

LESSON IV

Politics, Religion, Cultural, and Customs

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The Way, The Truth, and The Life Christian Center, Inc.

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Lesson (Supplemental) Material:
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Upcoming Classes

November 20 –
Figures of Speech /
Biblical Genres /
Bible Gaps (Cultural, Geographical, Language) / Attributes of God

December 4 – Survey of the Bible

December 18 – How to Apply What We Read / How to Use Reference Material



God's Ideal King
Pastor Maurice Tuff



Goals, Objectives, Outcomes

1. You will be able to read the Bible with understanding.
2. You will understand that the biblical text can never mean what it never meant.
3. You will understand that every biblical account had an original audience, which in most cases was a different audience from the one reading the text.
4. You will understand that every account, event, occurrence, or situation has a context that must be understood before you can understand what you are reading.

The goal of this course is to teach you how to fish.



You will know that God used different prophets to warn the Israelites to stop sinning and the consequences should they choose to continue following after other Gods.

You will learn how to prepare lessons or sermons based on the original meaning and context and draw from it what is applicable to us today.



Introduction

For example, the books of Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, Jeremiah, Esther, Ezekiel, Haggai, and Malachi, also portions of 2 Kings, 2 Chronicles, and Psalm 137 are centered around the Babylonian exile. Should you choose to read those books, you will know that the backdrop has something to do with the exile.

For example, Psalms 137—it's crystal clear that it's about the exile:

***137** By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion.*

***2** We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof.*

***3** For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion.*

***4** How shall we sing the LORD's song in a strange land?*



Preaching Exercise
Matthew 19:14



Title: Child Suffrage



“Suffer the little children”

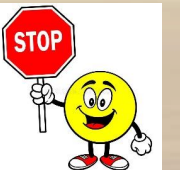
Children are suffering from many different things.



Point #2: Forbid them not...



Conclusion:



Evaluation: Answers will come later.



Let's Review



Let's review Lesson I: How We Got the Bible

- God gave Moses the Ten Commandments on stone tablets, the first writing pad. The biblical text went from stone to phone as we have it today.
- The Ten Commandments were the foundation of the Old Testament—the first five books of the Bible we know today as the Pentateuch or TORAH.



Lesson 2: Why so many versions?

- So that the gospel could go into all the world.
- The Israelites were scattered by the Assyrian empire in 721 B.C.
- The kingdom of Judah were exiled beginning in 605 B.C.



- The original Hebrew language was overshadowed by Aramaic, the language of the Babylonians.
- Alexander the Great came along and conquered many nations, which included Judah.
- Alexander the Great enforced Greek culture throughout his empire.



During this time, an Egyptian king, Ptolemy Philadelphus, who reigned from 285-246 B.C. had the Bible translated into Greek for his library because he couldn't read Hebrew.

This translation became known as the SEPTUAGINT, which means LXX (seventy) because it was translated by seventy-two translators—six from each Israelite tribe.



- Alexander died, leaving no heir.
- His kingdom was divided: Ptolemies in Egypt, Seleucids in Asia, and Antigonid in Macedonia.
- In 221 B.C., the Seleucid king Antiochus III invaded Palestine and failed. In 201 B.C.E. he invaded it again and quickly conquered it.
- Favoring polytheism, Antiochus III permitted the Jews to practice their own religion.



- After his death, his son Antiochus IV Epiphanes inherited the throne and forced Greek (Hellenization) culture on the Jews to a greater degree than what Alexander the Great had done. It has been said that Antiochus Epiphanes IV put the "Hell" in Hellenization (Which means Greek).
- This takeover replaced worship of Yahweh with Zeus, and much, much more.
- The Jerusalem temple was no longer a sacred place to worship.



In summary:

Hebrew ceased to be a spoken language as early as the exilic or post-exilic period (cf. Neh 13.24), and Aramaic became the common language of the Jewish people. With the rise of Alexander the Great and the Greek empire, the Jews in the diaspora were Hellenized, and for some Jews, especially those living in Ptolemaic Egypt, Greek became the primary language. Thus, it became necessary for the Scriptures to be translated into Greek, and from that point on, work on the part of faithful Christians continued to translate as needed.



