

**THE
TRUE STORY
OF THE
NEW
TESTAMENT**

Responding to Christ and His Commission

REGULAR BAPTIST PRESS

Director of Regular Baptist Press: Alex Bauman

THE TRUE STORY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT
RESPONDING TO CHRIST AND HIS COMMISSION
Adult Bible Study Leader's Guide

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How to Use *Life Design*



LIFE DESIGN: Bible Study Designed for the Life You Live. These Bible study materials are designed to engage adult learners in inductive Bible study and in applying the truths of that study to their daily lives.

As you prepare to teach these lessons, keep these two factors in mind:

- The **FOCUS** of productive adult Bible learning is the learner. The intent of teaching is not teaching, but learning—the learner’s learning.
- The **GOAL** of productive adult Bible learning is an appropriate life-response to Biblical truth. You do not teach simply to impart information; you teach so that the Holy Spirit of God can use the truths of the Word of God to change the child of God into the image of the Son of God.

The Lesson Plan

Each *Life Design* lesson has three distinct parts. **GETTING STARTED** is the attention-getter. The questions and activities “set the table,” as it were, for the Bible study. **SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES** is the heart of the lesson. A series of inductive Bible study questions leads the teacher and learners through the Biblical text. **MAKING IT PERSONAL** applies the truth to life.

As is true of any teaching experience, you can adapt the parts of the lesson to fit your particular class. You may choose to alter the beginning activities or change the

focus of the application. You will find more material in the Bible study than you can cover in one class session. Ask God to help you as you tailor the lesson for your learners.

The Study Book

This leader’s guide is designed to accompany the Bible study book. As the teacher, you will want a copy of the Bible study. Commit to working through the questions before you plan your lesson. We encourage you to distribute Bible study books to your learners. Urge them to complete the study before class. The more your learners have studied on their own, the better the class discussions will be. When a question in the leader’s guide is picked up from the Bible study book, you will notice the question number in parentheses. The answers to the questions are sometimes in the lesson commentary. They are also grouped together in the back of this book.

Other Resources

If you want to use transparencies as you teach, a packet of sixteen full-color transparencies is available. If you prefer to use PowerPoint, the resource CD includes a PowerPoint presentation for each lesson.

Some teachers stay very close to the outline as they teach. If this is true of you, and if you want your learners to capture that outline, reproducible in-class worksheets are included on the CD. The same worksheets may be downloaded from the Web and photocopied for class members. Visit www.regularbaptistpress.org/downloads. Thank you for choosing *Life Design* teaching materials. May God richly bless you and your learners as you study and apply His Word.

Preface

When we pick up an especially exciting novel, we may become so engrossed in reading it that we read the whole book in one sitting. We say, “I just couldn’t put it down.” The benefit of such an action is that we see the continuity of the book. We get the whole picture. The opening is still fresh in our minds when we come to the conclusion.

Often when we read the Bible through, we do so over a long period of time. Reading it may even take several years. If we are more dedicated, we may set a goal to read through the whole Bible in one year. While that ambition is noble, it still may leave us wondering how the Bible all fits together.

This course is a basic study of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament. It develops the chronological and historical story of the Bible from Matthew to Revelation. Focus is given to the major themes of the incarnation and ministry of Jesus Christ, the birth and development of the church, and the need for godly Christian living. The study emphasizes the central place of Jesus Christ in God’s redemptive plan.

While this goal is a challenge, it is a valuable endeavor. It will help us see the unity of the New Testament and better understand the life of Christ and the history of His church.

Resources for This Course

The transparency packet for this course (RBP0107) includes a transparency on which to record the summary statements from each lesson. The transparency will help you track and review these lessons. Starting with lesson 1, use transparency 1 at the end of each lesson or at the beginning of the next lesson to record the summary statement for each lesson. You may use the suggestions in this leader's guide or ask your learners to suggest summary statements.

The Resource CD (RBP0108) for this course includes a PowerPoint presentation for each lesson. All of the transparencies are part of the PowerPoint presentation. The transparencies are also included on the CD. If you

would like to make your own PowerPoint slides, the CD includes backgrounds ready for your own text.

To help in your promotion of this course, the CD includes a PowerPoint slide, poster, and a flyer. You can add your group's information to all of the promotional material.

The CD also provides in-class worksheets. Each in-class worksheet has a fill-in-the-blank outline that follows the corresponding outline in this leader's guide.

In addition, the CD includes a printable verse card for each lesson's key verse or verses. Blank verse cards are also included so you can enter different or additional verses for your learners to memorize.

LESSON 1

The Background of the New Testament Story

Scripture Focus

Various passages

Key Verse

“But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law” (Galatians 4:4).

