

# LD – 5.11 – Christian Anthropology – Paganism, Pantheism, Polytheism and Monotheism

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## A. INTRODUCTION

**Culture is not a static entity; it is dynamic and ever changing. Every culture has common elements: a world view, an identity and a life cycle. These elements develop and adapt over time and taken together, they make a culture unique and identifiable. Anthropologists study the development and evolution of people-groups and their culture through the evidence they have left behind. This evidence includes the historical written record and the durable material artifacts. Culture diffusion occurs over time as groups collaborate and cooperate with other known groups. Wikipedia the Online Encyclopedia makes the following general observations about Culture – (with some minor editing by AD for clarity):**

1. Culture is an umbrella term which encompasses the social behavior and norms found in human societies, as well as the knowledge, beliefs, arts, laws, customs, capabilities, and habits of the individuals in these groups. Humans acquire their culture through the learning processes of enculturation and socialization, which is shown by the diversity of cultures across social groups through history.
2. A cultural norm codifies acceptable conduct in society; it serves as guideline for behavior, dress, language, and demeanor in a situation, which serves as a template for expectations in a social group. [Some groups have been known for their ridged demands for conformity] accepting only a uniform or monoculture in a social group can bear risks. Just as a single species can wither in the face of environmental change, societies can wither for lack of functional responses to change. Thus, in military culture, valor is counted an ideal behavior for an individual; as are duty, honor, and loyalty to the social group are counted as virtues, or functional responses in the continuum of conflict. In the practice of religion, analogous virtues can be identified in a social group.
3. Culture is considered a central concept in anthropology, encompassing the range of phenomena that are transmitted through social learning in human societies. Cultural universals are found in all human societies; these include expressive forms like art, music, dance, ritual, religion, and technologies [including] tool usage, food and cooking, types of shelter, pottery, weaponry and clothing. The concept of *material culture* covers the physical expressions of culture, such as technology, architecture and art, whereas the *immaterial aspects* of culture such as principles of social organization (including practices of political organization and social institutions), mythology, religion and philosophy, literature (both written and oral), and science comprise the intangible cultural heritage of a society.
4. Culture is the set of customs, traditions, and values of a society or community, such as an ethnic group or nation. Culture is the set of knowledge acquired and passed on over time. In this sense, multiculturalism values the peaceful coexistence and mutual respect between different cultures inhabiting the same planet. Sometimes "culture" is also used to describe specific practices within a subgroup of a society, a subculture (e.g., a counterculture). Within cultural anthropology, the ideology and analytical stance of cultural relativism holds that cultures cannot easily be objectively ranked or evaluated because any evaluation is necessarily situated within the value system of a given culture.

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5. **“Ethnocentricity” is a term used to express this point of view or cultural identity. It means that every culture to one degree or another views the world and others through the lens of their own cultural values, what they know to be “right” which creates integration within the culture but makes objective evaluation by those outside the culture challenging. Furthermore, when a culture is viable and thriving, all these various cultural components are effectively aligned and integrated. When a culture is dynamic, it is also incorporating new elements at a manageable rate which brings renewed vigor and opportunities. When the rate of change exceeds the capacity for effective integration and a new normative environment fails to emerge, conflict and even chaos result. Failure to properly digest change is not good, nor is change merely for change’s sake. When compelling forces for change and the internal repression of change occurs, conflict usually results. History has demonstrated that organizations and cultures that manage and integrate change well clearly have an advantage.**
6. **There are three components that are fundamental for the survival of the culture. These are 1) Ideology-Religion; 2) Socio-Political Organization; and 3) Technology-Science. Ideology-Religion is critical for establishing and passing on cultural identity. In this article we will explore how different Ideology-Religion operates within culture and forms their world view.**

### **B. PAGANISM, PANTHEISM, AND POLYTHEISM:**

**Paganism, Pantheism and Polytheism make up the majority of the religious expressions of the world and differ markedly from Monotheism. We’ll first look on how these three religious systems are defined.**

1. **Paganism Defined – from an article in Encyclopedia Britannica Online:** The religious environment of the Gentile [Greco-Roman] mission was a tolerant, syncretistic blend of many cults and myths. Paganism was concerned with success, and the gods were believed to give victory in war, good harvests, success in love and marriage, and sons and daughters. Defeat, famine, civil disorder, and infertility were recognized as signs of cultic pollution and disfavor. People looked to religion for help in mastering the forces of nature rather than to achieve moral improvement. Individual gods cared either for specific human needs or for specific places and groups. [These gods were locally affiliated; therefore, it was believed that when people moved into or through a region, that they pay homage to the local god.] The transcendent God of Biblical religion was, therefore, very different from the numerous gods of limited power and local significance. In Asia Minor Paul and his coworker Barnabas were taken to be gods in mortal form because of their [ability to perform] miracles. To offer sacrifice on an altar [of a local god] seemed a natural expression of gratitude to any dead, or even living, benefactor. Popular enthusiasm could bestow divine honors on such heroes as dead pugilists and athletes. In the Roman Empire it seemed natural to offer sacrifice and burn incense to the divine emperor as a symbol of loyalty, much like standing for a national anthem today.
2. **Pantheism Defined – from an article in Encyclopedia Britannica Online:** The doctrine that the universe conceived of as a whole is God and, conversely, that there is no God but the combined substance, forces, and laws that are manifested in the existing universe. The cognate doctrine of pantheism asserts that

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God includes the universe as a part though not the whole of his being. Both “pantheism” and “panentheism” are terms of recent origin, coined to describe certain views of the relationship between God and the world that are different from that of traditional theism [the view that all limited or finite things are dependent in some way on one supreme or ultimate reality of which one may also speak in personal terms.] As reflected in the prefix “pan-” (Greek *pas*, meaning “all”), both of the terms stress the all-embracing inclusiveness of God, as compared with his separateness as emphasized in many versions of theism. On the other hand, pantheism and panentheism, since they stress the theme of immanence—i.e., of the indwelling presence of God [who inhabits plants, animals, creation itself, and of course by extension humanity]—are themselves versions of theism conceived in its broadest meaning. Pantheism stresses the identity between God and the world, whereas Panentheism (Greek *en*, “in”) that the world is included in God, but that God is more than the world.

