describe God's treatment of his people, that is, punishing and restoring? Cruel and unfair or gracious?

Jesus the Messiah: Part I

In the first century, Palestine was a hotbed of religious and political controversy. Time and again, Jerusalem had been run over by empires and controlled by their puppet rulers. First the Babylonians, then the Greeks and now the Romans tried to control a difficult terrain with even more difficult people who resisted the pagan gods of the foreign occupation. The Jews were divided over how to deal with the situation. The Sadducees thought that things were about as good as it could get while resistance movements, like the Zealots, sought change by violent revolution. Some, like the Essenes, headed for the hills and countryside to live secluded lives of religious purity away from the widespread corruption. Most identified with the Pharisees who attempted to purify Jerusalem and the people in anticipation of God's promised kingdom. Sometimes called the Kingdom of Heaven (because Jewish reverence did not allow speaking the word 'God'), this kingdom would be established by God's appointed leader (literally, a "Messiah" or "Christ") who would liberate the Jews and bring God's rule of justice and peace to the world.

Although the events surrounding his birth were dramatic, Jesus lived an ordinary childhood in a remote town of Nazareth on the Sea of Galilee. His cousin, John, was a popular, outspoken prophet who condemned the corruption of the political and religious leaders. John announced the need for widespread change that could only come through God's kingdom and its Messiah who would set things right. To symbolize the need for a fresh start, John baptized his followers in the Jordan River—much like the Jews were granted a new start by being liberated from Egyptian slavery at the Red Sea. In response to this message, Jesus identified himself with John's movement by being baptized. It was then that Jesus experienced God's call to lead his people.

He then formed his own community of followers that would make up a renewed Israel with twelve key leaders—like Israel's twelve tribes. These twelve were a mixed bag of colorful characters who, otherwise, would have been bitter enemies (For instance, Simon was a revolutionary Zealot who would have resented Matthew, a tax collector for the Roman emperor). Together, they traveled the region, visiting both Jews and Gentiles to rally support for Jesus and his message of God's kingdom. Jesus explained this kingdom through parables, stories taken from everyday experience such as a wedding celebration, a farmer's harvest or a rebellious son. Each story overturned the people's common expectations and ideas of what the kingdom is like. With his challenging words and miraculous actions, people's lives were changed. It all

signaled God's presence among his people: Jesus forgave people of their offenses, the sick were healed, the hungry fed and the dead were being raised to life. The kingdom had begun.

But it was difficult to pin Jesus down. The religious and political leaders harshly criticized him for being reckless with the laws and traditions of Israel. He intentionally broke traditions like the Sabbath and kosher food laws that identified Israel as having special standing with God. For Jesus, God's kingdom would not be restricted to the cultural and religious symbols of a particular ethnic group. Instead, one would have to trust and follow him regardless of their race. However, at the same time, he repeatedly avoided his supporters' attempts to make him king and lead a violent revolt against King Herod and the Roman emperor. To make matters more puzzling, after his cousin John was executed and as the religious leaders' hostility increased against Jesus, he began predicting his own death. And, in a treacherous move, he made his way to the eye of the storm in Jerusalem where he was sure to spark the explosive tensions of an entire nation.

For Reflection & Discussion

Read Mark 1-10. Record what interested or puzzled you for discussion. How has your reading changed your view about Jesus?

What is a Messiah and what does the Messiah have to do with God's kingdom?