Overview

Though there weren't any new revelations from God during the four hundred or so years between the testaments, God was not inactive. God worked sovereignly over history to fulfill prophecy involving world events and to prepare the world for the coming of His Son, Jesus Christ.

Topic

Intertestamental history

Theme

God sovereignly oversaw the history of the intertestamental period and prepared the world for the coming of Christ.

Desired Learner Response

The learner will recognize God's sovereign wisdom in directing history and will express his trust in God to wisely direct his own life.

Outline

- I. Intertestamental History
 - A. Closing of the Old Testament
 - B. Greek period
 1. Alexander the Great
 2. Ptolemies and Seleucids
 - C. Hasmonean period
 - D. Roman period
- II. Jewish Sects and Political Groups
 - A. Pharisees
 - B. Sadducees
 - C. Scribes
 - D. Herodians
 - E. Publicans

Materials

- RBP transparencies 1—3
- Resources 1—3
- Galatians 4:4 verse card from resource CD

- III. Jewish Institutions
 - A. Sanhedrin
 - B. Synagogues
- IV. Preparation for the Coming of Christ
 - A. The Jews
 - B. The Greeks
 - C. The Romans
 - D. Society in general

Getting Started

Alexander the Great

Ask: What do you know about Alexander the Great? (See lesson commentary below for facts.) **Ask:** Why might we be concerned about Alexander the Great in a study about the New Testament? (Questions 1, 2)

Alexander the Great is an important figure from the period between the testaments. Daniel gave specific prophecies about the Greek leader. All the prophecies eventually came to pass. Alexander, along with other people and nations, are excellent examples of God's sovereignty as He prepared the world for the coming of Christ.

The background of the New Testament is the topic for this lesson. Understanding the history leading up to the New Testament helps us understand the New Testament better.

Your Background

Ask: What two or three items from your personal or family background would help others better understand you today?

Use the various responses to help your learners grasp that even as it is helpful to know a person's background to better understand him or her, it is important to know the background of the New Testament to better understand its story.

Searching the Scriptures

No doubt you have noticed how different the Old Testament is from the New Testament. In the Old Testament we read about Canaanites, Philistines, Assyrians, Babylonians, and Persians. In the New Testament we find instead Romans and Greeks. In the Old Testament we find much about Abraham, Moses, and Israelite kings and prophets. The New Testament dwells on Jesus Christ, the scribes and Pharisees, the apostles, and the church. What changes took place between the end of the Old Testament and the beginning of the New Testament? This will be the focus of our study of New Testament backgrounds.

I. Intertestamental History

The intertestamental period is the time between the close of the Old

Testament and the opening of the New. It lasted about four centuries. It is sometimes called the Four Hundred Silent Years. However, while there were no new revelations from God, many events took place during those four hundred years. Kingdoms rose and fell. God's people struggled, suffered, sacrificed, and survived.

A. Closing of the Old Testament

The Old Testament period closed about 400 BC. Persia was the undisputed ruler of the Near East at that time. Half a century before the Old Testament period closed, Nehemiah had led in the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem, which had been torn down when Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem in 586 BC and carried the inhabitants of Judah to Babylon. In the rebuilding effort, Ezra aided Nehemiah by teaching the Word of God to the people. Under Ezra's ministry a revival broke out among God's ancient people. However, not all the evils were corrected.

About 400 BC, Malachi wrote his book to warn the nation of God's judgment on evildoers (Mal. 1:6) and of God's remembrance of those who feared the Lord (3:16). The Old Testament closed with Malachi's prophecy of the coming of someone like Elijah the prophet (4:5, 6).

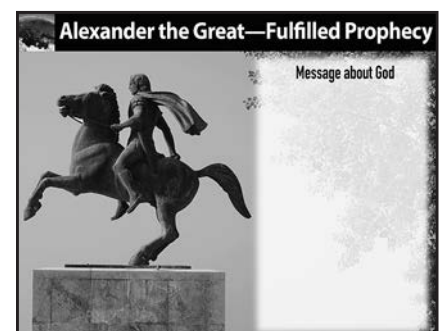
READ: Malachi 1:6–13. **ASK:** Describe the attitude the Jews and in particular the priests had toward God. **ASK:** What was the result of the Jews' sinful attitudes? (Question 3, 4)

B. Greek period

1. Alexander the Great

The Greek period began about 333 BC, when Alexander the Great came sweeping out of Greece and conquered the Persian Empire. Alexander was one of history's greatest generals. He never lost a battle, though the Persians usually greatly outnumbered him. He conquered all the land from Greece to Egypt to the border of India. Jerusalem and the Jews submitted without a battle and even showed Alexander the place in their Scriptures that prophesied of him (Dan. 8:1–7; 11:3). This prophecy stated that the big horn (Alexander) of the goat (Greece) would smite the ram (Persia) and would be victorious. Alexander was very pleased and favored the Jews from that time on. However, after conquering Persia, Alexander died at the young age of thirty-three. His kingdom was divided among four of his generals, thus fulfilling the prophesy of Daniel 8:8.