- 3. Polytheism Defined – from an article in Encyclopedia Britannica Online:** The belief in many gods. Polytheism characterizes virtually all religions other than Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, which share a common tradition of monotheism [the belief in one God]. Sometimes above the many gods a polytheistic religion will have a [most powerful god or] supreme creator and focus of devotion. In certain phases of Hinduism (there is also the tendency to identify the many gods as so many aspects of the Supreme Being); sometimes the gods are considered as less important than some higher goal, state, or savior, as in Buddhism; sometimes one god will prove more dominant than the others without attaining overall supremacy, as Zeus in Greek religion. Typically, polytheistic cultures include belief in many demonic and ghostly forces in addition to the gods, with some supernatural beings being malevolent; even in monotheistic religions there can be belief in many demons, as in New Testament Christianity.
- C. MYTH, MAGIC AND RITUAL – are a primary means that a culture’s ideology-religion employ to cope with the supernatural. In our individual and corporate life, we have to contend not only with normal everyday change, but also with cataclysmic change and the myriad levels of unpredictability in life’s conditions and events. Sometimes things go well, sometimes they don’t; sometimes the plan works, sometimes it fails. Sometimes good things happen to bad people; sometime bad things happen to good people. Illness and health are additional variables to cope with especially in early cultures who had no knowledge of modern viral-bacterial impacts on the natural world. If the head of a family got sick or died, the family or community suffered. Many things can happen when the vulnerabilities of life meet the complexities of random chance and change. The complexity of an agrarian society dependent upon regular rains for crops was another major problem. Pagan gods were thought to be in control of the fickle life events of rain, health, prosperity, and happiness. Finding a way to keep these gods attentive and responsible for everyday needs, to an individual or community was accepted as prudent thing to do. In the ancient Middle East before Judaism, Ba’al was the god of rain and his consort Asherah was the goddess of fertility and both were typically worshipped. However, Pagan gods were known to be fickle and capricious, as well as violent and petty. Homer’s *Iliad and the Odyssey* accurately captures these**

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aspects of the Pagan gods which was prevalent in the Ancient Near East. It was widely believed that these gods needed to be satisfied with the right sacrifice or magic spell; that they could be influenced and possibly controlled as an asset to an individual or the community. Virtually everyone in the Ancient world believed in the supernatural, and influencing this spiritual world of mysticism was where myth, magic and ritual held sway. Diviners and mystics were the spiritually sensitive individuals who were connected to the supernatural world and who could help people usually for a fee. This was the world where witches and witch doctors, priests and priestesses, herbalists and apothecaries held influence and authority mediating between the natural and the supernatural.

### 1. Myth Defined – from Encyclopedia Britannica Online with minor editing by AD for clarity:

Myth is a symbolic narrative, usually of unknown origin and at least partly traditional, that ostensibly relates [primeval pre-historical] events and that are especially associated with religious belief. It is distinguished from symbolic behavior (cult, ritual) and symbolic places or [ceremonial] objects (temples, icons). Myths are specific accounts of gods or superhuman beings involved in extraordinary events or circumstances in a time that is unspecified, but which is understood as existing apart from ordinary human experience. The term *mythology* denotes both the study of a particular myth and the body of myths belonging to a particular religious genre and tradition.

There is typically no attempt to justify mythic narratives or even to render them plausible. Every myth presents itself as an authoritative account, no matter how much the narrated events are at variance with natural law or ordinary experience. By extension from this primary supernatural meaning, the word *myth* may also be used more loosely to refer to an ideological belief when that belief is the object of a quasi-religious philosophy or faith. An example would be the Marxist eschatological myth of the withering away of the state.

While the outline of myths from a past period or from a society other than one's own can usually be seen quite clearly, to recognize the myths that are dominant in one's own time and society is more difficult. This is hardly surprising, because a myth has its validity not by proving itself but by presenting itself. In this sense the validity or authority of a myth "goes without saying," and the myth can be outlined in detail only when its authority is no longer unquestioned but has been rejected or overcome in some manner by another, more comprehensive myth.

The word *myth* derives from the Greek *mythos*, which has a range of meanings from "word," through "saying and story," to "fiction." Myths typically occur in some distant [primordial] pre-historical past. The unquestioned validity of *mythos* can be contrasted with *logos*, where the word whose validity or truth can be argued and demonstrated. Because myths narrate fantastic events with no attempt at proof, it is sometimes assumed that they are simply stories with no factual basis, and the word has become a synonym for falsehood or, at best, misconception. In the study of religion, however, it is important to distinguish between myths and stories that are merely untrue.

Myth has existed in every society. Indeed, it would seem to be a basic constituent of human culture.