God's people are now scattered everywhere and needed a Bible in their own language and culture.



Lesson III. The Silent Years / The Intertestamental Period

God spoke through prophets to warn Israel and Judah of the consequences of their sin, mainly idolatry.

After Moses' ministry, the prophets began with Samuel and ended with Malachi. The prophets are men like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, etc. The last prophet God spoke through was Malachi, which was around 420 to 400 B.C.



When God spoke again, it was through John the Baptist as God had promised in the Book of Malachi—that Elijah was to come. Jesus confirms this in Matthew 17:12:

But I say unto you, That Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed.

He's speaking of John the Baptist.



References to the 400 “Silent Years” simply means that God ceased to speak through prophets in the manner he had done during the establishment, development, and exile of the Nations of Israel and Judah.



“Silent Years” highlights

- Epiphanes desecrated the Temple.
- Stole from the Temple everything of value.
- Replaced worship of God with Zeus.
- The Jews revolted (The Maccabees). They fought and fought and won.
- They restored temple worship.
- To commemorate this event, they had a dedication—it came to be known as Hanukkah.



Note John 10:22-23 writes about Jesus attending a celebration of Hannukah.

22 At that time the Feast of the Dedication took place at Jerusalem;

23 it was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple in the portico of Solomon.



- After the Maccabean revolt, the kingdom lasted until 110 to 63 BCE.
- In 63 B.C. the Roman general Pompey captured Jerusalem.
- The Romans allowed them to practice their own religion, but under a puppet king, Herod the Great.



To end up with kings such as Antiochus Epiphanes and Herod the Great was a far cry from what God required.



Lesson IV

Politics, Religion, Cultural, and Customs



III. New Testament Sects / Religious Groups / Political System

A. Sects Development

1. Pharisees

2. Sadducees

B. Hebrew Culture and Customs



Sects Development

The Hasmonean (The Maccabees) line ruled Judea and much of Palestine from the triumph of Judas against the Seleucids in 160 BC until the accession of Herod the Great in 37 BC.



POLITICS:

Under Roman governance and the assimilation into Greek culture, the priests were no longer priests of God. And the kings were no longer kings of God.



1. Anyone could be priest—the office could be bought.
2. Anyone could be king—depending on who they rubbed elbows with.
3. Self appointed law guardians made it their business to add to the laws to make sure people kept them.



The Pharisees

The name Pharisees mean "separated." They identified with the common people and held sway over all the communities. Yet the Pharisees despised the "common people" who did not know or keep the Law.



**Jesus never condemned their work. He condemned their
hypocrisy.**



Example: Matthew 23:4

NIV *They tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them.*



Laws of Purity and Tithing.

This was the essence of Pharisaism. They developed elaborate laws on purity. For example, they instructed the way hands were to be washed, how they were to be held if they were dirty, how they were to be rubbed, and finally, if the water did not extend to the wrist, the hands were not considered washed!



Example:

(Matthew 15:2)

*Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders?
for they wash not their hands when they eat bread.*

*Jesus called them hypocrites. Why? Because this was a
law they made up themselves; it was not in the Law of
Moses.*



Pharisees developed elaborate interpretations and teachings, including fixed times for prayer. A basic trait of the Pharisee was to recite the Shema in the morning and in the evening” Followed by reciting the “Eighteen Benedictions.” They also loved to pray in public places—at street corners or at the entrance of the synagogue to be seen as pious people (Matt. - 6:5; Luke 18:9-14)



Sadducees

The Sadducees were the party of high priests, aristocratic families, and merchants—the wealthier elements of the population. They were devout Hellenists and welcomed Roman rule.



While their rivals, the Pharisees, claimed the authority of piety and learning, the Sadducees claimed that of birth and social and economic position. They were self-appointed to take care of the temple.



Speaking of the temple, keep in mind that the temple at this time had a different function from the first temple. Originally, the Temple was the place where they could go to pray and be in the presence of the Lord.