DISCUSS: How would you expect the Jews to respond to God's accurate fulfillment of prophecy during the "silent" years between the testaments? **TRANSPARENCY:** Display transparency 2. **ASK:** What "loud and clear" message about Himself did God send the Jews by fulfilling prophecy? (Record answers on the transparency.) (Questions 5, 6)



2. Ptolemies and Seleucids

RESOURCE: Display resources 1 and 2 from the resource CD to show the timeline of Ptolemy and Seleucid control of Israel as well as a map of the land they each controlled.

DANIEL 11 AND THE GREEK EMPIRE		
Year	Alexander the Great 332-323	Daniel 11
325	20 years of fighting among Alexander's generals	v. 3 v. 4
	EGYPT JUDAEA SYRIA	
300	PTOLEMY I (SOTER) 304-285 Dominated by Egypt	SELEUCUS I (NICATOR) 304-281 v. 5
275	PTOLEMY II (PHILADELPHUS) 283-246 DAUGHTER BERENICE MARRIED TO ANTIOCHUS II	ANTIOCHUS I (DART) 281-272 v. 6
250	PTOLEMY III (EUSMERTES) 246-221	SELEUCUS II (CALLINICUS) 246-217 v. 7, 8 v. 9
225	PTOLEMY IV (PHILOPATER) 221-204	SELEUCUS III (SELEUCUS) 226-221 v. 10 v. 11, 12
200	PTOLEMY V (EPHRAEMES) 203-181 Dominated by Syrians	ANTIOCHUS III (THE GREAT) 223-187 Daughter Cleopatra married to Ptolemy V v. 13-19
175	PTOLEMY VI (PHILOMETER) 181-145 Maccabean Revolt	SELEUCUS IV (PHILIPPER) 187-175 v. 20 ANTIOCHUS IV (EPHRAEM) 175-164 v. 21-25
150	PTOLEMY VII (EUSEBETES 2) 170-116	ANTIOCHUS V

One of Alexander's generals, named Ptolemy, ruled over Egypt. Another general, named Seleucid, ruled over Syria and points east. These generals soon became kings. At first Palestine was a part of Ptolemy's kingdom. But after a series of wars, it fell to Syria.

In about 171 BC, a Greek king of Syria named Antiochus IV began to persecute the Jews. He wanted them to stop worshiping Jehovah and to worship Greek gods, such as Zeus, instead. When the Jews refused, he sacked Jerusalem, profaned the temple, and offered a pig on the altar of burnt offering in honor of Zeus. (Daniel prophesied all this in Daniel 8:9-14.)

READ: Daniel 8:9-14. **ASK:** How do you respond to such accurate fulfillment of prophecy during the years between the testaments? (Question 7)

C. Hasmonean period

The Jews were horrified by Antiochus' desecration of the temple and its altar. Finally an old priest named Mattathias led a revolt against Antiochus and his Syrian Greek army. With the help of Mattathias's five sons, including Judas Maccabee, the Jews gradually won their independence. Around December 25, Judas Maccabee cleansed the temple. Jews celebrate this act of temple cleansing to this day with the feast of Hanukkah. Descendants of the Maccabees governed in Judea for about a hundred years.

D. Roman period

In 66 BC two brothers of the Maccabeans fell into a civil war over which of them should rule. By then the Romans had conquered Syria and made it part of the Roman Empire. Rome was the fourth of the four beasts of Daniel's prophecy of Daniel 7:1-7. In 63 BC one of the Maccabean brothers requested help from Pompey, the Roman general in Syria, against his brother in the Jewish civil war. The Romans were more than happy to step in.

Rome, however, had its own plans. The Romans conquered all of Judea and made it part of the Roman Empire. So the Jews lost their independence again and were under the heel of Rome.

RESOURCE: Display resource 3 to show the sequence and territories of the kingdoms prophesied by Daniel.

Rome soon appointed Herod, a descendant of Esau, to be king of Judea (Luke 1:5) under the Roman emperor Caesar Augustus, the ruler of the Near East (2:1) when Christ was born. Throughout the events of the rest of the



New Testament period, Rome ruled from England to Palestine in the mightiest empire that the Near East, Europe, and North Africa had ever seen. It lasted far longer than any other empire before it or since.

