

UNDERSTANDING CHRISTIANITY

Module 3: The New Testament

STUDY AIDS

TITLE	PAGE
Timeline of New Testament History A full chart paralleling the history of the New Testament from the birth of Jesus (c. 4 BC) to the writing of Revelation (c. 90 AD) with events in the Roman Empire.	3S.1
Timeline of Paul's Ministry An outline of the main events in the life of the apostle Paul.	3S.2
Books of the New Testament A table detailing the authors and themes of each of the 27 books of the New Testament.	3S.3
Key dates in Church History An overview of the history of the Church over 1900 years from 64 AD to 1962 AD.	3S.4
The History of Christianity in China An overview of the history of Christianity in China.	3S.6

TIMELINE OF NEW TESTAMENT HISTORY

Bible record			Roman Empire	
Date (AD)	Event(s)	Bible Reference(s)	Date (AD)	Event(s)
4 BC	Jesus born in Bethlehem	Matthew 1:18-2:23; Luke 1:5-2:40	27BC - 14 AD	Augustus, emperor
			37-4 BC	Herod the Great, king of Judea
29	John the Baptist baptises Jesus	Gospels	4 BC-39	Herod Antipas, ruler of Galilee
29-33	Public ministry of Jesus	Gospels	14-37	Tiberius, emperor
33	Crucifixion, resurrection & ascension of Jesus	Acts 1:1-11	26-36	Pontius Pilate, procurator of Judea
	Day of Pentecost	Acts 2:1-41		
33, 34	Stephen is stoned Saul is converted	Acts 7:54-60 Acts 9:1-19		Caligula, emperor
36	Paul's first visit to Jerusalem	Acts 9:26-28; Galatians 1:18-20	37-41 41-44	Herod Agrippa I, king of Judea
43 or 44	James the apostle executed	Acts 12:1&2	41-54	Claudius, emperor
46 or 47	Paul's second visit to Jerusalem	Acts 11:27-30; Galatians 2:1-10	45-47	Famine in Judea
47, 48	Paul's 1 st missionary journey	Acts 13-14		Claudius expels Jews from Rome
49	The Council of Jerusalem Paul begins 2 nd missionary journey	Acts 15:1-30 Acts 15:36 onwards	49	
50-52	Paul in Corinth	Acts 18:1-18a	50-c.93	Herod Agrippa II, ruler of Northern territory
52	Paul returns to Syrian Antioch via Ephesus & Caesarea Paul begins 3 rd missionary journey	Acts 18:18b-22 Acts 18:23 onwards	51-52	Gallio, proconsul of Achaia
52-55	Paul in Ephesus	Acts 19:1-20:1a	52-59	Felix, procurator of Judea
53-56	Paul in Macedonia	Acts 20:1b-2a	54-68	Nero, emperor
56-57	Paul spends winter in Corinth	Acts 20:2b-3a		
57	Paul's journey to Jerusalem via Macedonia, Troas & Miletus Paul arrested in Jerusalem Paul tried before Felix	Acts 20:3b-21:17 Acts 21:27-36 Acts 24:1-22		
57-59	Paul's imprisonment in Caesarea	Acts 23:23-24:27	59-61	Festus, procurator of Judea
59	Paul tried before Festus & Agrippa	Acts 25:6-26:32		
59-60	Paul's journey to Rome	Acts 27:1-28:16		
60-62	Paul's imprisonment in Rome	Acts 28:26 onwards		
62	Paul's last missionary journey	(Mentioned in I & II Timothy & Titus)		
64-68	Paul & Peter probably executed in Rome	-	64	Nero begins persecution of Christians
			70	Fall of Jerusalem, Temple destroyed
			69-79	Vespasian, emperor
c. 90-95	John writes Revelation & later dies on Patmos in his 80's	Revelation 1:9	81-96	Domitian, emperor

TIMELINE OF PAUL'S MINISTRY

The apostle Paul was probably born sometime around 1-10 AD in Tarsus in modern-day Turkey. He studied in Jerusalem under the renowned teacher Gamaliel. In around AD 33 he became a Christian and was called by Christ to be an apostle to the Gentiles. This was the beginning of a life-long ministry for God.

