

### QUIET TIME

#### Theme: How can you use the Bible practically?

- Try to make a specific time every day to meet Jesus Christ through reading and meditating his Word.
- Pray, talk with Jesus Christ and make a few short notes about this Bible passage in your notebook.
- Record what you discover, what speaks to your mind and heart, what you find difficult or what you understood.

- Day 1 Joshua 1:6-9  
Meditate day and night on the Bible
- Day 2 Psalm 119:9-16  
Hide God's Word in your heart
- Day 3 John 14:21,23  
Love by obeying God's Word
- Day 4<sup>BS</sup> Luke 8:4-15  
What is the condition and attitude of your heart?
- Day 5 Luke 6:46-49  
Do what Jesus teaches in his Word
- Day 6 Deuteronomy 6:4-9  
Speak with one another about the Bible
- Day 7 2 Peter 1:19-21  
How only can you explain the Bible?
- Day 8 Acts 17:10-12  
Develop your own biblical convictions
- Day 9 Ezra 7:9-10  
Study the Scriptures, live according to them and teach them to others
- Day 10 Proverbs 1:24-33  
Do not be obstinate and self-sufficient
- Think about Psalm 143:8-10.  
David asks God to lead him through his Word.
  - Ask God to lead you personally through his Word (the Bible).
  - Pray every day for someone or something specific and wait in expectation for what God is going to do (Psalm 5:3).

### STUDY

#### Theme: The origin of the Bible

Read study 1 carefully before the next meeting. If you have questions, write them down and mail them to one of your group leaders. We will seek an answer together.

### BIBLE STUDY

#### Theme: How should a Christian respond to the words in the Bible?

If you like, you may already prepare the Bible Study for the coming meeting by reading through the Bible passage. Make use of the 5-step Bible Study method. The Bible passage is: **Luke 8:4-15**

### MEMORISATION

#### 1. Motivation

Bible verses which you memorise will help you to overcome evil powers (Ephesians 6:11,17; Matthew 4:2-4).

#### 2. Memorisation

Memorise this verse in the Bible version of your choice.

#### THE BIBLE

#### 2 Timothy 3:16

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.

**2 Timothy 3:16** (NIV)

#### 3. Review

*Review* this verse once every day.

#### 4. Memorisation of the Bible books

*The 5 books of the Law:*

Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy

# 1. The origin of the Bible

## THE ORIGIN OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

Christianity did not begin with the first coming of Christ, but with the creation. The whole Bible (the Old Testament and the New Testament) is the foundation for the teachings and life of Christians.

### A. Events that led to the writing of the Old Testament

#### 1. God spoke directly to people

The special revelation of God began before the fall of mankind into sin. God spoke directly to the first people (Genesis 1:28). In the book of Genesis, God spoke especially to Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. And God commanded that his words should be transmitted to the next generations.

#### 2. God's words were passed on and recorded

During the Old Testament period the tradition was that fathers taught their children and that God's words were memorised (Deuteronomy 6:7). Because the human race was relatively small and not yet spread over all the earth, and because people lived several hundreds of years and thus several generations overlapped one another, the oral tradition of God's words remained without error. God also commanded some people to record his words.

#### 3. The writers made use of older manuscripts

More than 4000 years ago there already existed libraries filled with 'books' and 'recorded history'. These historical histories were used to write the Old Testament.

### B. The books of the Law (Moses) (1447–1407 B.C.)

The books of the Law (or just 'the Law') consist of the five books of Moses in the Old Testament: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

#### 1. Moses: a historian (1527–1407 B.C.)

Moses grew up in Egypt as the adopted son of Pharaoh's sister. He was well acquainted with the geography, cultures and languages of Egypt and Sinai (Acts 7:22). He was a historian who collected 'the accounts' (Genesis 2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10,27; 25:12,19; 36:1,9; 37:2). These 'accounts' were 'recorded histories' of the creation, of Adam, of Noah and his three sons, of Terah and his son Abraham, of Ishmael and Isaac, of Esau and Jacob, and of Joseph. Some of these accounts were from thousands of years before Moses. Moses used these accounts to compile the Book of Genesis (cf. John 1:17).

