## A. POLITICAL/HISTORICAL SETTING

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>SUPERPOWER</th>
<th>EVENTS</th>
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</table>
| 1000 | ISRAEL     | David, Solomon  
|      |            | Temple built |
| 900  | -----      | Kingdom split into  
|      |            | Israel and Judah |
| 700  | ASSYRIA    | 10 Northern tribes  
|      |            | (Israel) exiled |
| 600  | BABYLON    | Judah exiled  
|      |            | Jerusalem destroyed |
| 500  | MEDO-PERSIA| Exiles return to  
|      |            | Judah; 2\textsuperscript{nd} Temple |
| 400  | GREECE     | Alexander the Great  
|      |            | dies, 323 B.C. |
| 300  | Ptolemies (Egypt) | control Palestine |
| 200  | Seleucids (Syria) | control Palestine |
| 167  |            | Maccabean Revolt/Judean Independence |
| 100  | ROME       | Pompey takes  
|      |            | Palestine 63 B.C. |
| 0    | Herod the Great (37 – 4 B.C.) |
B. RELIGIOUS SETTING OF THE NEW TESTAMENT
(or “Why does what happens to me/us, happen to me/us?”)

Part 1: Non-Jewish Religions

GREEK GODS – many (polytheism), superhuman, immortal, corrupt, “bribed” Zeus (earth), Poseidon (oceans), Hades (underworld)

OFFICIAL ROMAN RELIGION – incorporated Greek gods (Zeus = Jupiter), emperors deified at death, later emperors claim divinity while living (Domitian) used to unify, hold together empire

PHILOSOPHY –
Epicureans pursue pleasure (not simply sensual)
Stoics = reason governs, accept fate
Cynics = pursue virtue, reject social comforts
Skeptics = reject all the above, fate determines

MOST PEOPLE – ignored or went through rituals,
superstitious, dissatisfied, empty, belief in supernatural (?)

MYSTERY RELIGIONS – “new” from East, attracted many, some “similarities” with Christianity are late and borrowed

GNOSTICISM – secret knowledge to escape evil, material world; developing in New Testament times and later
B. RELIGIOUS SETTING OF THE NEW TESTAMENT (continued)
(or “Why does what happens to me/us, happen to me/us?”)

Part 2: Jewish Religion/Old Testament and Intertestamental

Under David & Solomon, Israel had it all (1000-900 B.C.), but exiled by the Assyrians (722 B.C.) and Babylonians (586 B.C.). Israel lost: 1) Davidic dynasty, 2) Jerusalem temple, 3) land

Results in the DIASPORA or “scattering” of the Israelites/Jews among many nations. Some, the “Remnant,” returned to beginning in Judah in 538 B.C. A 2\textsuperscript{nd} temple was rededicated in 516 B.C.

Reactions to keep these disasters from happening again:

1. MONOTHEISM (“one God” only)

2. TORAH/LAW OF MOSES ordered society and religious outlook. The revealed will of God became legalistic, contractual.
   The Written Law of Moses had 613 commands, a developing Oral Tradition gave 341 more (2/3 deal with table fellowship; the Mishnah), the Talmud adds 631 more!

3. SACRED DOCUMENTS WERE COLLECTED (e.g. the Dead Sea Scrolls found near Qumran)
   A. Those in the Old Testament Canon (written by 400 B.C.)
      = The Hebrew Scriptures (Torah, Prophets, and Psalms)
      Septuagint (Greek translation of the O.T.)
      Targums (Aramaic translations with comment)
B. Others Religious Literature continues to be written (e.g., Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Apocalyptic)

4. SYNAGOGUE developed as the local place of worship, education, study, assembly, judicial proceedings, etc.

5. MESSIANIC EXPECTATIONS (e.g., Psalms of “Solomon”)
If we keep the faith and/or straighten up and live right, then...

A. The Spirit of God would return to the covenant land.
B. God would send the Messiah
   1. of Davidic line
   2. human, not divine
   3. who would establish a righteous and just rule to free
      his people from foreign oppressors.
   4. The Messiah’s victory would bring judgment on
      Gentiles (non-Jews) and wicked Jews (tax collectors,
      prostitutes, “sinners”) ALL ANNIHILATED
C. The Messianic Age of heaven on earth would arrive!