There were several priests and kings in and out who cared nothing for Israel's God. So the Sadducees made it their business to take care of the temple. But the temple now has been contaminated by Greek influence.



Where did Rome come from?





721 BC

Israel, northern kingdom, taken into captivity by Assyria, Judah remains in the land alone.

Hoshea
(2 Kings 15:30;
17:1–6)



606 BC

First captives taken by Babylon. DANIEL predicts four world empires (Dan 2). He focuses on the final empire as being the time of the end of the Jewish nation and the temple (Dan 7; 9:24-27). He details the second and third empires (Dan 8 and 11:1-35) and again talks of the fourth in Daniel 11:36-12:13.

Daniel 2
Daniel 7;
Daniel 9:24-27
Daniel 8
Daniel 11:1-35
Daniel 11:36 –
12:13



586 BC

Jerusalem and the temple falls to
Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon.

Read about Kings Manasseh and
Zedekiah.

2Kgs 25
Jer 52



539 BC

Babylon is taken over by the Medes and Persians. Daniel confesses the sins of the nation and pleads with God to keep His promise of the captivity ending. Cyrus, the Persian king who conquered Babylon, issued a decree that the nations conquered by Babylon could return to their homeland (II Chron 36:22- 23; Ezra 1:1-4). 50,000 Jews return under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Jeshua. The Temple foundation is laid, but work ceased after opposition from Samaritans (Ezra 1-4)

2Kgs 25
Jer 52



520 BC

HAGGAI AND ZECHARIAH prophesy and under their encouragement the Jews start building again (Ezra 5-6; Hag 1:4; Zech 1:16). Both prophets predict a time when Jerusalem will be built without walls and cannot be measured (Hag 2:6-7; Zech 2:1-13). It will be during the time of Messiah the Branch (Zech 3:8-10; 6:12-13; 9:9-10; 12:10; 13:1).

Ezra 5-6
Hag 1:4
Zech 1:16



468 BC

The book of ESTHER gives an account of the Jews that are still in Persia.

458 BC

EZRA leads another group to Jerusalem and reforms the true worship and teaches the Law of Moses.

Ezra 7:10



443 BC

NEHEMIAH comes to Jerusalem from Persia and rebuilds the walls of the city. MALACHI prophesied during the days of Ezra and Nehemiah. He condemns the Jews for making the same mistakes as their fathers had made and predicts the coming of John the Baptist (Mal 3:1; 4:5-6). This was the last book written in the Old Testament.

Mal 3:1

Mal 4:5-6



334 BC

Alexander the Great – at the age of 19 began to conquer the world. He conquered all of the Mediterranean and died in India at the age of 33. His conquest was predicted 300 years before in Daniel 8.

Daniel 8



198 BC	Greek Syrians take control of Israel.	
168 BC	Defiling of temple by Antiochus Epiphanes (predicted in the Book of Daniel).	Dan 8:9-14 Dan 21-26
163 BC	Maccabean revolt and Jewish independence for 100 years	



63 BC	In 63 BC. Pompey intervened in the disputed Hasmonean succession and occupied Jerusalem. He himself entering the temple, profaning the Holy of Holies with his presence. Afterward, he declared – to the surprise of the pagan world – that there was nothing there. Naturally, there was no graven image of Yahweh.	
37-4 BC	Herod the Great appointed king by Julius Caesar.	
4 BC	The Birth of Jesus	Matthew 2

At the opening of the New Testament, Judea and Galilee were under the rule of Herod the Great as parts of a single kingdom. Herod was a Roman citizen and was under the control of the emperor, Augustus Caesar. So long as Herod kept order in his kingdom, remained loyal to Rome, and provided a buffer against enemy states, he remained in control of his client state.



But after Herod's death, the kingdom of Judea was divided by Rome into three tetrarchies ruled by three of Herod's sons—Archelaus (over Judea), Herod Antipas (over Galilee and Perea), and Philip (over the northern area east of the Jordan).