PREPARATION (AD 33-47)

33 AD, In Damascus – he began to teach people in the synagogues (Jewish meeting places) that Jesus is the Son of God, but after hearing that some Jews were plotting to kill him, he had to be smuggled out of the city (Acts 9:19-25).

33 AD, In Arabia – Paul then spent some time in Arabia, presumably thinking through his new faith and listening to God's calling on his life (Galatians 1:17). After this he returned to the city of Damascus.

36 AD, In Jerusalem – three years after his conversion, Paul went to Jerusalem to meet Peter. The Christians there were suspicious of him, not really believing that he had become Christian. On Christian called Barnabas believed him, and introduced him to Peter. Paul spent fifteen days in Jerusalem with Peter, and preached about Jesus. However, some of the Jews again plotted to kill him, so the Christians smuggled him out of the city to the coastal town of Caesarea from where he could take a ship to his home town of Tarsus (Acts 9:26-30, Galatians 1:18-24).

Dates uncertain, In Antioch – Paul spent some time in Tarsus, until Barnabas came there to ask him to join him in working with the church in the city of Antioch. The two men spent one year in Antioch teaching the Christians there (Acts 11:19-30), after which they took a gift from that church to the persecuted Christians in Judea.

MISSIONARY WORK (AD 47-64)

47-48 AD, First missionary journey (Acts 13-14) – The Holy Spirit told the Christians in Antioch that Paul and Barnabas should be sent on a missionary trip, and so Paul began the first of three missionary journeys. Paul visited many cities, and in each place he preached the message about Jesus and founded new churches.

49 AD, The Council in Jerusalem (Acts 15:1-35; Galatians 2:1-10) – This was the occasion when the apostles made the final decision about the Gentiles, agreeing that they could become Christians without being circumcised or converting to Judaism first. After the council, Paul returned to Antioch to teach the Christians.

49-52 AD, Second missionary journey (Acts 15:36-18:22) – This journey began and ended in Antioch.

During this trip Paul made his first visit into Europe. The good news about Jesus was continuing to spread.

52-57 AD, Third missionary journey (Acts 18:23-21:16) – This journey began in Antioch and ended with Paul travelling to Jerusalem in 57 AD.

57-59 AD, In prison in Jerusalem and Caesarea (Acts 21:17-26:32) – Paul was only in Jerusalem for a short time whenever he was arrested because some Jews made accusations against him. He appealed to his Roman citizenship and the Romans transferred him to their capital city of Caesarea to keep him safe from his Jewish enemies. Paul was tried before Felix (the Roman procurator), then imprisoned for two years. In 59 AD Festus replaced Felix as procurator, and Paul was brought out of prison and tried again before Festus and then before King Herod Agrippa. Paul used his right as a Roman citizen to demand that his case should be referred to the Emperor in Rome.

59-60 AD, The journey to Rome (Acts 27:1-28:10) – During this journey Paul's ship was wrecked and he spent some time on the Mediterranean island of Malta.

60-62 AD, In prison in Rome (Acts 28:11-31) – Paul spent two years in prison in Rome. During this time he continued to preach the good news about Jesus to everyone who visited him, and wrote several letters (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon).

62-c.64 AD, Paul's last missionary journey – Although Acts does not tell us about this journey after his release from prison, Paul refers to it in some of his later letters. The details of the journey are unclear.

c. 64 AD, In Rome – Paul's life ended in Rome where he was imprisoned again in around 64 AD. During this period in prison he wrote his three last letters (I and II Timothy and Titus). By then the Roman Empire had become very hostile to Christianity because it had gained so many followers. The Emperor Nero started the worst persecution the Christians had ever seen, and almost certainly had Paul executed in Rome.