God also spoke directly to Moses (Exodus 3) and revealed himself and his will to him. He especially told him how he would save his people from slavery in Egypt, and about his moral, ceremonial and civil laws for his people Israel. God commanded Moses to record his words (Exodus 24:4,7; Exodus 34:27a; Deuteronomy 31:24). The books of the Old Testament were originally written in the Hebrew language, except for a few chapters that were written in the Aramaic language (Daniel 2:4b – 7:28).

#### 2. What are the books of the Law about?

The book *Genesis* (1447 B.C.) describes the history of God's deeds and words from the beginning of the creation and humanity until the time Jacob (Israel) and his descendants moved to Egypt (1877 B.C.) (Genesis 47:28; 50:22; Exodus 12:40).

The book *Exodus* (1447 B.C.) describes the history of how Israel became a large nation in Egypt, how the Egyptians oppressed them and made slaves of them and how God saved them from this slavery in Egypt. The book contains God's moral law (Exodus 20:1-17), a series of social laws (Exodus 21:1–23:33) and a number of ceremonial laws, especially about the tabernacle (Exodus 25–40).

The book *Leviticus* (1446 B.C.) contains God's ceremonial laws about sacrifices, the priesthood and the religious festivals.

The book *Numbers* (1446–1407 B.C.) describes the history how God led Israel through the desert for a period of 40 years until they reached the Promised Land, Canaan (1447–1407 B.C.).

The book *Deuteronomy* (1407 B.C.) contains a reminder of all God's great deeds and laws.

#### 3. God's words are inspired and authoritative

The words of God in the books of the law were written, not only in books, but had to be written in the hearts and minds of God's people (Deuteronomy 6:6). God himself commanded that his people had to meditate and obey his words (Joshua 1:7-8).

Also Jesus Christ believed that the books of the law were inspired by God and were authoritative (Matthew 4:4; cf. Deuteronomy 8:3).

### C. The historical books (1400–460 B.C.)

'The historical books' in the Old Testament are the 12 books: Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, 1 & 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther.

### 1. God commanded that the history of his people must be recorded

God himself commanded the Israelites not to forget his deeds and words. They had to tell them to their children and grandchildren (Deuteronomy 4:9)! God's command stimulated the Israelites to record the history of Israel and to gather them together in books.

The historical books in the Bible describe God's acts in Israel and in the surrounding nations. It particularly describes how Israel broke God's covenant again and again, how God punished their sins and how God saved only a remnant from the whole natural nation of Israel (2 Kings 19:4, 30-31).

### 2. The writers made use of smaller historical compilations

In the Old Testament we read about smaller historical collections that were later gathered into larger collections and thus formed the historical books we possess in the Bible today (Joshua 10:13; 2 Samuel 1:18; 1 Kings 11:41; 1 Kings 14:19; 1 Kings 14:29).

### 3. The writers were inspired by God

Although we do not know who compiled the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings, we do know that these books were written from the viewpoint of the prophets. The prophets wrote *history from God's point of view* (1 Chronicles 29:29-30; 2 Chronicles 32:32)!

## D. The poetical books (1000–400 B.C.)

'The poetical books' in the Old Testament are: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs. (Lamentations is also a poetical book).

### 1. Poetry: memorised and recorded

The Israelites not only memorised their poetry, prayers and songs, but also recorded them and transmitted them to the next generations. The discovery of a growing number of poetry of the surrounding nations from that time confirms this.

### 2. Wisdom literature: how should one live?

The poetical books contain much wisdom literature. In Israel and the surrounding nations much such literature was produced.

