

## **Questions for Study and Reflection**

(Select those that are most interesting and helpful to you)

### **The Menu**

- 1. Introduction**
- 2. Preliminary Considerations**
- 3. The New Testament Gospels in Preview**
- 4. Mark's Narrative of Jesus: Important Points and  
Junctures**
- 5. Paul and the Pauline Letters in Preview**
- 6. Selected Pauline Texts: Important Claims**
- 7. Acts: The Church in Motion**
- 8. Other New Testament Epistles: A Brief Survey**
- 9. Patmos and the Revelation to John**
- 10. Conclusion: Final Comments**

*In the Beginning: Critical Concepts for the Study of the Bible*

J. W. Aageson First Published 2000 Westview Press  
Republished 2018 Routledge Press

*Windows on Early Christianity: Uncommon Stories, Striking  
Images, Critical Perspectives* J. W. Aageson Cascade  
Books, Wipf and Stock Publishers 2016

(The appropriate chapters or pages from these books for many  
of the questions and topics are noted below)

## 1. Introduction

- A. Why are you taking this course and what in particular interests you about the New Testament?
- B. Are you primarily a solo learner or a group learner? What are the advantages of each? How might this digital course work for each type of learning?

## 2. Preliminary Considerations

- A. What are the implications of the assertion that Jesus was a Jew, not a Christian, and that the church emerged after the historical Jesus?
- B. How is our understanding of the NT gospels affected by imagining them in an oral cultural setting? What changed once they were read rather than heard? (*Beginning*, chapter 6)
- C. How would you describe in your own words the assertion that the writing of the NT documents and their canonization were two different processes? (*Beginning*, chapter 12 and *Windows*, chapter 12)
- D. What does it mean to say that translation is the first line of interpretation? Is there such a thing as an un-interpreted text? (*Beginning*, chapter 5)
- E. In these matters, what does the word genre mean and how does thinking about genre affect our reading of the NT? (*Beginning*, chapter 8)
- F. Can you think of an example of biblical re-contextualization? (*Beginning*, chapter 9)
- G. Do you agree or disagree with my conversation model of biblical interpretation? Why or why not?
- H. Why is thinking about different models and understandings of Christian origins important for New Testament interpreters? (*Windows*, chapter 4)

I. Why is “literal” interpretation of the NT more complicated than it might first appear? (*Beginning*, chapter 10)

### 3. The New Testament Gospels in Preview

- A. What are the implications of the claim that the NT gospels were not written until the final third of the first century CE?
- B. How would you describe in your own words the genre of the NT gospels? (*Windows*, pp. 74-84)
- C. What is your reaction to the 2-source hypothesis for the origin of the NT gospels?
- D. Why might reading the gospel texts in parallel be important?
- E. What are some of the differences between John’s gospel and the synoptic gospels? (*Windows*, pp. 81-82)

### 4. Mark’s Narrative of Jesus: Important Points and Junctures

- A. What might be some advantages of a narrative reading of the gospels (for example of Mark’s gospel) rather than an historical reading? (*Windows*, pp. 82-93)
- B. What might be some limitations of a narrative reading of the gospels?
- C. What other approaches might we use to read the NT gospels?
- D. Markan texts considered:
  - a. 1:1-13 (Jesus’s baptism and being driven into the wilderness, cf. Matthew and Luke)
  - b. 1:14-15 (Theme of Mark’s gospel)
  - c. 1:16-20 (Let the journey begin: calling the first disciples)
  - d. 1:21-34 (The first of his healings)
  - e. 2:1-12 (Healing of the paralytic)
  - f. 2:15-17 (The call of Levi)
  - g. 3:13-19 (Jesus’s entourage expands)

- h. 3:31-34 (Jesus's family)
- j. 4:1-20, 33-34 (Parable of the sower)
- k. 4:35-5:43 (To the other side of lake)
- l. 6:1-8:21 (The interlude: teachings, feedings, healings)
- m. 8:22-26 and 10:46-52 (Two blind men, bracketing)
- n. 8:27-30 ("Who do people say that I am"?)
- o. 8:31-37, 9:33-37, 10:32-40 (Predictions, misunderstandings, and the nature of the kingdom of God)
- p. 9:2-13 (Transfiguration)
- q. 11:12-24 (Entering Jerusalem, the temple, and on to the crucifixion)
- r. 14:12-15:47 (Passover, betrayal, trial, crucifixion)
- s. 16:1-8 (The empty tomb, cf. Matthew and Luke)