In the north, Herod Antipas remained in control of the Galilee during the entire lifetime of Jesus; but in the south, not long after taking power over Judea, Archelaus was removed by Augustus because of complaints about his rule in AD 6.

The fear expressed by Caiaphas and the Jewish leaders concerning the trial of Jesus—that the Romans would remove them from their positions of power and take away their “place” if they did not do something about Jesus (John 11:48)—was realistic. They chose to kill Jesus rather than lose their jobs.





Where did Rome come from?
Roman Rule



Soon Judea came under the full control of Rome as an imperial province. Pontius Pilate is one example of a governor. His title was prefect sent to Judea in A.D. 26.

While Judea was not as large as many other Roman provinces, it was territorially crucial enough to justify specific Roman attention. Pilate mostly allowed the Jewish leaders to govern their own people.



As a general rule, the Romans allowed local laws and customs to remain in place after they had conquered a people. Roman law still always ruled the day, but it allowed a good deal of latitude regarding the cultural and religious norms of local individual peoples living in regions far enough away from Rome. Jews, for example, were at first exempt from the requirement to worship Roman deities so that they could keep their covenant to worship only the God of Israel.



Summary:

Politically, Jesus was born under Roman rule. His life was threatened by the puppet king Herod the Great, who was an Idumean, a descendent of Esau, a Jew by marriage.

We know that God used the term “Hate” when he referred to an Idumean, not in the sense that he hated them as persons, but as His choice. He chose Jacob. “Remember, Esau sold his birthright.”



**The Impact of
Cultural Influences
in the New Testament**



B. Hebrew Culture and Customs

C. New Testament Culture and Customs



Culture:

The term “Hellenization” was coined to denote the spread of Greek language, culture, and population into the former Persian empire after Alexander’s conquest.



Culture:

However, before we blame the entire cultural shift on Hellenism, we have to also consider the acculturation of Babylon.

Fifty-thousand Jews returned to Jerusalem from Babylon and the majority of them were born in Babylon. They were a different people and Jerusalem did not mean the same to them as it did to their ancestors.



Culture:

Life for the small population that remained in Jerusalem after the captivity were severely influenced by neighboring pagans to a damaging degree according to Ezra:

Ezra confessed the sins of the returned Jewish exiles when he learned many of them had intermarried with pagan peoples and were presumably practicing their abominations (Ezra 9).



Culture:

10 And Ezra the priest stood up, and said unto them, Ye have transgressed, and have taken strange wives, to increase the trespass of Israel.

11 Now therefore make confession unto the LORD God of your fathers, and do his pleasure: and separate yourselves from the people of the land, and from the strange wives.

12 Then all the congregation answered and said with a loud voice, As thou hast said, so must we do.



Culture:

Greek influence

Babylonian influence

Canaan influence



Culture:

We can't forget Canaan. As we read the Old Testament, you will notice how often God told them not to marry people outside of the covenant. God told them not to worship other gods. From day 1, they were disobedient—2000 years before Jesus' day.



Culture:

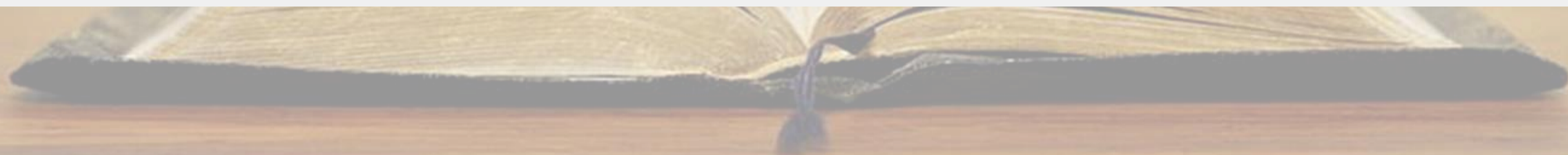
As you begin to read the New Testament, you need to remember this: Jesus was born into the Graco-Roman culture. He would have learned the Law from the Scribes and Pharisees. He would have grown up speaking Aramaic and Greek. We do know that he spoke some Aramaic, because he used it for some words.