'Wisdom literature' contains many practical principles and instructions about how one could best live and should live. These are based on careful observations of human behaviour and human nature. They record rules how to succeed in social life, commerce and even politics. The wisdom literature teaches how one should relate to all kinds of different people. The Hebrew wisdom literature is practical rather than theoretical-philosophical (Proverbs 1:1-7).

## E. The prophetic books (788–420 B.C.)

'The prophetic books' in the Old Testament are the four major prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah (and his Lamentations), Ezekiel and Daniel and the 12 minor prophets: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi.

### 1. God spoke through the prophets

All the prophetic books in the Bible maintain that the God of the Bible is the Author of the prophetic books. More than 2700 times the prophetic books say: "The word of the LORD came to me, saying" (Jeremiah 1:4) or "This is what the LORD says" (Jeremiah 2:5)! These words show that the prophets were the inspired mouthpieces of God. God revealed himself and his words to the prophets and spoke to his people through his prophets (cf. 2 Peter 1:20-21).

### 2. God commanded the prophets to record his words

For example, Isaiah had to record God's words twice: first on a clay tablet so that people could read it immediately and secondly in a book made of papyrus or leather so that later generations could also read it (Isaiah 30:8). Thus the recording of God's Word served as a witness to all later generations (Jeremiah 36:2)!

### 3. The prophetic books were studied and quoted and survived the prophecies of the false prophets

The latter prophets (e.g. the prophets after the exile) studied and quoted the books of the earlier prophets (e.g. the prophets before the exile). The latter prophets pointed out that the prophecies of the earlier prophets proved to be true and trustworthy (Zechariah 7:7-10). They regarded the books of the earlier prophets as God's Word, inspired by the Spirit of God (Zechariah 7:12).

The prophets also quoted one another's prophecies in their books, because they regarded them as words inspired by God. For example, the words in Isaiah 2:2-4 and Micah 4:1-3 are exactly alike.

It is remarkable that in spite of the fact that the prophets spoke openly against the sins and disobedience of the Israelites, the Israelites did not and could not destroy these prophecies against them! In a sovereign way God saw to it that these prophecies were preserved for all later generations.

## THE ORIGIN OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

### F. Events that led to the writing of the New Testament

The books of the New Testament came into being due to four important events:

- a. The first coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, into the world
- b. The calling of the disciples of Christ to be his witnesses
- c. The oral tradition of the apostles' teaching (Acts 2:42)
- d. The special circumstances that led to the writing of each book

#### 1. The coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, into the world

From the very first people, Adam and Eve, and throughout the whole Old Testament period the prophets announced the coming of the Messiah, the Saviour of the world. He came and his deeds and words made such a deep impression on the people in the world that the news about Jesus Christ spread fast. All four writers of the Gospels describe this greatest event in all of human history (Luke 1:1; John 21:25; Acts 1:1). Mark, Luke, Matthew and John each made a selection of the most important things Jesus said and did. They made their selection in accordance with the purpose of their Gospel.

#### 2. The calling of the disciples of Jesus to be his witnesses

The life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, as well as his acts and teachings, did not take place in a corner of the world (Acts 26:26). There were very many witnesses. They saw the works of Jesus *with their own eyes* and heard his teachings *with their own ears* (2 Peter 1:16-18; John 19:35; Luke 1:1-4; 1 Corinthians 15:5-6). And what they saw and heard they passed on to very many people in many places in the world (1 John 1:1). Before Jesus Christ ascended into heaven he appointed his disciples as his witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:2,8). All these eye- and ear witnesses could affirm that what the apostles proclaimed and later recorded in the Bible was the absolute truth!

But there were also many enemies of Christ and Christians. If the apostles would have proclaimed lies, these enemies would have been the first to bring that into the light. They would have unmasked the apostles as false witnesses. One of the strongest proofs that the apostles proclaimed the truth was that they made an appeal to the knowledge of their enemies! So great was their confidence that there were many people who could affirm what they proclaimed (Acts 2:22; cf. Matthew 22:15-16)!

