

Chapter 2: The New Testament World of Jesus

Student Preparations

- Students were assigned to read Chapter 2, “The New Testament World of Jesus,” pages 58-85
- Students were also asked to complete the Chapter 1 “Review “ questions on pages 55-56.

Warm-up (about 20 minutes)

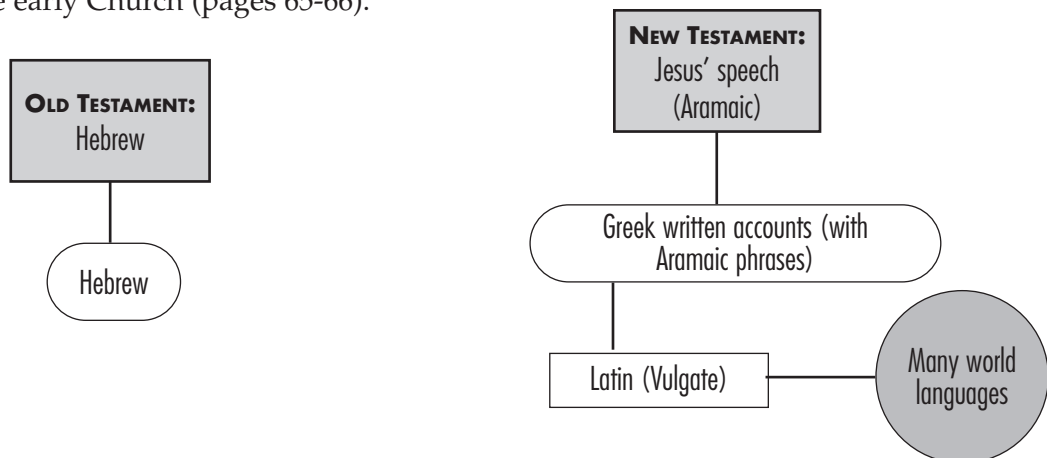
- Invite students to discuss the difference between knowing *about* someone and actually knowing *the person*. Give an example of a time in your own life where you grew from knowing about someone and came to know the real person. What difference did it make? After inviting students to share examples, facilitate a discussion on the difference between knowing about Jesus and knowing Jesus as a person.
- Have students brainstorm about what has influenced who they are today: their family, their neighborhood, their race, living in America in the beginning of the twenty-first century, being Catholic, etc. Ask: How do you think Jesus was influenced by the circumstances of his life?
- If possible, show about ten minutes of a video on the Holy Land (several are recommended on page 67 of the teacher’s manual).
- Collect the Review Questions from Chapter 1, and ask students to explain what “Biblical criticism” means.

Part 1:

Lesson (about 30 minutes)

Text References: Palestine: The Holy Land, Language and Dialect of Jesus’ Time, Religious Feasts and Practices of Jesus’ Time, The Political Climate in First-Century Palestine (pages 61-72)

- Have students turn to the map on page 65. Review the three major regions of Jesus’ life: Galilee, Samaria, and Judea. Have students identify them on the map, and then, referring to pages 62-64, give a brief description of each area, its important cities, and the significant events which occurred in each place. Write their responses on the board.
- Do the “Map of the Holy Land” exercise on page 64.
- Have students draw a diagram of the languages used in the Scriptures and the translations which occurred in Jesus’ time and the early Church (pages 65-66).



- Highlight examples 2 and 3 on pages 66-67. This information provides help in understanding a number of Scripture passages that are troublesome for many people.
- Lead students in a discussion of the differences between the Temple and a synagogue (one Temple, many synagogues; sacrifice offered only in Temple). What elements of worship in synagogue are also found in our celebration of Mass?
- What do we know about Herod the Great, Herod Antipas, and Pontius Pilate? (See pages 71-72.) What was life like for Jewish people living under Roman rule? Were there any advantages to the Roman presence?

Break/Writing Exercise (about 15 minutes)

- Join students for a break with refreshments.
- Have students write a reflection on the conversation between a new Christian convert and a non-believing friend that begins on page 59. Ask them to share about anyone they know whose life has been transformed by a relationship with Christ? Have their lives been changed by Jesus' presence? Can they see an area of their lives now that is in need of change? How could Jesus help?

Part 2:

Lesson (about 30 minutes)

Text Reference: The Practice of Slavery, Jewish Beliefs and Practices, Religious Sects in Jesus' Time, Other People in the New Testament

- Slavery was a practice in Jesus' time which is not directly challenged in Scripture. Yet Jesus, and St. Paul, clearly see each person as infinitely worthwhile in God's eyes. Have students brainstorm areas in which we believe society is more respectful of people than in Jesus' day (women, people with disabilities, etc.). What are challenges that did not exist in Jesus' time (stem cell research, end-of-life technology, etc.). How do we apply the principles which Jesus taught in a world which is very different from first-century Palestine?
- Have students answer the questions on page 76 about angels. Facilitate a discussion about the existence of angels and of evil spirits. Do students have any stories of times when they or someone they know has encountered an angel? How can we be open to the possibility of spiritual encounters, without being gullible? What seem to be the markers of a "true" encounter (peace, clarity, long-lasting effects, etc.)?
- Sadducees, Pharisees, Essenes, and Zealots competed in Jesus' time. Divide students into four groups. Assign one sect to each group and have students review the characteristics of their sect. (There is a good summary of each group's beliefs on page 75 of the Teacher Manual.) Have each group write a position statement on how Jews should respond to a Roman demand to swear an oath of loyalty to the emperor. Have a spokesperson for each group read the statement, and then engage in a brief debate on the merits of each position. Are there any comparable issues today that divide people of faith (abortion, homosexuality, immigration, etc.)?
- Continue discussing material presented in the text. For example: Why were tax collectors so despised in Jesus' day? What do you think your response would have been? If you were very poor, would you have been tempted to take a job that compromised your beliefs? What was the role of women in Jesus' time? Has this situation changed much in the Middle East? How are women oppressed today in some countries in the Middle East?

Prayer Experience (about 20 minutes)

- Prepare your space for prayer with whatever you have chosen as tools for transition: candle, music, table, picture of Jesus, etc.
- Have two students read the dialogue on pages 59-60. Give students a few minutes of silence to reflect on the journal writing completed earlier in the session.
- Invite students to bring forward any prayers of petition or thanks which are on their hearts. Allow plenty of time for this portion; it may take time for students to get comfortable verbalizing their concerns.
- Close the prayer time by reading the passage from Romans found on pages 84-85.

Conclusion (5 minutes):

- Have students complete the "Review Questions" on pages 83-84 for next session.
- Have students read Chapter 3, "The Essential Jesus" (pages 87-112) for the following session.