6. By Jesus’ Day, think of JudaismS with various GROUPS
   (cf. Christian denominations)

   PHARISEES – strict interpretation and legal application of Law
   Ritual purification
   Within society yet separatistic
   Accepted Law, Prophets, Psalms and Oral Tradition
   God controls earthly events
   Earthly messianic kingdom
   Believe in bodily resurrection and angels

   SADDUCEES – priestly and aristocratic
   Politically involved
   Concentrated in Jerusalem and on Temple services
Accepted only Torah (Law of Moses)
Freedom of individual
Deny earthly kingdom, resurrection, and angels

ESSENES – withdrew from “corrupt” society (Qumran ???)
Communal, monastic, disciplined, and ascetic

HERODIANS – supported Herod’s successors and, therefore, Rome

ZEALOTS – revolutionary, no taxes to Rome, violence

SCRIBES – professional class, experts in Law, around Temple and synagogues, close to Pharisees

SANHEDRIN – ruling council of 70 Jews with limited authority
Controlled and met in Temple
“Supreme Court” for legal/religious matters

HELENISTS – allowed Greek language and culture

HEBRAISTS – adhered to traditional “Jewish” values

PROSELYTES - Gentile converts, adopt Jewish lifestyle (e.g., circumcision, food laws), allowed half-way in

GOD-FEARERS – Gentiles who worshipped the God of Israel, but did not adopt Jewish lifestyle

7. Follow the Calendar of FESTIVALS and Their Significance

Passover and Unleavened Bread  Exodus from Egypt
Pentecost or Weeks  Wheat harvest
Trumpets of Rosh Hashanah  New Year
Day of Atonement (“Yom Kippur”)  Repentance, fasting
Tabernacles or Booths  Wilderness wanderings
Lights, Dedication, Hanukkah  Rededication of Temple (165 B.C.)
Purim  Esther delivers God’s people
C. CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING:
DATING JESUS’ LIFE AND MINISTRY

“When the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, to redeem those under law” (Galatians 4:4-5).

During the time of the Roman Empire, events were dated from the founding of the city of Rome (ab Urbe Condita). In the 6th century A.D. every date in the western world was recalibrated according to:
B.C. = “Before Christ”
A.D. = Anno Domini = “the year of the Lord” (since His birth)

JESUS’ BIRTH = 5-4 B.C.
MATTHEW 2:1 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod,…

NOTE: According to this chronology, we now know fairly confidently that HEROD THE GREAT died in 4 B.C. Jesus was born before that date so the chronology is close, but probably 4-7 years off!

JESUS’ THREE-YEAR PUBLIC MINISTRY = A.D. 26-29 (or 29-33)
LUKE 3:1-2 In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar – when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea,…the Word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the desert.

LUKE 3:23 Now Jesus himself was about thirty years old when he began his ministry. He was the son, so it was though, of Joseph,…

Tiberius Caesar began to rule alone in A.D. 14. Then Jesus began in A.D. 29 when he was “about thirty years old.” If literally “30” years old, this would place Jesus’ birth after Herod the Great’s death.
Possible Solution: Tiberius was named co-regent with Caesar Augustus in 11 A.D. Technically, the 15th year from the beginning of his reign would then be 26 A.D. which is 30 years from 4 B.C.