#### 3. The oral transmission of the apostles' teaching

The message of the gospel was first proclaimed by the apostles and consequently recorded in their four Gospels (Acts 2:22; Acts 2:42). By proclaiming the same message again and again to people in many different places, the message more and more received the form it now has in the four recorded Gospels. The three main parts of the apostles' teaching are:

- a. An introduction about Jesus Christ: his origin, his birth and the beginning of his ministry.
- b. His ministry in public to the crowds and his ministry in private to his disciples.
- c. His death, resurrection and ascension.

#### 4. The inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit

Jesus promised his disciples that he would send the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit would remind them of the life, acts and teachings of Jesus Christ (John 14:26), teach them all things they had to know and guide them into the whole truth. The Holy Spirit would take what is of Christ and make it known to the disciples (John 16:13-15). The writers of the Gospels wrote their Gospels under the direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of Jesus Christ himself (Romans 8:9-10).

The disciples of Jesus Christ were a very unique group of people and were called 'apostles', because they were chosen by Jesus Christ himself (Luke 6:12-16; Acts 26:16; Romans 1:1) and complied with the requirements of 'an apostle' in Acts 1:21-22. 'An apostle' of Jesus Christ had to be *an eyewitness* of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit used them to write the books of the New Testament.

The whole New Testament was thus inspired by the Holy Spirit (John 15:26), just as the whole Old Testament had been inspired by the Holy Spirit (the Spirit of Jesus Christ) (1 Peter 1:9-12; 2 Peter 1:19-21). The whole Bible has been inspired by the Holy Spirit (2 Timothy 3:16).

The books of the New Testament were originally written in the Greek language, which was the common language in the Roman Empire at that time.

### G. The four Gospels

The purpose of each Gospel is the following:

*Mark*, written in Rome in the years 44–46, teaches that Jesus Christ is the mighty King. Mark was a disciple of the apostle Peter (1 Peter 5:13) and wrote his Gospel mainly for Romans.

*Luke*, written in Rome in the period 60–61, teaches that Jesus Christ is the compassionate High Priest. Luke was a disciple of the apostle Paul (Colossians 4:14) and wrote his Gospel mainly for the intellectuals at Rome.

*Matthew*, probably written in Jerusalem (cf. his references to events and situations in and around Jerusalem) in the period 63–66, teaches that Jesus Christ is the great Prophet. Because Matthew wrote his Gospel mainly for Jews he made much use of quotations from the Old Testament.

*John*, most probably written in Ephesus in the years 70–98, teaches that Jesus Christ is the Son of God or the Word of God. The apostle John wrote his Gospel originally for people who had a great need for the truth in a time when there were many false teachings.

## H. The book of Acts

### 1. Luke, the writer of Acts

Luke was a disciple, co-worker and fellow-traveller of the apostle Paul. Luke first made an accurate study of his resources in Jerusalem, Caesarea, Asia Minor and Greece with regard to the life, works and words of Jesus Christ (Luke 1:1-4) and especially of the two apostles Peter and Paul. Luke wrote the book of *Acts of the Apostles* in 61 in Rome. The book of Acts is one of the most accurate history books in the world!

### 2. Luke wrote Acts with three purposes

*Luke wanted to record the continuing ministry of Jesus Christ through his apostles*

The purpose of the Gospel of Luke was to record the beginning of the ministry of Jesus Christ. The purpose of the book of Acts was to record the continuation of the ministry of Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit working in his apostles (Acts 1:1). Jesus Christ built his Church on the foundation of the apostles and the New Testament prophets (Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 2:20).

*Luke wanted to win the intellectuals to Christ*

He wanted to make the message of Jesus Christ known to learned people in Rome. It was common in that time for a group of intellectuals to gather to listen to the reading of a new book, generally by the author himself, and then to discuss it. In this way Luke could proclaim the message of Jesus Christ to learned people.

