

Introducing the Bible
Worksheet for Week 6
God Comes to His People

This week, we will begin taking a look at the New Testament, where we come to meet the living Jesus. We'll begin by seeing how the Old Testament points us to Jesus and how his faithfulness to his mission, even to the point of crucifixion, is a concrete and profound expression of God's faithfulness to God's covenant with his people. This worksheet will introduce you to the material we'll talk about in class this week and provide you with a structured set of daily Bible readings.

Approaching Jesus

Jesus was thoroughly and completely Jewish, born into first-century Judaism, with all its tensions and hopes. Much of Jesus' teachings and many of his actions only make sense in light of the beliefs and lives of first-century Jews. There are three keys to putting Jesus in the context of the biblical story.

1. We need to remember the purpose of the covenant God had made with his people. God had chosen Israel and through them all of creation would be renewed, salvation and peace would be brought to all, and God's kingdom would return to the earth. Thus, we should not be surprised that Jesus had more to say about the kingdom of God than any other subject. Jesus' healings were an enactment of God's kingdom, in which the blind would see and the oppressed would be set free. (see Luke 4:14-30, for Jesus' first public teachings and pronouncements about the arrival of God's kingdom)
2. If Israel was the God-chosen agent of creation's redemption, then the obvious question is *who* constitutes Israel. Israel was the nation of God's people, not a nation in the modern-day sense, but a people brought together under a covenant with God. God's people were those who kept the Sabbath, circumcised their male children, obeyed God's dietary laws, and so on. Keeping God's law was the badge of membership in the people of God.
3. So . . . the Jews, the people of God, believed in one God who had created all that is and had chosen them, the knower's and keeper's of God's law! They believed that one day the whole world would see that they had been right and that they would be the ones through whom the world would be reconciled with God. BUT . . . it just sure didn't look like it. By Jesus' day, the Jews had lived under foreign oppressors for more than 500 years. This is the driving tension in the Old Testament. Much of the story of Judaism in Jesus' day is the story of Jewish attempts to force God's hand, to try to make the fulfillment of all God's promises come true.

The Good News

The Gospel of Mark was the first gospel written. In Mark, the first words by Jesus are, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news" (Mark 1:15). Any first-century Jew would have heard these words as a proclamation that the story of God's people was coming to a climax. In the Greek, "good news" or "gospel" is *evangelion*. This was not a "church word." Instead, the *evangelion* was a proclamation that a new emperor had been borne, had taken the throne, or won an important military victory. This proclamation was carried to the Roman provinces by heralds¹, or messengers. The Good News, or *evangelion*, that Jesus brings is the claim that Jesus is Lord; not Caesar, but Jesus! This proclamation, that Caesar's claims to lordship are false, set Jesus up in direct competition with Caesar and with those who would deny that "the kingdom of God has come near."

¹ In the birth stories of Jesus, the *evangelion* or "good news," was brought by herald angels (Luke 2:8-14). John the Baptist also proclaimed this "good news" (Luke 3:18).

Bible Readings for Week 6

Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help. Jot down a few questions that come to mind from your reading of the passage. What do you find most surprising in these readings?

<p>Day 1 Luke 2:8-14 The herald angels bring the proclamation, the good news, the <i>evangelion</i>, that Jesus is Lord.</p>	<p>Day 2 Luke 4:14-30 Jesus begins his ministry in Nazareth.</p>
<p>Day 3 Matthew 5 Jesus begins to teach his disciples about the Kingdom of God.</p>	<p>Day 4 Matthew 12:1-14 Sabbath laws; Jesus heals on the Sabbath</p>
<p>Day 5 1 Corinthians 15 Paul makes sense of Jesus' resurrection and the coming resurrection of all God's people.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Weekly Prayer Concerns</p>