Because the variety is so great, it is difficult to generalize about the nature of myths. *It is clear that in*

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their general characteristics and in their details a people's myth reflect, express, and explore the culture's self-image. The study of myth is thus of central importance in the study both of individual societies and of the culture as a whole.

### 2. Magic Defined – from Encyclopedia Britannica Online with minor editing by AD for clarity:

There are types of *Occult Practices* classified as *magic* which include divination, astrology, incantations, spells, alchemy, sorcery, spirit mediation, and necromancy [speaking with or for the dead]. The term magic is also used colloquially in Western popular culture to refer to acts of sleight of hand for entertainment, without supernatural mediation. The purpose of occult magic is to [influence the supernatural powers for the benefit of individuals to] 1) acquire knowledge, power, love, or wealth; 2) to heal or ward off illness or danger; 3) to guarantee productivity or success in an endeavor; 4) to cause harm to an enemy; 5) to reveal information; 6) to induce spiritual transformation; and 7) in terms of entertainment to trick; or 8) to entertain. The effectiveness of magic is often determined by the condition and performance of the magician, who is thought to have access to unseen forces and special knowledge of the appropriate words and actions necessary to manipulate those supernatural forces.

Phenomena associated with magic include forms of mysticism, medicine, heresy, witchcraft, shamanism, Voodoo, and superstition. Magic is sometimes divided into the "high" magic of the intellectual elite, bordering on science; and the "low" magic of common folk practices. A distinction is also made between "black" magic used for nefarious purpose, and "white" magic ostensibly used for beneficial purposes. Although these boundaries are often unclear, magical practices have a sense of "otherness" because of the supernatural power that is believed to be channeled through the practitioner, who is a marginalized or stigmatized figure in some societies and a central one in others. [It is important to note that this description doesn't mean there is no supernatural realm from which the practitioner draws their power or influence, only that it cannot be ostensibly proven empirically (see Acts 16:16-18)]. Magic in the supernatural sense is a means of affecting or controlling the material world.

### 3. Ritual Defined - from Encyclopedia Britannica Online with minor editing by AD for clarity:

The performance of ceremonial acts prescribed by tradition or by sacerdotal decree. Ritual is a stylized, specific, observable mode of behavior exhibited by all known societies. Ritual behavior, established or fixed by traditional rules, has been observed the world over and throughout history. In the study of this behavior, the terms *sacred* (the transcendent realm, or the supernatural realm) and *profane* (the material realm of time, space, and cause and effect; or the natural realm) have remained useful in distinguishing ritual behavior from other types of action. Although there is no consensus on a definition of the sacred and the profane, there is common agreement on the characteristics of these two realms by those who use the terms to describe religions, myth, and ritual. For scholars and others who use these terms, ritual is a determined mode of action. Belief systems, myths, and the like, are viewed as expressions of the nature of the sacred realm in which ritual becomes the determined conduct of the individual in a society expressing a relation to the sacred and the profane. The sacred is that aspect of

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a community's beliefs, myths, and sacred objects that is set apart [from the mundane] and forbidden [except by specially trained practitioners]. The function of ritual in this context within the community is that of providing the proper rules for action in the realm of the sacred as well as supplying a bridge for [power and influence] passing into the realm of the profane.

Rituals [or rites] which are a patterned expression or behavior that is taught and learned [and passed on] by a master to an apprentice. Ritual has significance only when performed properly, such as in the context of a religious service. Ritual may also be described [in a non-supernatural sense] as a regular functional routine typically followed by an individual and as such is a common way of defining or describing behavior. Human beings are sometimes described or defined as a basically rational, economic, political, and recreational species. They may, however, also be viewed as ritual beings who exhibit a striking parallel between their ritual pattern and verbal behavior. Just as language is a system of symbols that is based upon stylized or arbitrary rules, ritual may be viewed as a system of stylized or symbolic acts that are based upon more nuanced or ordered rules. The intricate yet complex relation between ritual and language can be seen in the history of various attempts to explain ritual behavior. In most explanations, language becomes a necessary factor in the theory concerning the nature of ritual, and the specific form of language that is tied to explanations of the ritual couched in the language of myth. [Rituals may include special attire, symbolic movements, chanting or theatrical language or intonation, etc.] Thus, both myth and ritual remain fundamental to any analysis of religion.

4. **Summary Thoughts – myth, magic and ritual entail more than mere superstition; they are the means by which many cultures identified themselves and secured their place in the world in the context of the natural and supernatural.**
  - a. **Myth is typically predicated on a time outside of history, the rationale for this is to reinforce the notion that it has always been this way. Myths typically make no effort to be historical. Examples of such are many creation myths where one primordial god kills another primordial god, then cuts it up and creates the earth and cosmos with the carcass. *Myth is not trying to solve a problem within the context of history; it's trying to fashion an identity in the context of a particular culture.***
  - b. **Magic practitioners within their culture have the opportunity positively or negatively influence the society and its local environment. It also served as a stabilizing component for the culture in an otherwise unpredictable and often hostile world.**
  - c. **Ritual for both practitioners and adherents offered a direct means to engage the supernatural as a society. It established guidance and continuity of thought and identity as a community.**
  - d. **A modern portrayal of a Pantheistic blend of myth, magic and ritual may be observed in the Star Wars saga. The Force is an example of a Pantheistic god; each installment begins with the mythic statement "A long time ago; in a galaxy far, far away." History is not the point of the story. The magical nature of The Force empowers the Jedi practitioners who engage and direct it to manipulate the physical world which contains elements of both good and evil. Cultic rituals and training occur for the young apprentices within the Jedi temple. This is a modern picture of an ancient process and practice.**



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We will now look at the development of Judeo-Christian monotheism and its difference from Paganism, Polytheism and Pantheism.