BOOKS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

Book	Author & recipients	Date (AD - approx.)	Theme(s)
Gospels – records of the life and teachings of Jesus			
Matthew	Matthew the apostle, one of the 12 disciples	61-64	Jesus is the Son of David, the promised King
Mark	John Mark, an associate of the apostle Peter	58-60	Jesus is the promised Suffering Servant
Luke	Luke, a doctor and associate of the apostle Paul to Theophilus	61-64	Jesus is the perfect man who came to seek and save the lost
John	John the apostle, one of the 12 disciples	85	Jesus is the Son of God who gives eternal life to those who trust in Him
Historical Record			
Acts (of the apostles)	Luke, a doctor and associate of the apostle Paul to Theophilus	62-68	History of the spread of Christianity until around AD 60
Epistles – letters to individuals or churches			
Romans	Paul to the church in Rome	56-57	The good news about Jesus which brings Jews and Gentiles together in one church
I Corinthians	Paul to the church in Corinth	55-56	Correcting errors that were leading to division in the church
II Corinthians	Paul to the church in Corinth	57	Paul's authority as an apostle & Christian living
Galatians	Paul to the churches in Galatia	49 or 52	Salvation comes by God's grace not by observing the Old Testament Law
Ephesians	Paul to the church in Ephesus	60	The unsearchable riches of Christ shared with the church, His body
Philippians	Paul to the church in Philippi	60-61	Christian experience and the unity of the church
Colossians	Paul to the church in Colosse	60	Christ's pre-eminence and our completeness in Him
I Thessalonians	Paul to the church in Thessalonica	51	The future return of Christ
II Thessalonians	Paul to the church in Thessalonica	51-52	The coming Day of the Lord
I Timothy	Paul to Timothy	63-64	Advice to a younger Christian leader about how to carry out his ministry in the church
II Timothy	Paul to Timothy	64-65	Holding to the truth with boldness
Titus	Paul to Titus	64	Advice to a younger Christian leader about how to carry out his ministry in the church
Philemon	Paul to Philemon	60	Love exemplified by Paul and Philemon encouraged to forgive a runaway slave
Hebrews	Unknown to Jewish converts to Christianity	68-70	A letter to new Jewish converts to Christianity explaining why the New Covenant is much better than the Old
James	James, half brother of Jesus to Jewish converts	45-50	Practical Christian living – faith expressed through actions
I Peter	Peter the apostle to Jewish converts in modern day Turkey	64-65	Suffering and glory – the true grace of God
II Peter	Peter the apostle to unknown Christians	66	Living in light of the last days
I John	John the apostle to unknown Christians	85-90	Loving relationship with God brings eternal life – how to be sure of our salvation
II John	John the apostle to an unknown church	85-90	Christ's command – walking in the truth
III John	John the apostle to Gaius	85-90	Walking in truth
Jude	Jude, half brother of Jesus to unknown Christians	65	Authority and rebellion
Prophecy			
Revelation	John the apostle to seven churches in Asia	90-95	The only prophecy book in the New Testament. Contains many pictures about the end times. Its main message is that Jesus will return as the Conquering King

