

INTRODUCTORY

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CONTENTS

- 1. The New Testament as Pastoral Response
- 2. The Environment of Early Christianity
- **3.** The Cultural and Social World of the Early Church
- 4. The Four Gospels and the One Jesus
- 5. The Gospel According to Mark: Following in the Way of the Cross
- **6.** The Gospel According to Matthew
- 7. The Gospel According to Luke
- 8. The Acts of the Apostles
- **9.** The Gospel According to John
- 10. The Epistles of John

- **11.** A Prologue to the Study of Paul's Letters
- 12. The Letter to the Galatians
- **13.** The Thessalonian Correspondence
- 14. The Corinthian Correspondence
- 15. The Epistle to the Romans
- 16. The Epistle to the Philippians
- **17.** The Epistle to Philemon
- **18.** The Epistles to the Christians in Colossae and Ephesus
- 19. The Letters to Timothy and Titus
- 20. The Epistle to the "Hebrews"
- 21. The Epistle of James
- 22. The First Letter of Peter
- 23. Jude and 2 Peter
- 24. The Revelation of John

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TEXTBOOK FEATURES

THE ENVIRONMENT OF EARLY CHRISTIANITY

CHAPTER ONE

THE NEW TESTAMENT AS PASTORAL RESPONSE

HOW DID WE GET THIS COLLECTION of texts called the New Testament? To answer this question, we need to consider two distinct processes: first, the composition of each of the texts now included in the New Testament; second, the selection by the church of this group of texts to stand in a position of central importance and authority within the church as touchstones for faith and practice. Both processes can be understood in terms of response to pastoral exigencies. These texts would never have been written in the first place were it not for the kinds of concerns and challenges that early Christians faced. Each text was written to serve some specific pastoral needs and answer a range of important questions arising out of the life of the church. Because these texts answered those perennial questions so well, they continued to provide the basic point of reference for each successive generation of Christians in ever-widening circles from the texts' places of origin. Faced with the same or new challenges, Christians kept turning to these texts to find guidance from the apostolic witness and, ultimately, from their Lord himself. Canonization was a long, natural, and largely consensual process by which the churches in every place throughout the Roman world came to recognize the indispensable value of these texts for their continuing life, nurture, and direction.1

> ¹It must also be said that the process of arriving at consensus also determined the boundaries of the church. Thus Gnostic Christian and some Jewish-Christian movements re-

ISSUES IN THE FIRST-CENTURY CHURCH

A bishop sent a vibrant, innovative minister to a dwindling United Methodist congregation in a big city in the hope that she would build up the congregation. One of the less conventional moves she made was to rent advertising space on buses. The side of a bus featured her likeness, adorned in liturgical garb, with a Bible tucked prominently under her arm and a caption that read: "When our new minister came, she brought the manual." The Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments function very much as the church's "manual" or "handbook" (manual is derived from the Latin manus, meaning "hand"). These are the resources that give us our identity, vision, mission, and hope, and that orient us to our past, to the world around us, and to our future.

The early Christians, however, did not have access to such a manual. From the parent religion, they inherited the Jewish Scriptures (what Christians would come to call the Old Testament), which were foundational to the forging of the new group's identity, but not in nearly the same way that they were for the synagogue. Gentile Christians were connected to these texts only on account of their connection with Jesus. Jewish Christians were wholly reoriented to their Scriptures by the same. Both were called together into one new

mained essentially separate entities as they clung to their own distinctive texts and the distinctive faith and practice these nurtured

experience the freedom to express a wno yearns to part his holiness and wholeness the love and gratitude that follow. It also directs the community of faith

and freedom from a harmful way of ve, restoration, life lived apart from God. Luke seeks to nurture a community that values and invests itself not only in facilitating the

em as a city in revolt against his atally slaughtering thousands. istance finally led Antiochus. the advice of Menelaus himself. eople's adherence to their an-(the Torah) as the root of their In 167 BCE Jews in Jerusalem to circumcise their young or to of the Torah. Those who perng Torah observance met with

John D. Crossan, In Parables: The Thallenge of the Historical Jesus (New prk: Harper & Row, 1973). avid Flusser, Die rabbinischen ichnisse und der Gleichniserzähler u. 1 Teil: Das Wesen der Gleichnisse (n: Peter Lang, 1981). L. Blomberg, Interpreting the 95 (Downers Grove, IL arsity Press, 1990), 93. are adapted from K. R. ass, "Parable," in Dictionary of nd the Gospels, ed. Joel B. cot McKnight, and I. Howard (Downers Grove, IL: y Press, 1992), 598; and bles of the Kingdom, 11-20.

> vulnerability as nan as Simon did. ommunity omeone who serious hurt or tation by activity is out ctable people. es on the Anonye deep. pen.ª ethos is ecome a lee from where

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be seen more clearly as zeal for the Torah and the safety of Israel, lest this newest movement lead to God's wrath on the nation that was slow to declare its absolute allegiance to Torah. Attempts to pursue the "hope of Israel" through



Figure 2.3. A silver tetradrachm of Antiochus IV. The image on the obverse bears a portrait of the king; the reverse bears an image of Zeus, seated with "Victory" standing in his hand. The inscription reads "of King Antiochus, God Manifest, Bringer of Victory." (Photos courtesy of Sandy Brenner, www.JerusalemCoins.com)

assimilation, therefore, encountered greater resistance hereafter from those who had become even more certain that the "hope of Israel" lay in fidelity to the distinctive way of life set out for it by God in God's covenant.

The saviors of Israel: Political independence and Israel's hope. The attempt to suppress observance of the covenant and the intolerable situation in Jerusalem and Judea led a priest named Mattathias and his five sons to initiate revolution. A Syrian official came to Mattathias's village of Modein calling for an idolatrous offering as a sign of acquiescence to

FEATURES

- · Full four-color interior
- · Updated scholarship throughout
- Integrates textual criticism with ministry formation
- · Include maps, photos, points of interest, and aids to learning