JESUS’ DEATH, RESURRECTION, ASCENSION = A.D. 30 (or 33)
D. HOW THE 27 DOCUMENTS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT LIBRARY/“CANON” CAME TOGETHER

1. **Definition** In Greek, *kanon* meant “a reed,” then “a measuring rod/stick,” and, finally, came to be applied to a norm or list of normative works. The phrase “The New Testament Canon” describes the 27 books recognized as reliable and authoritative for the leading the faith and life of the Christian church (see also Called by the Gospel, pages 19-21).

2. **History of the Canon**

   a. The First Period, 100-170 A.D.

      In this period there is *little discussion* of the canon. The writings of the Apostolic Fathers testify to the existence and the authority of all types of N.T. writings (Synoptic Gospels, John, Catholic epistles, Paul’s letters, Hebrews). Clement, Ignatius, and Polycarp distinguish between the superior authority of Apostolic writings and their own. Justin Martyr records that the Gospels were read in the public services of the Church interchangeably with the writings of the Prophets (i.e., the O.T.). The fact that heretics or false teachers also employed these N.T. writings to establish their heresies testifies to the authority of these books. One of them, named *Marcion*, set up an 11-document canon of his own which eliminated the entire Old Testament. It consisted merely of a revised version of Luke’s Gospel and ten letters by Paul. **This brought the issue to the forefront and led the Church to settle the matter of the Canon.**

   b. Second Period, 170-220 A.D.

      In this period there is no longer any question as to the fact of the Canon; the only question is its extent. First, **the Old Testament is reaffirmed as the authoritative Word of God for Christians.** Second, there is also now more. Irenaeus (d. 202 A.D.) bishop of Lyon, Tertullian (d. 240 A.D.) of Carthage, Clement of Alexandria (d. 203 A.D.), and the Muratorian Canon (c. 170 A.D.) of Rome all demonstrate that there was **practical unanimity on twenty of the twenty-seven books in our present New Testament Canon (homolegoumena).** Seven others were challenged or “spoken against” in certain places (*antilegoumena*). With the exception of 2nd Peter, each of them was also known and accepted elsewhere as canonical: Hebrews, James, 2nd and 3rd John, Jude, and Revelation. For example, Palestinian and Syrian churches had long rejected Revelation; Egypt was doubtful about some of the lesser Catholic Epistles, while the Western and African Church accepted Jude, 1st and 2nd John, and Revelation. **The history of the Canon in the third and fourth centuries is the story of the gradual acceptance of these disputed books (*antilegomena*) by the whole church.**

   c. The Third Period, 220-300 A.D.

      During this period the Canon underwent no striking change, but there is growing evidence for recognition of the disputed books. 2nd Peter receives its first clear
attestation from Origen (d.254) of Alexandria and Caesarea. Dionysius of Alexandria (d.265) testifies to James, 2nd and 3rd John, Hebrews, and Revelation (though he doubts Johannine authorship). Cyprian of Carthage (d. as martyr 258 A.D.) cites Revelation frequently. Throughout this period there is no official action on the Canon; neither did the opinion of individual theologians affect the formation of the Canon decisively. For instance, the opinion of Dionysius, a great, learned and influential man, on Revelation had little or no effect on his contemporaries or his successors. The practical test of canonicity was use in the worship services of the church.

d. Fourth Period, 300-400 A.D.

In this period the Canon is officially recognized and its limits established. Eusebius, Bishop of Caesarea (d. 340), sets forth the Canon of his time on the basis of historical inquiry, but there are no official decisions to which he can appeal. Cyril of Jerusalem (d. 386) lists all the books of our Canon, except Revelation, without any distinction between homolegoumena and antilegomena. Anthanasius in his Paschal Letter of 367 A.D. lists all 27 books of our present Canon and calls them “the fountains of salvation.” A council held at Carthage, 397 A.D. prescribes that only canonical Scriptures are to be read in the Church services and also lists our 27 books as the canonical books of the N.T. That this expresses a consensus reached in the Church even before is clear from the words of the decree itself and from the fact that at the Council of Nicaea (325 A.D.) both sides silently admitted sacred Scriptures as the final authority. By 530 the whole Greek-speaking church was in line with the canon as we know it.