KEY DATES IN CHURCH HISTORY

Date	Event	Significance
64	Fire in Rome	This fire was blamed on Christians by Emperor Nero for political reasons. It marked the beginning of the persecution of Christians by the Roman Empire. Peter and Paul both probably died in this first persecution.
70	Titus destroys Jerusalem	This event forced the Christians in Jerusalem to flee, helping to cause Christianity to spread and to emerge from its Jewish roots.
156	Martyrdom of Polycarp	Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, is executed. This marked the death of probably the last living link with the apostles (Polycarp had studied under the apostle John).
312	Conversion of Constantine	The conversion (at least in name) of the Roman Emperor led to Christianity becoming legal and, eventually, the established religion of the Empire. This would lead to the end of persecution but also increasing pressure on the Church from secular leaders to compromise its principles.
325	Council of Nicea	In response to the false teachings of Arius this Council confirmed the full deity of Christ (that Jesus was fully God).
405	Vulgate completed	Jerome translated the Bible into Latin (his version is called the Vulgate). This made the Bible available to more people, but fixed Latin as the language of the Western Church for centuries to come.
432	Patrick brings the gospel to Ireland	The spread of the Christian message to Ireland led to the establishment of a vibrant missionary Celtic Church.
451	Council of Chalcedon	This Council confirmed that Christ was fully human as well as being fully divine.
590	Gregory I becomes Pope	Gregory achieved much to increase the authority of the Bishop of Rome over the Western Church, leading further towards the modern idea of the Pope.
664	Synod of Whitby	This meeting, at which Celtic Christians and representatives of the Pope debated what the date for Easter should be, extended the influence of Rome over Christians in the British Isles.
716	Boniface goes to Germany	Boniface, an Anglo-Saxon missionary from England helped to establish a strong church in Germany.
732	Battle of Tours	Charles Martel, King of the Franks, defeated the Islamic army, preventing Islam from spreading further across Europe.
863	Cyril & Methodius evangelise Slavs	These brothers brought Christianity to the Eastern European Slavs.
988	Conversion of Vladimir	The "conversion" of the Prince of Russia extended Christianity to his territories.
1054	The East-West Schism	The Eastern and Western churches had gradually been drifting apart for several reasons: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Language</i> (the East was Greek based but the West used mainly Latin). 2. <i>Style of worship</i> (e.g. type of bread used in Lord's Supper, date for Lent). 3. <i>Clergy</i> (Eastern pastors could have beards and marry, but in the West they had to be clean-shaven and could not marry). 4. <i>Theology</i> (the Western Church said that the Holy Spirit came from the Father and the Son, the East said He came only from the Father). In 1054 this split (or "schism") became permanent as the Pope and the leader of the Eastern Orthodox church excommunicated each other.
1095	First Crusade	This began a very bloody and dishonourable period as "Christians" fought against Muslims for control of Jerusalem. Many "Christian" kings were more concerned with power and popularity than with representing the true faith.
1173	Waldensians founded	This group, founded by Peter Waldo after he experienced a true conversion to faith in Christ, reacted against many of the false teachings that had entered the Roman Catholic Church. Waldo had the Bible translated into French and sought to practice a more biblical Christianity. His followers were condemned by the Roman Catholic Church because they existed outside its authority.
1215	Fourth Lateran Council	This Council established firmly the power of the Pope as Christ's representative on earth. It also declared that the Roman Catholic Church was the only true Church and that the bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ at communion, with the result that forgiveness for sins is received through the sacrifice of the mass offered by the priest.
1380	First English Bible translation	John Wycliffe oversaw this translation and sent out evangelists (Lollards) throughout England to call people to repentance and faith in Christ.
1415	John Hus burned at the stake	This man was executed in Prague by the Roman Catholic Church for preaching a more biblical Christianity and speaking against corruption in the priesthood.
1456	Gutenberg prints first Bible	This new technology meant that the Bible could be produced in greater numbers than before and could spread more widely.
1478	Spanish Inquisition established	This reaction against groups that did not teach official Roman Catholic Church teachings or did not accepting its authority led to the persecution of many heretics and true believers alike
1517	Martin Luther posts his 95	This act, intended to spark debate in the Roman Catholic Church in reaction to