### D. JUDAEO-CHRISTIAN MONOTHEISM – THE LOGOS IN REDEMPTIVE HISTORY:

1. Monotheism is the belief of one God who created the cosmos, earth and humanity and has adherents in many different faith expressions including Zoroastrianism and Yazidism in Iran, Atenism in Egypt, Sikhism in India, and the Abrahamic Faiths of Judaism, Islam and Christianity in the Middle East. For the purposes of this study we will focus on the Judaeo-Christian tradition and its expression in the Bible.
2. The Bible is God's Self-Revelation through chosen human prophet co-authors. As such, it is Story, not Myth – it presents a very different view of the nature of God and Humanity from Paganist, Polytheist or Pantheist myth and legend stories. The Bible is very consciously a revelation within a known historical context, and with specific and named individuals. The Creation Epic of Genesis chapters 1 and 2 is very different than myth. Note the following study note on Biblical Creation from Psalm 8 in Zondervan's Archaeological Study Bible, which contrasts myth and revelation:

a. The Creation of Humans – the Sumerian Myth of Enki contrasted with Biblical revelation of Creation in the Book of Genesis 1-2:

The major deities in the Sumerian pantheon included An, the god of the heavens, Enlil, the god of wind and storm; Enki, the god of water and human culture; Ninhursag, the goddess of fertility and the earth; Utu, the god of the sun and justice; and his father Nanna, the god of the moon; Inanna, the goddess of sex, beauty, and warfare. This is rather a typical pantheon with gods ruling certain aspects of life.

The Sumerian myth of Enki and Ninmah describes the creation of humankind and a subsequent contest between these two deities regarding the value and occupation of humanity. The Sumerian myth begins when the earth was newly created, and the lesser gods were charged with the drudgery work in service to the greater gods. Consigned to digging irrigation canals and providing their superiors with food, their toil became so wearisome that they rebelled against the high god Enki. The mother goddess, Nammu, encouraged Enki to relieve these lesser god's labor by forming a creature who could do the work for them. Enki accordingly devised the form of humanity and commissioned Nammu to create man and woman, using a pinch of clay (Biblical cross-reference Genesis 2:7).

Afterward Nammu boasted that she could make a person in any form she wished, and Enki replied that he could find compensation for any deformity. Nammu deliberately fashioned a series of individuals with various disabilities, including a blind man, a cripple, a barren woman and a eunuch. Enki proceeded to find an honorable occupation for each of these persons in which their handicaps proved no obstacle. The text ends by praising the superiority of Enki.

By contrast the Biblical story presents humanity's creation quite differently from the Sumerian myth. In the Bible men and women are not an afterthought but the pinnacle of God's creation, crowned with glory (Psalm 8:5). Work (tending God's creation and caring for His creatures) is a God given vocation (Genesis 1:26, 28; 2:15); it's a privilege not a form of drudgery to relieve God's

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burden. Instead, human work is a means of participation in God’s creative work and an opportunity to act as His representatives on earth. Human sickness and malformation, far from being the result of some divine game, are a product of humanity’s fallen condition and, in God’s Sovereign Plan, even defective humans are vehicles through which God can display His greatness in the lives of individuals (John 9:2-3).

- b. **Psalm 8:3-5 makes a definitive statement regarding the difference of Biblical Scripture and the nature of God and His relationship with humanity. Remember that this text is poetry not narrative, and poetry communicates through imagery and emotions so the reader can see and feel what the author is speaking about:** When I consider Your Heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You set in place, what is man [who am I?] that You are mindful of him, the son of man that You care for him? You made him a little lower than the Heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor.

**The Biblical view shows that God is personally involved with and caring for individuals, and thus Creation in general is vastly different from the myths and legends of paganism, pantheism and polytheism.**

- 3. **The Spiritual Realm where God resides is not a place where humanity may enter to discover God. Where the paganist, polytheist and pantheist gods are an extension of the physical world of earth as their home, the Biblical account notes a fundamental separation between Heaven [the supernatural realm of Spirit], and the physical world of earth [the natural realm]. Humanity lives in the natural, whereas God resides in the Supernatural. This is a structural separation that humanity cannot overcome. Since humanity could not go to the metaphysical realm to discover who God is, it was necessary for God to reveal Himself to humanity. When God made His Self-revelation to humanity, He did so through physical human agents. Historical people specifically identified as Abraham, Moses, Samuel, David, the Prophets, Messiah Jesus and the Apostles. These distinct human agents carried God’s revelation to humanity within the context of their known historical worldview. This Revelation was carefully preserved through the ages to preserve the integrity of God’s Self-revelation as the Creator God of Heaven and earth in the Biblical Scriptures. This God was totally different from the paganist, pantheist and polytheist religious traditions in a number of ways including:**
  - a. **This God did not require people to search Him out. Instead, God wanted to be known and purposefully revealed Himself. God communicated through history through real people who actually lived in an historical timeline, who then recorded and passed on God’s messages for posterity. Instead of requiring people to figure out a way to take care of themselves, God stepped into history to reveal and solve humanity’s problems. Instead of demanding to be fed and placated, God wanted a relationship with the people He created, and was more than happy to serve them rather than being served by them.**
  - b. **The Old and New Testament records events and writings which occurred within a known historical context. Knowing the date and historical context of these writings allows us a peek into what God was saying to His people at a particular time and place. The interpretive science of “Biblical Hermeneutics” invites us to step into a particular time and place to interpret these**