*Luke wanted to defend Christianity*

Luke wanted to justify the attitude of the apostles Peter and Paul and other Christians towards the Roman government and its law. Throughout the book of Acts the respectful behaviour of the Christians towards the Roman government and its laws is made evident.

### 3. A short summary of the history that is recorded in Acts

*Acts chapters 1 – 7 describe the founding of the Church in Jerusalem and its surroundings*

The events in Acts chapters 1 to 7 took place in the years 30–33/34. Through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost in May 30, the Spirit of the

resurrected Christ (John 14:16-18) came to dwell in the hearts and lives of all Christians in order to give them courage, power, endurance, joy, and spiritual insight. The proclamation of the gospel led to the conversion of many people and the founding of the very first congregation in history in Jerusalem in the year 30. However, the fast growth of the number of Christians (Acts 2:42-47) led to the persecution by the Jewish authorities. Finally a great persecution broke out against especially the Greek speaking Jews who had become Christians (Acts 6:9; 7:57–8:3)!

*Acts chapters 8 – 12 describe the spreading of the Church to the south and to the north*

The events in Acts chapters 8 to 12 took place in the period 33/34–44. Jewish Christian congregations were founded in Judea, Galilee and Samaria (Acts 9:31). One of the first Gentile Christian congregations was established in Caesarea by Peter in about the year 40 (Acts 10:28-29,34, 47-48; Acts 15:7-9). While the apostles remained in Jerusalem, the Greek speaking Jews, who had become believers in Jesus Christ, were scattered because of the great persecution against them. They proclaimed the gospel wherever they went and so people in Africa and the Middle East became Christians. By the year 44 they had founded the congregation in Antioch of Syria (Acts 8:1,4,27-28; Acts 11:19-26; Galatians 1:21).

*Acts chapters 13 – 20 describe the expansion of the Church to the west, to Asia Minor and Europe*

The events in Acts chapters 13 to 20 took place in the period 44–57. Jews lived in very many countries since the time of the exile to Assyria (721 B.C.) and the exile to Babylon (586 B.C.). They spread the knowledge of the Old Testament in these countries (Acts 15:21). Paul made several missionary journeys to spread the gospel among the Jews and especially among the Gentiles. From Antioch in Syria Paul made three missionary journeys:

*The first missionary journey of Paul* was during the years 47–48 (Acts 13 – 14). His companions were Barnabas and Mark. They travelled to Cyprus, Pamphylia, South Galatia and Cilicia. They founded congregations in Lystra, Iconium and Antioch (Acts 14:23).

*The second missionary journey of Paul* took place during the years 50–52 (Acts 15:40 – 18:22). His companions were Silas and Timothy. They travelled from Syria to Cilicia and South Galatia in Asia Minor. Accompanied by Luke they crossed over to Europe and founded congregations in Macedonia (Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea) and in Achaia (Athens and Corinth).



*The third missionary journey of Paul* was during the years 52–57 (Acts 18:23 – 21:14). His companions were among others Timothy and Titus. They laboured for three years in Ephesus and founded the congregations in the province of Asia (Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea and Colosse) (Acts 19:8-10; Colossians 4:16; Revelation 2 – 3). They also travelled to Macedonia and Greece (Acts 20:1-3). On the return journey Luke was again with Paul (Acts 20:5-6).

*Acts chapters 21 to 28 describe the extension of the Church to Rome, the capital of the Roman Empire*

The events in Acts 21–28 took place in the period 57–61. During this time Paul was in prison most of the time. He was imprisoned in Jerusalem and Caesarea during 57–59 and in Rome during 60–61.

## I. The thirteen letters of Paul

### 1. The apostle Paul, a Pharisee and persecutor of Christians, became a Christian

Paul was a Jew, born in Tarsus in the Roman province of Cilicia. He automatically received the Roman citizenship. He was educated as a Pharisee by Gamaliel in Jerusalem and ardently strived to live according to the Jewish law. He persecuted Christians in many places (Acts 22:2-5, 25-29; Acts 26:4-11). Paul was converted in about the year 34, four years after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He immediately went from Damascus to Arabia and later returned to Damascus. There he proclaimed the gospel until his escape from Damascus three years later (Acts 9:19b-25; Galatians 1:17).