	theses	many false teachings, eventually led to Luther's excommunication and the Protestant reformation. Luther's major legacy was a rediscovery of the Biblical truth that justification is received only by faith not through works.
1523	Zwingli leads Swiss reformation	Zwingli (in Zurich) insisted on teaching Biblical truth even when it differed from the official Church position.
1525	Anabaptist movement begins	This group emphasised the Biblical doctrine of believer's baptism and pushed for a separation of Church from the State. They believed in simplicity in church government and emphasised evangelism and Biblical teaching. Their aim was to return the Church to the New Testament ideal.
1534	Henry VIII breaks from Rome	This English King made this move for his own purpose (to allow him to divorce his wife), but the result was an English Church not under the direction of Rome.
1536	John Calvin publishes	Calvin led the reformed church in Geneva, Switzerland. His writings have had a huge influence over Protestant theology.
1540	Pope approves the Jesuits	The Society of Jesus founded by Ignatius Loyola, was at the forefront of the Counter-Reformation in the Roman Church, which led to removal of some of its worst excesses but also sought to wipe out Protestantism.
1545	Council of Trent begins	This council finally decided the Roman Catholic Church against the Biblical rediscoveries of Luther and others. At its heart was the belief that tradition is of equal authority with Scripture in deciding the teaching and practice of the Church. Those who protested against this decision were called "Protestants".
1559	John Knox returns to Scotland	Knox was influenced by Calvin, and was instrumental in bringing the Reformation to Scotland.
1572	St Bartholomew's Day Massacre	Thousands of Protestants were massacred in France, leading to greater Roman Catholic control over France.
1608-09	First Baptists	The Baptist movement began when John Smyth became convinced of the Biblical basis for believer's baptism.
1611	King James Bible Published	This translation into English became the accepted standard for over three centuries and made the Bible more accessible to the common people.
1648	Quaker's begin	The Society of Friends was founded by George Fox. They neglected many truths about the Church, but were very active in social reform
1727	Moravian Brethren launched	This group had its origins in modern day Czech Republic under John Hus's teaching. The group living in Herrnhut had a revival in 1727 and became a major missionary force.
1735	Great Awakening	A great evangelical revival in America, largely influenced by the teaching of Jonathan Edwards
1738	John Wesley's conversion	John and Charles Wesley preached to thousands across Britain, Ireland and America, leading to a huge evangelical revival. Some of Wesley's followers eventually broke from the Anglican church to become Methodists.
1793	William Carey goes to India	This marked the beginning of the modern missionary movement.
1807	Slavery abolished by Britain	This was a high point of the influence of evangelicals in society as the campaign led by William Wilberforce finally succeeded
1830	Plymouth Brethren begin	This group began in Dublin and England around the same time, and sought to return local church practice to a New Testament ideal. The movement generally has no clergy and emphasises evangelism and biblical teaching with simplicity of local church government and no denominational structures.
1854	Hudson Taylor goes to China	This initiated the missionary movement today known as OMF, which has had a huge impact on China and other East Asian countries
1854	CH Spurgeon in London	This man was a great preacher and had a huge impact on Victorian Britain.
1855	DL Moody converted	This preacher had a huge impact in the USA.
1865	Salvation Army founded	This group was founded by William Booth as a response to immense social needs in Victorian Britain. It has a healthy emphasis on social action and evangelism but has neglected New Testament teaching on the Church.
1906	Pentecostalism begins	This movement teaches that the baptism of the Holy Spirit must be received separately from conversion.
1948	World Council of Churches formed	This group is the spearhead of the Ecumenical movement, which seeks to bring together all Christians into one. Although the aim of Christian unity is a good one, the Ecumenical movement fails because it is not seeking unity in the truth. Although many Roman Catholics are true believers, the Roman Catholic Church remains far from Biblical truth on central beliefs and Bible-believing Christians cannot, therefore, recognise it as a true Christian church.
1949	Billy Graham's LA Crusade	This marked the beginning of the career of Billy Graham, the 20 th Century's most famous evangelist.
1960	Charismatic Movement begins	This movement, which spans many denominations, emphasises spiritual gifts and the work of the Holy Spirit, but sometimes tends to neglect Bible teaching.
1962	Second Vatican Council begins	This Council made superficial modernising changes in the Roman Catholic Church, including allowing its members to read the Bible and changing services into the local language instead of Latin, but did not change any of the core unbiblical teachings of that institution.

THE HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY IN CHINA

Christianity has been in China for nearly 1400 years, but it was quite slow to take root among Chinese people, largely because it was seen as a foreign religion. The main events in the history of Christianity in China were:

635 AD: Christians from Syria first bring the gospel to China

Aluoben, a Nestorian (Syrian) Christian, came to China to introduce Christianity. He was received with honour by the Emperor, who studied and approved Christianity, and gave permission for the Christian message to be spread. At least 50 churches were established in major cities. The Nestorians tried to share Christianity without trying to change the culture of Chinese converts. However, most of the converts to Christianity were foreigners from Persia and Central Asia rather than ethnic Chinese, and most of the ethnically Chinese converts were poor and uneducated.