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writings so we can project them into our own historical context. Additionally, where most ancient writings have a limited number of sources, there are hundreds and thousands of Biblical sources which scholars have carefully chronicled and cross-referenced. The amount of direct Biblical sources, combined with historical references from known historians, and countless discoveries from the archaeological record provide a cross reference of the Historicity of Scripture. Even the preamble of Genesis 1-11, which occurs as a schematic timetable, describes known areas of the Fertile Crescent that the human writer's and their audience knew. In discussing this preamble, Zondervan's Archaeological Study Bible states - "The pre-flood and post flood genealogies seem to be schematic and incomplete. In general, the time period from Adam to Abraham appears to have been extensive, and the genealogical lists in Genesis hardly serve as a timetable." The purpose of the Biblical historical preamble was to intentionally trace the cultural development of a people within a specific historical context. The preamble then steps into known history in Genesis 11:27 when Abram's family leave their home in the known geographical location of "Ur of the Chaldeans" in the Fertile Crescent just north of the Persian Gulf. Abram and his family then travel North to "Haran of the Hittite Empire," another known historical place.

- c. Wikipedia traces the historical era from the Sumerian city states of the early Bronze Age to the Akkadian Empire of Abraham's time, approximately dated at 2,166-1,901 BC (see historical timeline at the end of this paper). "The Akkadian Empire was the first state that successfully united larger parts of Mesopotamia in the 23rd century BC. After the Gutian period, the Ur III kingdom similarly united parts of northern and southern Mesopotamia. It ended in the face of Amorite incursions at the beginning of the second millennium BC. The Amorite "Dynasty of Isin" persisted until c. 1700 BC, when Mesopotamia was united under Babylonian rule."
  - d. In chapter 12, the Biblical story picks up with Abram [now renamed Abraham] leaving his home with his family on their way to Canaan. In other words, the earlier parts of the story were shortened to bring the reader to the heart of the redemptive historical saga, specifically the relational calling of Abraham and his obedience by faith to this call. Humanity's problems were intentionally demonstrated in Genesis chapters 2 through 11 with humanity shown as being corrupt, selfish, sinful and in need of redemption. The redemptive solution involved a relationship to this Self-Revealing Biblical God with the calling of Abraham in chapter 12.
4. Magic and Sorcery were common in the paganist, polytheist and pantheist faiths; but they were strictly forbidden in Biblical Scripture. The following article discussing these differences is from Zondervan's Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible:
- a. Scripture Definition – In its widest sense "magic" is the attempt to influence persons and events by recourse to superhuman [supernatural] powers... [in the ancient near east] it is "the science of the occult." The word derives from the Magi, a priestly caste in Media whose functions have largely been associated with "magic" ever since. They claimed to mediate between gods and men, conducted sacrifices, supervised the disposal of the dead, interpreted dreams, omens, and celestial phenomena, and foretold the future. "Magic" came into the Greek world from Persia and thence

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into the Roman world. Gradually it acquired a pejorative sense, which the word “**sorcery**” has possessed to an even greater degree.

- b. Black and White Magic – Traditionally, “black” magic is distinguished from “white” magic. Black Magic is a means of invoking evil upon one’s enemies, with the aid of evil spirits, curses and spells: it presupposes malevolent powers who are willing to be manipulated. “White” magic postulates benevolent powers through whom good ends can be achieved and evil spells undone. In a well-known definition Frazer wrote, “Magic is a kind of savage logic, an elementary species of reasoning, based on similarity, contiguity and contrast” (*Golden Bough* I. 61). This often is compared with the systematic procedures of science.
- c. The Hebrews – are portrayed in the Old Testament within a world in which magic had been practiced for many centuries. The persons [known in the Bible as] “Magi” were, in fact, relative late-comers. In Sumerian-Akkadian folklore, gods as well as men needed the services of magic: thus, in the Babylonian “Creation Epic” Ea-Enki was the “Lord of Incantation,” and his son Marduk defeated the female deity Tiamat because his spells were more potent than hers. Handbooks have survived which list a wide range of errors which bring evil on men, with appropriate rites of purification. A manual “Maglu” similarly prescribes rituals for warding off the effects of black magic. The cult of divination was highly developed: tablets survive describing many omens observable in the heavens, in human events, in the flight of birds and the organs of animals. Hence, the reference in Nahum to Assyria as “graceful and of deadly charms” (3:4).
- d. In Egypt – magic had been equally prominent. It was under the patronage of the leading gods, Thoth and Isis, and papyri provide abundant details. Magic was learned in temple schools (“the House of Life”) and priesthoods devoted especially to the art. The lore was extended to the dead, who needed their own magical equipment to preserve them in the next life. The manual “Instructions for King Meri Kare” (c. 2200 B.C.) shows how closely magic was linked with medicine in Egypt. The interpretation of dreams was a highly sophisticated art, and Egyptian magicians were also renowned as wonder-workers, the evidence of their extraordinary feats (going back to the third millennium) being recorded in the “Tales of the Early Magicians” (see A. H. Gardiner, *HERE* viii. 262-269 for six categories of Egyptian magic).
- e. In early Canaanite epics – both divine and human magic were practiced. In the “Epic of Baal,” for example, the victory of Mot over Baal is reversed by the goddess Anath by magical means; and in the “Legend of Keret,” king of Ugarit, the god El carries out elaborate rituals to restore the king to health. Other epics mention the practice of augury and astrology by women. Evidence of Canaanite magic is relatively plentiful in the Old Testament.
- f. The Bible’s Old Testament and magic – In the light of this universal phenomenon, its impact on the life of Israel was inevitable. The Old Testament is clear-cut in its message: as in other areas of their spiritual development, the uniqueness and power of the revelation of Yahweh were here apparent. The reality of occult powers is acknowledged, but magic and sorcery are consistently forbidden. A notable passage is Deuteronomy 18:10-14: “There shall not be found among you... anyone who practices divination, a soothsayer, or an augur, or a sorcerer, or a charmer, or a medium, or a

