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Objectives for today:

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- 2) State of religion in the world at the time of Christ
- 3) Types of books in the New Testament
- 4) Introduction to the Gospels

Divisions within Judaism

Q: How do we survive and maintain our identity as faithful Jews when we're surrounded by Gentiles and ruled by them?

A: (According to the Pharisees) By living the Law as faithfully as possible, and avoiding Gentile contamination.

A: (According to the Sadducees) By doing what it takes to keep the Temple worship going and not making the Gentiles mad at us.

Because the Sadducees were so focused on Temple worship and what the Jewish priests did, they weren't able to survive the fall of Jerusalem and destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D. Modern day Judaism as we know it descends from the Pharisees.

The Sadducees also accepted only the Torah as Scripture. They didn't believe in angels or in the resurrection of the dead (which made them sad, you see).

The Decline of Pagan Religion

The old myths were losing hold on the minds of people. The Greek philosophers had already come to realize that there had to be only one god, and that the one god was responsible for the existence of everything, but they didn't know that God cared about everything or wanted them to enter into a relationship with Him. (In fact, the god they thought about was much more "it" than "Him.")

The Romans weren't big into philosophy anyhow. They were much more practical-minded. At least on an official level, as long as everything was working, they didn't mind keeping up with the forms of pagan worship and probably thought in some vague way that it made some difference.

Neither Greek philosophy nor Roman practicality spoke to the hearts of people. So "mystery religions" began to take hold, especially among the Roman people. They were a sign of people's longing for something beyond themselves--a longing that God wanted to fill with Himself.

Some Gentiles were attracted to Judaism, seeing in it something both transcendent (the God they wanted that was something more than just bigger than they were) and rooted in historical reality (all that stuff we studied last semester). Some went all the way through the conversion ritual; others didn't, but attended synagogues and believed in the one true God. This latter group was known as God-fearers.

Types of books in the New Testament

Gospels: tell us the life of Jesus

Acts: One-of-a-kind book; tells us the story of the very early Church

Epistles: Letters to various churches and people

Revelation: One-of-a-kind book; sort of prophecy, but really not

The Four Gospels

Gospel = “Good News”, from the Greek “evangelion”

Evangelist = someone who wrote a Gospel (also means other things, but this is the one that we need for class)

The Gospels each give us a story life of Jesus Christ. They aren't written as biographies the way we wrote them now, but they are ancient-style biographies (e.g., ancient biographers felt free to arrange incidents as best fit their story rather than putting them in chronological order).

All of them were written in Greek.

Purpose of the Gospels:

St. John: Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name.

St. Luke: It seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the truth concerning the things of which you have been informed.

Who wrote the Gospels?

St. Matthew: Traditionally identified with the Apostle Matthew/Levi, a tax collector

St. Mark: Traditionally identified as St. Peter's assistant, who recorded St. Peter's preaching in his gospel. Might be the "John Mark" mentioned in the book of Acts.



St. Luke: Also wrote the book of Acts. An associate and friend of St. Paul. Born a Gentile (the other evangelists were all Jewish), known to have been a physician, said to have been an artist as well.

St. John: Traditionally associated with St. John the Apostle, brother of St. James the Apostle.

The Synoptic Gospels

The Gospels of SS. Matthew, Mark, and Luke are known as the *synoptic Gospels*.

Synoptic = syn + optic

syn = together (synthesis, symphony [“synphony” is too hard to say”])

optic = related to the eye (optic nerve, optometrist, optician, optical illusion)

Synoptic = with the same eye; these Gospels tend to tell the same stories, often with the very same words.