3. The Canon in Modern Times:

The Medieval Church held to the canon as it had been established in the fourth century. At the time of the Reformation the canon was again subjected to scrutiny, by Catholics as well as by the Reformers. Luther relegated Hebrews, James, Jude, and Revelation to a secondary place as no “true and capital books of the New Testament.” Luther also excluded the books of the Apocrypha which caused the Roman Catholic church to respond by recognizing them as authoritative at the Council of Trent. But these had little effect on the actual working Canon. The canon of the New Testament, as recognized by the ancient Church, imposed itself anew upon the Church until the era of modern historical critical scholarship (see pages to follow).

In view of the “unofficial” and almost automatic manner in which the Canon assumed its place in the church, the following, somewhat circular dictum seems appropriate: “The Bible constitutes itself the Canon. It is the Canon because it has imposed itself as such upon the Church and invariably does so...The Bible is the Canon just because it is so. But it is so because it imposes itself as such.” Ned Stonehouse adds, “The basic fact of canonicity remains...the testimony which Scriptures themselves bear to their own authority. But the historian of the Canon must recognize the further fact that the intrinsic authority established itself in the history of the church through the government of its Divine Head.”
E. THE HISTORICAL CRITICAL METHOD

A. Definition of Major Components

1. Historical criticism (over-riding approach)

This view rises out of the Enlightenment and Rationalism. It contends the Bible should be examined and dissected just like any other ancient source. “Historical criticism is that approach to the text of Scripture which insists that the only way to discover the truth of Scripture (or any portion thereof) is by way of applying to it the principles and methods of scientific historical investigation.” Since miracles and other supernatural events are beyond the possible boundaries of so-called scientific historical investigation, these are disallowed as actual occurrences.

2. Literary Criticism = What then is the source of the miraculous written stories in the New Testament?


In applying literary criticism to the Gospels, the conclusion is made that Mark was the first Gospel written. To help explain material not found in Mark but present in Matthew and Luke, the usual theory is that a hypothetical document of collected sayings of Jesus existed, commonly called “Q” (from Quelle, German for “source”, “spring”). Along with Mark, it was presumably used by those responsible for the Gospels according to Matthew and Luke.

3. Form Criticism – Prior to being written down, the stories of Jesus circulated and “developed” in oral form (cf. peeling back an onion further).

“Form criticism has been concerned with the study of the period of oral transmission before the gospel traditions reached their written stage in the Synoptic Gospels. It is a basic thesis of form criticism that the traditions contained in the written gospels are analyzable in terms of definite forms in which they circulated orally. Form criticism also maintains that in the course of transmission there were changes and developments in these forms, and it is part of its task to identify and account for these changes. Insofar as the discipline is concerned with the latter investigations, it is more appropriately called form history.” From Howard Clark Kee, Franklin W. Young, and Karlfried Froehlich,

***More simply stated, form criticism holds that through the years the Early Church modified, adapted, and added to isolated saying of and about Jesus. By this process the Gospels as we know them eventually came into being.

According to form criticism, the life situation of the events of the Gospels is not that of the time of the life and ministry of Jesus (ca 5 B.C. to A.D. 30), but rather that of the Early Church between the years 30 – 100 A.D. Hence, the Gospels are not “records” of Jesus’ life, words, and deeds as they actually happened, but that which the Early Church thought had happened and that which was added as all this was developed for preaching purposes, seeking to make memories of Jesus’ life and ministry relevant to its day.

4. Composition (Redaction/Editorial) Criticism

Growing out of form criticism, “the redaction critic investigates how smaller units – both simple and composite – from the oral or from written sources were put together to form larger complexes, and he is especially interested in the formation of the Gospels as finished products. Redaction criticism is concerned with the interaction between an inherited tradition and a later interpretative point of view. Its goals are to understand why the items from the tradition were modified and connected as they were, to identify the theological motifs that were at work in composing a finished Gospel, and to elucidate the theological point of view which is expressed in and through the composition” (Pages vi-vii of Via, see No. 2 above for bibliographical data).