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wizard, or a necromancer. For whoever does these things is an abomination to the LORD...these nations, which you are about to dispossess, give heed to soothsayers and to diviners; but as for you, the LORD your God has not allowed you so to do” (cf. Lev 19:26). This verse incorporates practically all the Old Testament types of magic, except those practiced by Egyptians and Babylonians. Two other words of Ugaritic and Akkadian provenance are used to cover magic and sorcery in general (e.g. Exodus 22:18; 2 Kings 9:22). The faithful Jew was trained from childhood to regard as dangerous superstition much of the religious practice around him; it could not co-exist with the pure worship of Yahweh. Those who became mediums or wizards were to be put to death (Leviticus 20:27). The same uncompromising attitude is found in the prophets... “And when they say to you, ‘Consult the mediums and the wizards who chirp and mutter,’ should not a people consult their God? Should they consult the dead on behalf of the living?” (attacking necromancy in Isaiah 8:19). “So do not listen to your prophets, your diviners, your dreamers, your soothsayers, or your sorcerers.... For it is a lie which they are prophesying to you” (against divination in Jeremiah 27:9, 10). “Thus says the Lord GOD: Woe to the women who sew magic bands upon all wrists, and make veils for the heads of persons of every stature, in the hunt for souls!” (against witches in Ezekiel 13:18). Isaiah 3:18-23 contains a long list of the finery of women which includes several articles used as charms—“amulets,” “headbands,” and “crescents.”

- g.** The New Testament and Magic – The Old Testament repugnance for magic was inherited by the Christian Church, in a world which was as thoroughly imbued with such practices as ever. The epistles therefore echo Old Testament denunciations, Paul lists sorcery among the “works of the flesh” which bar men from God’s kingdom (Gal 5:19), and in the somber description of 2 Timothy 3:1-9, the godless are compared to the magicians Jannes and Jambres who withstood Moses (v. 13, RSV “deceivers” may also describe sorcerers). In Revelation sorcery appears among those practices which merit judgment (9:21; 18:23; 21:8; 22:15). The Gospels mention certain Pharisaical customs which appear to have bordered on the superstitious— the wearing of phylacteries (Matt 23:5) and repetitious prayers (Matt 6:7), but the former practice did have a higher significance for the pious (cf. Exodus 13:9, 16; Deuteronomy 6:8). What is emphasized is the supremacy of Christ over the spirit world (Mark 3:22, 23; Luke 10:17-20). Sorcerers appearing in Acts are Simon Magus, Elymas Bar-Jesus, and the sons of Sceva, and divination is well illustrated by the girl at Philippi. She was regarded as spirit-possessed, and it was the spirit who was addressed and expelled by Paul (16:16 ff.).
- h.** Ritual Worship and the Priesthood – Priests (and Priestesses) have officiated over organized religion since the dawn of culture. They were trained practitioners who mediated religious ceremonies through the performance of often stylized rituals. Rituals are common in all religious observances as well as occult and magical rites. To become a priest or dedicated practitioner of these rituals, there would be many years of training involved so that the practitioner could execute the ritual precisely and consistently as mandated by their tradition. Generally speaking, the value of the ritual was dependent upon its proper performance, which would secure the hoped for outcome. Anyone who has attended a Jewish or Catholic-Christian worship service can’t help but

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notice the deliberate actions and gestures involved... from presenting the Scripture prior to reading the passage, to the preparing and presenting the Communion elements prior to inviting the parishioners to partake, or the entry and exit procession of the priest and attendants at the beginning and ending of the service. The rituals and Sacraments prescribed by the faith are full of symbolism, and whether solemn or jubilant, they effectively usher the practitioner and the faithful into an other-worldly experience. Christians understand that God has ordained priests and pastors who shepherd Christ-followers into vital faith experiences. From the beginning of the Jewish nation, the priesthood was understood as mediating the Covenant relationship between the people and God.