### 2. The letters of Paul during his second missionary journey, 50–52

Paul travelled with his co-workers Silas, Timothy and Luke to Syria, Asia Minor, Macedonia and Greece.

He wrote the (1<sup>st</sup>) letter *Galatians* in the year 50 from Corinth to the congregations in the province of Galatia in Asia Minor. His purpose was: ‘to defend the gospel of righteousness by faith without the works of the law’.

He wrote the (2<sup>nd</sup>) letter *1 Thessalonians* in the autumn of the year 50 from Corinth. His purpose was: ‘to encourage the growth of the new congregation’.

Shortly thereafter he wrote the (3<sup>rd</sup>) letter *2 Thessalonians* also from Corinth. His purpose was: ‘to exhort the new congregation to remain calm with a view to the second coming of Christ’.

### 3. The letters of Paul during his third missionary journey, 52–57

Paul travelled with his co-workers Timothy and Titus to Asia Minor.

He wrote the (4<sup>th</sup>) letter *1 Corinthians* in the year 56 from Ephesus. His purpose was: ‘to teach that the Christian Church is in the world, but not of the world’.

And he wrote the (5<sup>th</sup>) letter *2 Corinthians* in the autumn of the year 56 from Macedonia. His purpose was: ‘to witness that God’s strength is manifested through the weakness of his apostle’.

He wrote the (6<sup>th</sup>) letter *Romans* in the spring of the year 57 from Corinth. His purpose was: ‘to teach that justification is only by grace through faith’.

### 4. The letters of Paul during his imprisonment in Rome, 60–61

Paul wrote four letters in the years 60–61 while he was imprisoned in Rome.

He wrote the (7<sup>th</sup>) letter *Colossians* in the year 60 to the Christians in the city of Colosse in Asia Minor. His purpose was: ‘to teach that Jesus Christ is supreme in the world and his work of salvation is all-sufficient’.

He wrote the (8<sup>th</sup>) letter *Philemon* in the year 60 to his co-worker and friend Philemon ‘to exhort him to welcome his runaway slave Onesimus’.

He also wrote the (9<sup>th</sup>) circular letter *Ephesians* in the year 60 to the Christians living in Ephesus and the surrounding cities. His purpose was: ‘to teach Christians about the unity of the world-wide Body of Christ (the Christian Church)’.

Finally he wrote the (10<sup>th</sup>) letter *Philippians* towards the end of the year 61 to the Christians in the city of Philippi in Macedonia. His purpose was: ‘to open up his heart and life to the Philippians’.

### 5. The letters of Paul to his co-workers, 61–64/65

After his release from imprisonment in Rome, Paul travelled much.

He wrote the (11<sup>th</sup>) letter *1 Timothy* to his co-worker Timothy in the period 62–63 from Macedonia. His purpose was: ‘to instruct his co-worker Timothy about the organisation of the congregation in Ephesus’.

He wrote the (12<sup>th</sup>) letter *Titus* to his co-worker Titus in the period 62–63 from Macedonia. His purpose was: ‘to instruct his co-worker Titus how to advance the sound teachings and sanctification in the personal lives, families, congregation and society’.

Paul wrote his final (13<sup>th</sup>) letter *2 Timothy* probably during the winter of the year 64–65 once more from prison in Rome. His purpose was: ‘to instruct Timothy to proclaim the sound Christian message’.

Paul was sentenced to death and according to tradition of the early church fathers he was beheaded on the Via Ostia, a highway outside Rome.