Since Greek was the common language, it is debatable that he spoke Latin, because there would be no need too.



Aramaic Words in the New Testament

“empty headed”	ράκά	Matt 5:22
“zealot” (Aram. <i>kan’an</i>)	Καναναῖος	Matt 10:4; Mark 3:18.
“Save now” (Aram. <i>Hosanna</i>)	ὠσαννὰ	Matt 21:9 (2x), 15; Mark 11:9; John 12:13
“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”	ελωι ελωι λεμα σαβαχθاني	Mark 15:34
“...why have you forsaken me?”	λεμα σαβαχθاني	Matt 27:46
“Little girl, rise.”	ταλιθα κουμ	Mark 5:41. The parallel in Matt 9:24 and Luke 8:54 omit this phrase.
“Be opened”	εφφαθα	Mark 7:32
“Rabbi” (Aram. <i>rabbouni</i>)	ράββουνί	Mark 10:51; John 20:16
“Father/Dad” (Aram. <i>abba</i>)	αββα	Mark 14:36; Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6



Culture:

I also want to remind you of Oral Tradition. The New Testament writings did not take place until after Jesus' death. If he died around A.D. 30, at the age of 33, or thereabouts, the Gospels were not written until 40 years later. Stories were told and passed down, but when the story tellers began to die out, they saw the need to put the traditions in writing.



Culture:

The New Testament writings confirms that all Hebrew cultural values were not lost.

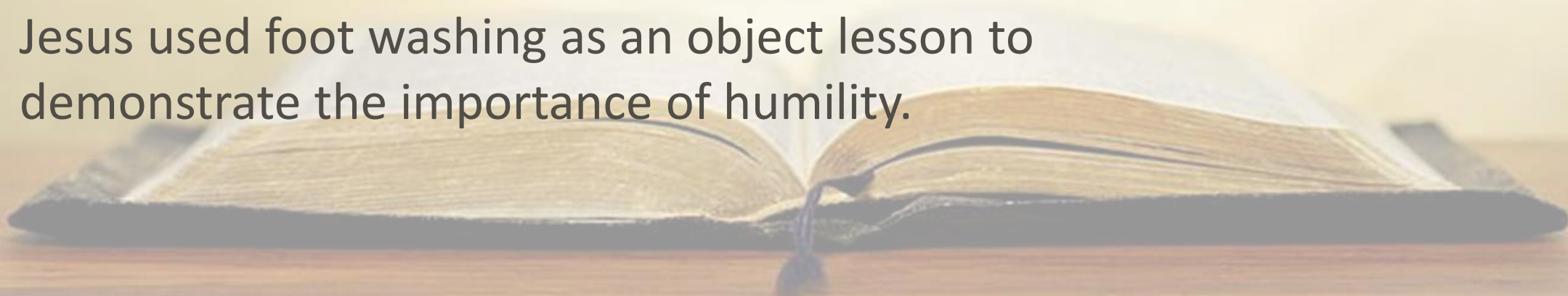
One example is foot-washing.



Culture:

Foot washing was a common practice in Jesus's day. Roads were just dirt, and people would have worn sandals of rope and leather. Combine the sweat-inducing heat with nearly bare feet, and dusty roads, and you can imagine the result. When you entered someone's home, you came with filthy, sweaty feet, and it was common courtesy to have a servant wash them when you entered the home.

Jesus used foot washing as an object lesson to demonstrate the importance of humility.



“No,” said Peter, “you shall never wash my feet.” Jesus answered, “Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.” “Then, Lord,” Simon Peter replied, “not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!” Jesus answered, “Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you.” John 13.8–10).



Culture:

Houses:

Jesus washed the disciples' feet in an upper room.



Culture:

The houses mentioned in Bible times were quite different than what we are used to seeing in America. Most had one room, but some had multiple rooms. For the average person, houses were not built with the intention of remaining inside for many hours at a time throughout each day. Instead, people “lived” outside (working, playing, and sometimes eating), while the house was largely what they used for storage and where they went to sleep.