5. **The following article describing the role of the priest is from Zondervan’s Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible** – In Israel however, the priesthood represented the nation’s relationship with God. The original intention in the Mosaic Covenant was for the entire nation to be a *kingdom of priests* (Exodus 19:6; cf. Leviticus 11:44 ff.; Numbers 15:40). The Covenant of God was mediated through the priesthood. In Biblical theology the concepts of priesthood and Covenant are closely related. Because of the Covenant at Sinai, Israel was meant to be “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exodus 19:5, 6; cf. Isaiah 61:6). God’s holy character was to be reflected in the life of Israel (Leviticus 11:44 ff.; Numbers 15:40).
- a. The Levitical priesthood served in a representative character for the whole nation in the matter of the honor, privilege, and obligation of priesthood. When the priests ministered, they did so as the representatives of the people. It was a practical necessity that the corporate obligation of the Covenant people should be carried out by priestly representatives. Furthermore, the priests in their separated condition symbolized the purity and holiness God required. They were a visible reminder of God’s righteous requirements. Moreover, as substitutes for the people they maintained the nation’s Covenant relationship with God intact. The primary function of the Levitical priesthood, therefore, was to maintain and assure, as well as reestablish, the holiness of the chosen people of God (Exodus 28:38; Leviticus 10:7; Numbers 18:1). The priesthood mediated the Covenant of God with Israel (Malachi 2:4 ff.; cf. Numbers 18:19; Jeremiah 33:20-26).
  - b. In early Israel, an important function of the priests was to discover the will of God by means of the ephod (1 Samuel 23:6-12). They were constantly occupied with instruction in the Law (Malachi 2). Of course, their duties always included offering of sacrifices. Early priests were guardians of the sanctuary and interpreters of the oracle (1 Samuel 14:18). Instructions in the Law belonged to the priests (Hosea 4:1-10). The priest acted as judge, a consequence of his imparting answers to legal questions (Exodus 33:7-11).
  - c. The Levitical priesthood and the sacrificial system in which it operated, found their fulfillment and perfection in Christ. In the New Testament, Christ is the High Priest (Hebrews; Romans 3:25). He is the great High Priest, eternally one with the Father (Hebrews 1); identified with man in Incarnation (Hebrews 2:14-18; 4:15; 5:1, 8-10). He is the mediator of the New Covenant (7:23-28; 8:6-13; 9:15), perfecting eternal redemption (9:11-28; 10:11-18) and assuring His people of constant access to God (10:19-25). Moreover, all of God’s people are priests in the New Testament (1 Peter 2:5, 9; cf. Romans 12:1; Hebrews 13:15; Revelation 1:5).

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- d. Two vital elements were transmitted to the New Testament teaching – the doctrine of priestly mediation and the priestly hierarchy. The Epistle to the Hebrews builds on the teaching of the effectual high priesthood of Christ. Ministry in the Church has replaced the ancient God-ordained Old Covenant hierarchy.
6. **It is clear in these quotes from these sources that God’s People were called out into a different standard of belief and conduct, and that they were not to follow the worldly norms of the Pagan cultures that surrounded them. They were to be separate from the world and dedicated to God. When God’s people were obedient, things went well with them. When they fell into the worldly conduct of the paganist, polytheist, and pantheist cultures that surrounded them, things went badly.**

### **E. THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS SPECIFIC TO CHRISTIAN MONOTHEISM:**

1. **The Holiness of a Perfect God, and the Sinfulness of an Imperfect Human:**
  - a. **The problem in establishing a relationship with this God who has revealed Himself and is characterized as Holy, Just and Good, is the fallen and corrupted nature of humanity. Fallen humanity could not solve their corruption using natural methods. Humanity needed a supernatural redemption, thus God had to intervene with a Redemptive Plan. The Fall and God’s judgment is laid out in Genesis chapter 3, the remainder of the Bible is the playing out of God’s redemptive plan in human history to restore the relationship sin had broken. The Bible is in fact more of a love story than a scientific manual for humanity. God solved the problem of redemption with something people of every era could understand... a blood sacrifice. Animal blood was employed in the Old Testament, which was the foreshadowing of Jesus the Messiah, the God/man who would shed His own blood on the Cross in the New Testament. This sacrifice was long foretold in Old Testament Scripture; and through it, God accomplished the redemption humanity needed. In other words, God did for us what we couldn’t do on our own.**
  - b. **This plan was revealed throughout redemptive history and recorded in the Bible, and when accomplished it radiated out both into the past and future to provide the opportunity for all of humanity to have an ongoing relationship with God. Exactly what humanity needed for the security of eternal life... God provided at His own expense. This is message of the Gospel we call Grace. God’s free gift of love that we receive by faith. God didn’t need to be placated or bought off. Instead, God wanted relationship and to be trusted and obeyed. This human action of faith and obedience courses throughout Scripture, which consistently demonstrates that it is for our own good as faith and obedience prepares humanity for the gift of eternal life. Humanity could not find God on our own, so this God of Love revealed Himself in the Bible. This is the basic message of the Christian Gospel revealed by Jesus.**
  - c. **In light of this, the Apostle Paul goes on to contrast the Gospel prophets proclaiming the wisdom of God versus the worldly prophets proclaiming the wisdom of the world:**
    - i. **1 Corinthians 1:18-24 – For the word of the Cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, “I WILL DESTROY THE WISDOM OF THE WISE, AND THE CLEVERNESS OF THE CLEVER I WILL SET ASIDE.” Where is**

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the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not *come to know* God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe [what He has revealed]. For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentile's foolishness, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God.

- ii. **2 Corinthians 2:15-17** – For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved, and among those who are perishing; to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life. And who is adequate for these things? For we are not like many, peddling the word of God [for personal gain], but as from sincerity, and as from God, we speak of Christ in the sight of God.