## 6. The reading, exchange and collection of the letters of Paul

The apostle Paul stimulated the reading of his letters to the congregations (1 Thessalonians 5:27) and also the exchange of his letters with the other congregations (Colossians 4:16). Timothy had been his faithful co-worker for 14 years and had good relationships with all Paul’s other co-workers and all the congregations, which Paul had either founded or built up. From his second imprisonment at Rome Paul gave an important commission to Timothy: “The things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses (all these people and congregations) entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others” (2 Timothy 2:2). One way to do this was that Timothy collected all Paul’s letters, made copies and spread them to each congregation.

## J. The eight general letters

### 1. The letter to the Hebrews

It is not known who wrote Hebrews, to whom he wrote or when and from where this letter was written.

#### *The Hebrews*

They were Jewish Christians, converts from a Jewish sectarian background. They probably belonged to a Jewish sectarian community in Rome (cf. Hebrews 13:24) and their religion was characterised by ceremonial washings (ablutions to ritually cleanse) (Hebrews 6:2). When these Jews became Christians they took with them certain sectarian customs into the Christian congregation.

#### *The letter to the Hebrews*

The (1<sup>st</sup>) general letter is to the *Hebrews*. It was written before 64 to the Jewish Christians in Rome who kept holding on to the conservative teachings of traditional sectarian Judaism.

#### *The purpose*

The purpose of the letter to the Hebrews was: ‘to teach that *the message of the Old Testament had been fulfilled by the message of the New Testament*’.

Jesus Christ is the highest exalted Person in history. His work of salvation by his life, death and resurrection has been perfectly fulfilled. The message of the New Testament is God’s final word to all people (Hebrews 1:1-2; cf. Revelation 22:18-19).

### 2. The letter of James

#### *James: the brother of Jesus*

James was the brother of Jesus (Mark 6:3) and one of the leaders in the congregation of Jerusalem, which consisted of thousands of Jewish Christians (Acts 21:18-20).

#### *The letter of James*

The letter of James was written to Greek speaking Jewish-Christian congregations.

The (2<sup>nd</sup>) general letter is *James*. It was probably written before the year 43 from Jerusalem. It is the earliest written book in the New Testament. The purpose of James was more or less the same as that of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7), namely, ‘to explain the true standards of the Christian life in the kingdom of God’. James directed his letter to ‘the twelve tribes scattered among the nations’, that is, to the Greek speaking Jewish Christian congregations. These congregations came into being due to the heavy persecution that broke out in Jerusalem especially against the Greek speaking Jews who had converted to Christ. They were scattered from Jerusalem (Acts 6:8 – 8:3) and persecuted (Acts 22:5). Everywhere they went they proclaimed the gospel only to Greek speaking Jews and non-Jews who had converted to Judaism (Acts 11:19) and founded Christian congregations among them.

### 3. The two letters of Peter

#### *The apostle Peter*

*He was ‘the rock’ on which Jesus Christ built his Church.*

Peter was a Jew from Capernaum in the province of Galilee (Mark 1:21,29). He and his brother Andrew were fishermen (Mark 1:16). After John and Andrew, Peter probably became the third disciple of Jesus Christ (John 1:40-42). Jesus had promised Peter (Greek: petros) that he would build his Church on ‘the rock’ (Greek: petra), that is, especially on the apostle Peter and the other apostles and their testimony concerning Jesus Christ (Matthew 16:18; cf. Ephesians 2:20) who is the real ‘rock’ (Daniel 2:44; 1 Peter 2:8).

The apostle Peter was one of the leaders in the congregation of Jerusalem between the years 30–33/34 (Acts 1:15; 2:14; 3:12; 4:8; 5:3,29; 6:2,4; 15:7, etc.).

About the year 40 Peter was the first to proclaim the gospel to *the non-Jews (the Gentiles)* in Caesarea. God had to take extreme measures to convince Peter that the gospel was not only intended for Jews, but also for the Gentiles in the world! In the year 44, when King Herod Agrippa I died, Peter was imprisoned, but miraculously delivered. He then went away from Jerusalem (Acts 12:1-19).