ASK: Given their political situation, how might the Jews have reacted to the news of the birth of a Jewish king? (Question 8)

II. Jewish Sects and Political Groups

One cannot read much of the Gospels without coming across names of Jewish sects and political groups that were not a part of Old Testament Israel. However, they were very much a part of the society that Jesus lived in. To better understand Judaism of Jesus' day, we must take a look at some of these factions of society.

A. Pharisees

Some Bible teachers think that the Pharisees were successors of the pious Jews who stood true to the law in the days of the persecution by Antiochus IV. Though the Pharisees did have a good beginning, many had capitulated to dead orthodoxy by Jesus' day. They held not only to the Scriptures, but also to oral traditions handed down from the fathers. These traditions were organized and codified and passed down in the Mishnah. Because the Pharisees put so much emphasis on tradition, Jesus rebuked them and told them they were "making the word of God of none effect" through their traditions (Mark 7:13).

The Pharisees were rigid legalists and added much to what the Scriptures said. For example, the Law of Moses forbids work on the Sabbath. So the Pharisees said that if a wife sewed a garment for her husband and left the needle in it, the husband would be a lawbreaker if on the Sabbath he wore that garment with the needle attached.

In Mark 7:3 we read, "For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, except they wash their hands oft, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders." They certainly did wash their hands often at a meal. (1) A person had to wash before the meal. (2) He had to wash after each course of the meal. (3) He had to wash after the meal. (4) He had to immerse his hands in the water, or none of the washing was valid. (5) The water itself had to be taken through a cleansing ceremony before the washings, or none were valid. (6) Yet none of this cleansing would count unless first of all the pots holding the water went through a ceremony of cleansing too. And so it went with ever-increasing detail.

DISCUSS: What was missing in the Pharisees' "worship" of God? **DISCUSS:** How would you expect Jesus to respond to the Pharisees' religious leadership of the Jews? (Questions 9, 10)

Jesus did not regard the traditions of the elders to be binding. For this reason, most Pharisees did not approve of Him. In time some Pharisees, such as Nicodemus (John 3:1) and Paul (Acts 23:6), became believers.

The word “Sadducee” is a corruption of Zadoksee.

B. Sadducees

The Sadducees were another influential religious group in Jesus’ day. Their beginnings are thought to go back much further than the Pharisees. They have been traced to Zadok, whom Solomon made high priest (1 Kings 2:35). All Sadducees were priests, but not all the priests were Sadducees.

The Sadducees were worldly minded and materialistic aristocrats of Jewish society of that day. They were also involved in politics as well as religion. If the Pharisees were the legalists of the day, the Sadducees were the liberals. They are known for what they denied instead of what they affirmed. They denied all things supernatural. Thus they did not believe in angels, spirits, miracles, or the resurrection of the dead (Matt. 22:23; Acts 23:8).

The Sadducees and Pharisees did not get along with each other except when they were uniting against a common enemy, such as Christ and those who believed in Him (Acts 23).

C. Scribes

Since there were no printing presses in that day, all copies of Scripture had to be made by hand. That was the main work of the scribes. They were very meticulous in their endeavors. After they had completed a manuscript, they counted every single letter to make sure all were right. Since Hebrew letters were also used for numbers, they could add up the letter numbers and make certain the total was correct after they had finished.

Since they spent so much time copying Scripture and were so meticulous about it, they came to know the law of Moses better than almost everyone else. Therefore, they were also called lawyers (Matt. 22:35). Many of the Pharisees were also scribes.

Some of the scribes challenged Jesus concerning the Scriptures. Others used the oral traditions to try to find fault with Jesus. The oral traditions were laws and regulations added to the Scripture. The scribes saw their oral tradition as having authority over the Scriptures. They expected Jesus to have the same view.

READ: Matthew 15:1–9. **ASK:** For what major fault did Jesus condemn the scribes (v. 9)? (Question 11)

D. Herodians

Turning from the religious groups, we come to the political ones. The New Testament mentions two. The first is the Herodians. As their name indicates, they were a Jewish party who supported King Herod. While many Jews hated Herod, this group sided with him. They were government people whose jobs depended on Herod’s maintaining his position. They were the ones who questioned Jesus about paying taxes to Caesar (Matt. 22:16, 17).

READ: Mark 3:6. **ASK:** Why would the Herodians be especially motivated to kill Jesus? (Question 12)

E. Publicans

The publicans were native people in conquered lands who collected taxes

from their countrymen on behalf of Rome. In Greece they would be native Greeks. In Judea they were Jews.