The roof of the houses were used for storage and to rest especially in the summer mornings and evenings. Prior to the prophet Samuel anointing Saul as the first king of Israel, you may recall how Saul had been resting “on the top of the house...about the dawning of the day” (1 Samuel 9:26).

And they arose early: and it came to pass about the spring of the day, that Samuel called Saul to the top of the house, saying, Up, that I may send thee away. And Saul arose, and they went out both of them, he and Samuel, abroad.



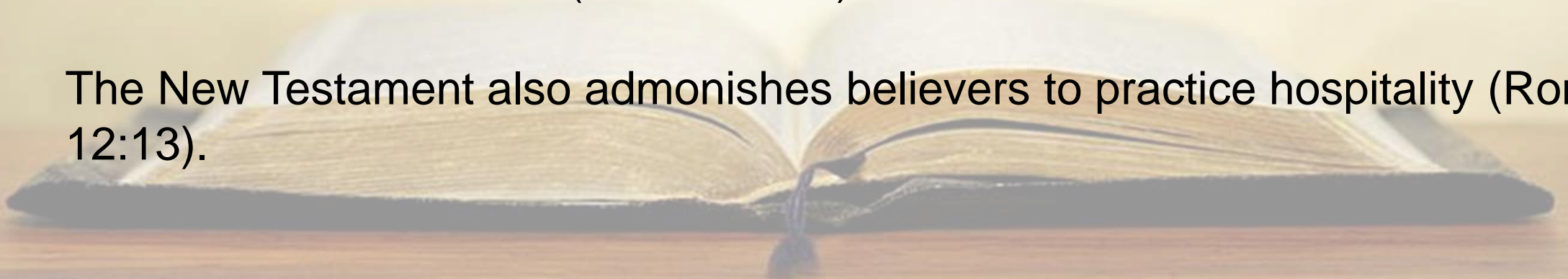
HOSPITALITY

Obligation

Both Old and New Testaments vividly reflect hospitality as a sacred duty. Offering a stranger a meal was more than providing food for him; it was a commitment to the stranger's safety and well-being.

But a major reason for showing hospitality was the belief that visitors had been sent by God. Abraham reflected this sense of hospitality by providing a lavish meal for his heavenly visitors (Gen.18:1-8). Lot went to wrongful lengths to protect his angelic visitors when he offered his daughters to the debased men at Sodom (Gen.19:1-11).

The New Testament also admonishes believers to practice hospitality (Rom. 12:13).



Taxation

Like all other peoples, the Jews paid various taxes to the Romans and to local rulers. The most famous New Testament instance is the tax mentioned in Luke 2:1: “There went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed.” This could refer to the tax initiated by Quirinius and mentioned by Josephus (*Ant* 18.1.1:2–3), but such censuses were a common way to assess the tax responsibility of any area (see chapters 9 and 13 herein). Jews could expect to pay to the Romans an annual head tax for each adult male, property taxes, sales taxes, inheritance taxes, and transit tolls. Taken together, Roman imperial, regional, and local taxes, in addition to the annual temple tax and tithing requirements, could total as high as 50 percent of all production in Judea.



Rending of Garments

This was a Jewish custom practiced for thousands of years and can be found in both the Old and New Testaments. The tearing of garments was an expression of grief for someone who died.

- Jacob tore his garment when he saw the bloody garment of Joseph, thinking he had been killed by a wild animal (Genesis 37:33-34).
- David and his men tore their garments at the news that Saul and Jonathan had been killed in battle (2 Samuel 1:11-12).
- Job tore his garment when he received news that his ten children had all died at once (Job 11:18-20). His closest friends tore their garments when they saw Job's physical suffering (Job 2:12).



Conclusion:

I want to leave you with this: The New Testament is literature, books written by the decision of Christian leaders who desired to retain the true essence of the ministry of Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

As we read it, we must read through the lenses of Hebrew and Greek culture. Otherwise, we leave the door open to preach and teach “self” rather than the word of God.