### *The two letters of Peter*

Peter wrote two letters to the congregations which Paul had founded in Asia Minor. Although we do not know whether Peter had ever ministered in Asia Minor, it is possible when you take into consideration that he travelled much. These congregations in Asia Minor consisted mainly of Gentile converts. They were being oppressed and persecuted, probably by their own countrymen.

The (3<sup>rd</sup>) general letter is *1 Peter*. It was written in the period 62–63 from Rome to the congregations in Asia Minor (1 Peter 1:1). The purpose of Peter was ‘to strengthen the Christians amidst their sufferings and to urge them to live godly lives with a view to their future hope’.

The (4<sup>th</sup>) general letter is *2 Peter*. It was written in the year 64 from Rome, not long before he died (2 Peter 1:14) during the persecution instigated by Caesar Nero in the year 64/65. He wrote this letter to the same congregations in Asia Minor (2 Peter 3:1). His purpose was: ‘to equip the Christians against the false teachers and their false doctrines’.

While 1 Peter addresses *the danger coming mainly from outside the congregation (their hostile countrymen)*, 2 Peter addresses mainly *the danger coming from the inside of the congregation (false teachers)*.

### **4. The three letters of John**

#### *The apostle John*

After the death of the apostles Paul and Peter, God gave the Christian congregations in Asia Minor a new leader: the apostle John. The church father Irenaeus (130–200) said that the apostle John lived permanently in Ephesus in Asia Minor and that he ministered until the time of Caesar Trajan (98–117).

#### *The three letters of John*

After the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in the year 70 by the Roman army under Titus, the heathen religions with their heathen philosophical teachings and customs began to influence the Christian teachings and habits.

The (5<sup>th</sup>) general letter is *1 John*, the (6<sup>th</sup>) general letter is *2 John* and the (7<sup>th</sup>) general letter is *3 John* and they were written in the period 70–98 in Ephesus to the congregations in the area of Ephesus. The purpose of John was ‘to warn the Christian congregations against the false teaching of Cerinthus’. Cerinthus was a Jewish convert to Christianity in Alexandria in Egypt and a contemporary of John. Cerinthus and other adherents of Gnosticism were Christian heretics who claimed that they possessed more spiritual knowledge than the knowledge that was revealed in the Bible.

### **5. The letter of Jude**

Jude was also a brother of Jesus and James (Mark 6:3). The (8<sup>th</sup>) general letter is *Jude* and was written in the period 64–68, probably to the same congregations in Asia Minor to which Peter had also written. The purpose of Jude was ‘to warn the Christian congregations against the false teachers and to urge them towards love, faith and prayer’ (Jude 1:20-21). It seems that the false teachers had already penetrated and infiltrated the Christian congregations with their destructive work.

## **K. The book of Revelation**

The church father Irenaeus said that the book of Revelation was written towards the end of the reign of Caesar Domitian (81–96), who during the final three years of his reign persecuted Christians. He demanded that all people must worship him as ‘god’ and opposed the growth of the Christian Church. The opposition and persecution under Caesar Domitian was the example for the social, economic and religious conditions revealed in the book of Revelation, which also characterises such conditions in the history of the world during the whole period between the first and the second coming of Jesus Christ.

Although God in Jesus Christ is the real Author of the book of Revelation, Christ revealed its contents via an angel to the apostle John by means of visions and symbolic language.

John recorded these visions in the book of *Revelation* in about the period 95–96 while he was exiled on the isle of Patmos.

The purpose of the book of Revelation on the one hand is: ‘to encourage the persecuted Christians throughout history in their struggle against the evil political, economic and religious powers, because genuine Christians are more than conquerors through Jesus Christ (Romans 8:37; Revelation 17:14)’.

The purpose of the book of Revelation on the other hand is: ‘to warn the careless and negligent Christians who are tempted to conform to this evil world, that unless they repent, their lampstand would be removed from its place (Revelation 2:5)’.

The theme of the book of Revelation is:

‘The victory of Christ and his Church over the dragon and his helpers.’