The Romans had a policy of specifying how taxes should come from each conquered land. The publicans were to raise that amount. During part of the history of the Roman Empire, the publicans were allowed to collect as much as they could, and they could pocket anything above the amount required by Rome. At times the publicans would use extortion or other means to raise the money. Thus they earned a reputation for trying to wring out every coin they could from their fellowmen to send to Rome. Though the publicans often became rich, they were despised as traitors.

Some noted publicans were Matthew, who became an apostle (Matt. 10:3) and the writer of our Gospel by that name, and Zacchaeus (Luke 19:2), who climbed up a sycamore tree to see Jesus. After coming to Christ, Zacchaeus sought to make right any money he had falsely taken from others.

READ: Mark 2:13–17. **ASK:** Why would tax collectors be particularly attracted to Jesus? (Question 13)

III. Jewish Institutions

Several Jewish institutions also played a part in the life of our Lord and in the lives of the members of the early church.

A. Sanhedrin

The Sanhedrin was a seventy-member council of Jewish leaders that was the supreme authority of the Jews of Jesus' day. Its name comes from a Greek word meaning "assembly." It was made up of Sadducees and Pharisees, and the high priest was its leader. Since Rome ruled Palestine, Palestine was subject to the Romans and could not apply the death penalty. Thus the Sanhedrin had to go to Pilate to ask that Christ be crucified (Matt. 27:1, 2).

B. Synagogues

The synagogues came into existence in Babylon after Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the temple in Jerusalem and carried away the Jews to Babylon. Once in Babylon, the Jews met in houses, but this gathering gradually developed into formal assemblies with their own places of worship. The synagogue was a place of instruction, public worship, and prayer. It also was a storage place for copies of Scripture.

There had to be a minimum of just ten Jewish men in a city for a synagogue to be built, so almost every major city with any Jewish population had one or more synagogues. The synagogue strongly influenced the early church. With the arrival of Christianity, churches became places of instruction, public worship, and prayer like the synagogues. The apostle Paul did much evangelizing in the synagogues (Acts 13:14; 18:4).

IV. The Preparation for the Coming of Christ

The Jewish Scriptures prophesied the coming of the Messiah many times. During the intertestamental period, God was at work preparing for Christ's

coming. Three groups of people contributed to the preparation for the rapid diffusion of Christianity.



TRANSPARENCY: Display transparency 3 to show how God prepared the world for the coming of Christ. Reveal each section as you discuss it.

A. The Jews

The Jews contributed their monotheism—their belief in one God. Wherever they went, they proclaimed that there is only one God. In that day they actively sought to win others to Judaism (Matt. 23:15). The Jews, through their synagogues, provided places for many early Christian sermons by Paul and others (Acts 17:1, 2). The Jews also contributed their meticulous copies of the Scriptures. Additionally, the Jews provided their Messianic hope that made the world conscious that a great deliverer was coming.

READ: John 1:6–8. **ASK:** What did God do specifically through the Jews to prepare the way for Jesus? (Question 14)

B. The Greeks

The Greeks contributed their language. Greek was widely spoken throughout the Near East. It was the language of culture, education, and commerce. Greek was the language of the first Bible translation from Hebrew, called the Septuagint. Thus the Old Testament could be read far and wide. Greek also became the language in which the New Testament was written. Greek culture and thought patterns were widely spread after the days of Alexander the Great; therefore, the early Christians did not have to break down a cultural gap.

C. The Romans

The Romans contributed the *Pax Romana*, the Roman peace, which allowed Christians to witness in relative safety. Roman roads made travel easier for missionaries, such as Paul, Luke, Timothy, and Barnabas, to reach distant places.

D. Society in general

In general, there was degeneration in religion, which left a vacuum. Many people no longer believed in the myths of the gods of Greece and Rome. Thus Paul could write, “When the fulness of time was come, God sent forth his Son” (Gal. 4:4).

Making It Personal

Desire for Study

Ask: How does knowing the background of the New Testament story affect your desire to study this course? (Question 15) Use the responses to help

build a sense of excitement for the study of the New Testament.

Ask: Why should you personally value a study of the New Testament? (Question 16)

Trusting God

Ask: How does God's working in history to fulfill prophecy and prepare for the Messiah affect your trust in Him? **Ask:** How should you respond to God's directing of your life? (Questions 17, 18)

Encourage learners to express their trust in God through sentence prayers.

Review Transparency

Use transparency 1 to review the response for this lesson: Trust God and follow His direction for your life.

Memory Verse

Distribute copies of the Galatians 4:4 verse card from the resource CD. Encourage the learners to memorize the verse.