## 5. Paul and the Pauline Letters in Preview

- A. Why is it important to be precise about understanding Paul's so-called conversion? What might be some of the implications of this, if we view him as having departed from Judaism? (*Windows*, pp. 56-61)
- B. Describe in your own words some of the major theological themes in Paul's letters. (*Windows*, pp. 63-69)
- C. How has the church reflected in the Pastoral Epistles changed as compared to the other Pauline letters? (*Windows*, chapter 8)

## 6. Selected Pauline Texts: Important Claims

- A. What is the *Shema* and why is it important for understanding Paul and his theology?
- B. What is the importance of "righteousness by faith," "new creation," and "reconciliation" for Paul?
- C. If observance of the Jewish law is not critical for Gentiles, why was the law given to Moses in the first place? (*Windows*, pp. 67-68)
- D. How does the figure of Abraham fit into Paul's theology? How does this contrast with the way other Jews understood Abraham? (*Windows*, chapter 3)

E. What does it mean to say that Paul was pastoral?

F. Pauline texts considered:

- a. Rom 3:30, 1 Cor 8:4, Gal 3:20 (echoes the *Shema*)
- b. 2 Cor 5:17-19 (new creation, reconciliation)
- c. Phil 2:6-11
- d. Gal 3:6-9 (Abraham, righteousness, belief)
- e. Gal 3:19-29 (The Law)
- f. Rom 4:1-12 (Abraham, righteousness, belief)
- g. Rom 7:7-12 (The Law)
- h. Rom 12:9-21 (The state)
- i. 1 Cor 10:1-33 (Eating and drinking, pastoral advice)
- j. 1 Cor 11:23, 15:3-5 (Carrier of the tradition)
- k. Gal 5:16-25 (Life in the Spirit, life in the flesh)

## 7. Acts: The Church in Motion

A. Who wrote Acts?

B. Where does the book of Acts begin and how might we outline the entire narrative? Where does it end and under what circumstances?

C. What does it mean to say that Acts is a unique mix of history and theology?

D. What is the significance of the Acts account of Paul's so-called conversion in chapter 9? (*Windows*, pp. 99-109)

E. Acts texts considered.

- a. 1:1-2:13 (Narrative transition and opening)
- b. 2:14-47 (Peter's speech)
- c. 13:16-41 (Paul's speech)
- d. 3-8 (Chapters leading to Paul)
- e. 8:26-40 and 9:32-10:48 (bracketing)
- f. 9:1-22 (Saul on the Damascus Road)
- g. 28:16-31 (Paul in Rome)

## 8. Other New Testament Epistles: A Brief Survey

- A. What are the important themes in the book of Hebrews?
- B. How does the epistle of James differ from Paul on the question of “righteousness by faith”? Why does James take a seemingly different position from Paul and to what might he be reacting?
- C. What might you say by way of shorthand about 1 & 2 Peter?
- D. Are the three epistles of John written by the same person who wrote the gospel of John? Why or why not? What is the other so-called Johannine literature in the NT?
- E. Texts cited.
  - a. Heb 8:1-10-10:18 (New covenant)
  - b. Heb 11:1-39 (Heroes of faith)
  - c. James 2:14-26 (Faith and works)
  - d. 2 Peter 3:15-16 (Reference to Paul)

## 9. Patmos and the Revelation to John

- A. How would you describe the words “apocalypse,” “apocalyptic eschatology,” and “apocalyptic”? (*Windows, chapter 10*)
- B. What is the apocalyptic context for the book of Revelation? What is its worldview? In that world, how might it function?
- C. How would you describe the genre of Revelation? How does it proceed literarily from beginning to end?
- D. How might the book of Revelation be used properly or improperly in the church today?

## **10. Conclusion: Final Comments**

- A. How has this course been helpful to you and what are the most important things you have learned?
- B. What was not included that you might have liked to consider?