UPDATE: Now we live in an era of Post-Modernism where everything, it seems, has become relative. This applies especially to truths about religion, supposedly so that we can all “co-exist” here in time and, presumably, hereafter in eternity as well. “Truth” then depends totally upon the individual’s perspective, assessment, and experience. But to assert there is no absolute truth is, in itself, an assertion of absolute truth! Furthermore, no one actually lives as a post-modernist in day-to-day life. The New Dictionary of Biblical Theology (edited by Alexander and Rosner, Inter-Varsity, 2000, page 100) offers this balanced response:

Postmodernism does its most honourable work when it exposes the most arrogant epistemological claims of the ‘modern’ period, and especially the hollow pretensions of ‘independent’ or ‘autonomous’ reason. It functions honourably when it reminds us that we operate in contexts (linguistic, cultural, religious, racial, individual), and that these inevitably shape us … But postmodernism succumbs to a new arrogance when … it tells us we are nothing more than our contexts, and proclaims the absoluteness of the relative. There are alternatives.
F. Some Provisional Thoughts from a Lutheran Perspective  
(see also Called by the Gospel, pages 7-16)

1. The sole source and norm of our teaching is God’s word, the Holy Scriptures (the “formal principle” = the form God’s revelation comes in). “Your Word is truth” (John 17:17 NIV).

2. The central teaching of the Holy Scriptures is the Gospel of Jesus Christ (the “material principle” = the material or substance the Bible contains; its main teaching; John 3:16).

3. INSPIRATION: “For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21; NIV). “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16; NIV).

4. “In calling the Scriptures INERRANT the church is expressing the conviction of faith that these words, as words taught by the Holy Spirit, are truthful, wholly reliable, and uniquely powerful witnesses to the words and works of God, and that these inspired words in their concrete human form are the very voice of the God of her salvation.”

From Law and Gospel by C.F.W. Walther:
Thesis 1. The doctrinal contents of the entire Holy Scriptures, both of the Old and the New Testament, are made up of two doctrines differing fundamentally from each other, namely, the Law and the Gospel.

Thesis 4. The true knowledge of the distinction between the Law and the Gospel is not only a glorious light, affording, the correct understanding of the entire Holy Scriptures, but without this knowledge Scripture is and remains a sealed book.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LAW</th>
<th>GOSPEL</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>We do</td>
<td>God has done in Jesus Christ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centered in people</td>
<td>“outside of us”; in God; on the cross</td>
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<tr>
<td>Obedience, Failures</td>
<td>Faith passively receives God’s gifts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Process, Measurements</td>
<td>“It is finished/accomplished” (John 19:30)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Power, force, compulsion</td>
<td>Allow yourself to be given to</td>
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<tr>
<td>“have to”; irresistible</td>
<td>Resistible, weakness, can reject</td>
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<tr>
<td>Threats, punishments</td>
<td>Free gift of forgiveness</td>
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<tr>
<td>What we deserve, justice</td>
<td>God’s undeserved mercy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Accuses, condemns</td>
<td>“The truth will make you free.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Uncertain; “Have I done enough?”</td>
<td>Confidence (Romans 8:31-39)</td>
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<tr>
<td>“For the wages of sin is death,”</td>
<td>but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Jesus our Lord” (ROMANS 6:23).</td>
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“God is as creative as he is relentless. The same hand that sent manna to Israel sent King Uzziah to his death. The same hand that set the children free from [Egypt] also sent them captive to Babylon. Both kind and stern, tender and tough, faithfully firm, patiently urgent, eagerly tolerant, softly shouting, gently thundering ... Ever offering, never forcing” (Max Lucado, A Gentle Thunder, Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995, p 4).