698 AD: Buddhist persecution of Christians begins

Buddhists, feeling threatened by the spread of Christianity, began to persecute the Christians.

845 AD: Official policy turns against Christianity

The Emperor, influenced by Daoists, issued a decree against all foreign religions, including Buddhism, Islam and Christianity. He was afraid that Chinese customs would be corrupted or lost. Around the same time, Central Asia came under control of Muslim rulers, and the line of communication between Christians in China and Christians in the West was cut off. By the 10th Century, the Nestorian churches in China had disappeared.

13th Century: Christianity returns to China

Under the Yuan dynasty Christianity returned to China, brought by both Nestorian and European missionaries. The Yuan emperors allowed freedom for all religions. In 1266 when Marco Polo returned to Europe from China he carried with him a request from Kublai Khan that 100 educated Christians be sent to China to teach the people about Christianity. Unfortunately this request was not answered immediately.

1610: The Church in China is small but well established

By this stage there were around 2000 Christians in China, including a number of Chinese scholars.

1692: Christianity gains official status but fails to spread effectively

Emperor Kang Xi issued an edict establishing the legal status of Christianity in China. Unfortunately, some divisions among Christians in China made the spread of Christianity more difficult. Qian Long, Kang Xi's successor, made some laws against Christianity and Christian missionaries were put out of the country.

19th Century: European Protestant missionaries enter China

British, German and American missionaries went to Singapore and translated the Bible into Chinese. Some overseas Chinese became Christians and returned to China to share the message about Jesus. The first Protestant missionary, Robert Morrison (from Scotland) entered China in 1807. He was not very successful at seeing people converted, but he did translate the Bible into a new Chinese version. After the Nanjing Treaty of 1842, foreign missionaries were allowed into China, based in Hong Kong and the Treaty Ports. One of the most significant was James Hudson Taylor, who entered China in 1854. He served there until his death 51 years later and personally baptised around 50,000 Chinese as well as bringing over 800 missionaries to the country under the China Inland Mission, which he founded. In 1861 the Treaty of Beijing allowed missionaries to own land and build churches in China.

1900: The Church in China is well established but still seen as foreign by many Chinese

There were over 100,000 Christians in China, and over 2000 foreign missionaries and 1600 Chinese Christian workers. The Boxer Uprising in 1901 reacted against all foreigners in China, and many thousands of Chinese Christians and 188 Western missionaries and children were killed. Many Chinese still saw Christianity as a foreign religion.

20th Century: The Church in China becomes truly Chinese

During the early 20th Century missionaries worked very hard to show that people could be culturally Chinese but also Christian. In the 1920s there was great opposition to Christianity led by the Anti-Christian Confederation, and many missionaries had to flee China. Again during World War II many missionaries had to leave China, but they returned in 1945. Many intellectuals in Chinese universities became Christians at this time. The leaders of the Chinese Church were increasingly Chinese people rather than Western missionaries. In 1949, after Chairman Mao's victory, all Western missionaries were expelled from China. However, under Communism the number of Christians has continued to grow, even in the face of some opposition. Still, Christianity is stronger in rural areas than in the cities (90% of Christians live in rural areas) and among uneducated villagers than scholars.

21st Century: New challenges and new opportunities

It is difficult to be accurate about the number of Christians in China today. Official records of the State-registered churches suggest 21 million members. The Public Security Bureau recently admits privately that there are at least 25 million, but the best estimates suggest there may be as many as 70-100 million! The number of Christians grew most during the 1980s when the Church faced most opposition. The biggest needs for the Christians in China today are for good teaching from the Bible and well-trained leaders. At the moment it is difficult to train Christian leaders in China. However, many Chinese young people are now coming to Western countries to study at University, and this is providing new opportunities for them to hear the Christian message and even to be trained how to teach the Bible to others when they return to China. There is a new vision in China for Chinese Christians becoming missionaries and taking the gospel to the Muslim nations of Central Asia and the Middle East. It is an exciting time for Chinese Christians.