### 2. The Problem of Theodicy:

- a. **One of the biggest objections of non-Christians is how an “All-Powerful God be trusted as Good if He allows evil to occur in the world.” Not surprisingly, one of the oldest books of the Bible is Job... an ancient poem about wrestling with why a Good and all-powerful God allows bad things happen to good people. This fundamental question is the Theological problem of “Theodicy” - meaning *Theo*=God, and *dike*'=justice. According to The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology, “Theodicy refers to attempts to (understand and) justify the ways of God to humanity. [Specifically, the contrast of the Judea-Christian Tradition and other faiths.] A successful theodicy resolves the problem of evil and demonstrates that God is all-powerful, all-loving, and just... despite the existence of evil.” Zondervan's Archaeological Study Bible compares the speeches of God found in Job chapter 38-41 to the mythic stories of ancient Hittite polytheism:**
  - i. The speeches of God in Job 38-41 present God [YAWEH] as absolute and unrivaled in His power over nature. The stars, storms, seasons, and wild animals all submit to and depend upon Him. God even controls *Leviathan*, the Sea-Dragon that symbolizes chaos and evil.
  - ii. Polytheism, on the other hand, gods are often depicted as weak and dependent. Hittite texts of myth and ritual illustrate this. For example, the Telepinu myth recounts an incident in which the storm god, Telepinu, was reported to have become angry and deserted his post [of moderating the weather]. In his absence the crops ceased to grow and the livestock [failed] to calve. Even the other gods began to panic at the prospect of starvation [because they were dependent on humanity feeding them through food offerings]. Although the gods were unable to locate Telepinu, a bee found him asleep under a tree and wakened him with a sting. A goddess of magic and a human priest then performed expiatory rituals that assuaged Telepinu's anger.
  - iii. Other Hittite myths tell of the storm god's conflict with the dragon Illuyanka. Unlike YAHWEH's domination of Leviathan in Job 41 however, the storm god can scarcely handle Illuyanka. In one version the storm god is first defeated by the dragon, but the tables turn after the goddess Inara enlists the aid of a mortal, Hupashiya, by sleeping with him. She



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then hosts a feast; after Illuyanka gorges himself on food Hupashiya binds the dragon with ropes so that the storm god can slay him. In another version the storm god loses his heart and eyes to the dragon in their first battle, but the god's son marries Illuyanka's daughter and persuades Illuyanka to return his father's eyes and heart. The storm god resumes the battle, slaying both the dragon and his son.

- iv. The profound [nature] of the moral and theological debate of Job could not have arisen from such Pagan myths. The gods depicted in these tales, were simply too weak to control events in a meaningful way, they needed the assistance of other gods and even that of humans and animals [to prevail]. There would also be no problem of evil if God were too weak to control the world; such a theological dilemma can only exist in a setting in which God is understood to be omniscient [all-knowing] and omnipotent [all powerful].

**b. Whereas the problem of Theodicy in Paganism, Polytheism and Pantheism doesn't arise because their gods are weak, capricious, and self-serving; Theodicy has a logical place needing resolution in Christian Monotheism where an all-powerful God prevails.**

- i. **Humanity is understood as individuals who are "free-will" moral and ethical agents; they know the difference between right and wrong, and can be held responsible for their choices and actions before God. If humanity lacked the ability to choose, humanity couldn't be held responsible for their choices.**
- ii. **If humanity couldn't choose and God chose for us, then humanity would be relegated to the position of "automatons" meaning beings acting out a scripted play they have no choice but complying with. The logic of Theodicy would make God the Author of both Good and evil.**
- iii. **If humanity could not know good from evil and be held accountable for their choices, and God scripts people's lives who are but automatons, then God would be seen as making some people to populate heaven and others to populate hell. The quality of God as "Good" could not be reasonable if humanity are not free-will agents responsible for their actions.**
- iv. **This is obviously, a theological conundrum. Free will also makes sense from the perspective that humanity's ultimate Home is an eternal one, and God reserves the right to work blessing and judgment there according to one's actions.**

**3. The Historicity of Scripture:**

- a. **Biblical scholars understand that the Bible is an integrated Book of God's Self-revelation revealed and recorded throughout the course of redemptive history. We also know that Biblical Scripture was not necessarily written in the order they are presented in the Bible. The following "Schedule A" presents the generally accepted Dates of the known historical events around and writing of the Old and New Testaments. These dates are validated from a variety of sources including the historical records, findings dated in the archaeological record, cross referenced with the Bible.**
- b. **Though some historical observers have complained of the delay of some of these writings especially the Gospels after Jesus ministry and death, it is understood there were source**

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documents written by eye-witnesses and were shared for many years before they were assembled into a book. Some are referred to as the “Q” Documents, that were the common source for the Synoptic Gospels. Another factor for the delay was the general expectation that Jesus’ Apocalyptic Return would be immediate rather than delayed. Finally, the authors didn’t write in a vacuum, there were many eyewitnesses that were interviewed and whose accounts were written down. Roman historians including Josephus wrote extensively about the Jewish nation during the Roman Empire, including Jesus. We also hold that the Holy Spirit Supernaturally enabled all writers of Scripture to recall and present God’s intended message to His people. The internal and external evidence accompanied by the transformative response of believers through the ages bear out the validity of the Old and New Testament Canon.

- c. The most compelling rationale for the trustworthiness of Scripture is:
  - a. The internal witness of the Bible itself where the timid and unimpressive disciples stood before the world powers of the era and spoke with poise and confidence.
  - b. The external witness that some 1-1.5 million Gentile converts to Christianity and Messianic Jews chose death over renouncing their faith. People don’t die willingly for a lie, but these people died willingly for the truth they were objectively convinced of.
  - c. Roman historians did an excellent job of capturing the events throughout the Roman Empire. Many of the events are captured in official correspondences that have endured.

#### 4. CONCLUSION:

- a. In this article we’ve taken a journey and explored and compared different faiths: paganism, polytheism, pantheism, and monotheistic Christianity. We have also observed what Myth, Magic and Ritual are and how they are contrasted within these faiths. We have spoken about the redemptive historical timeline through which Christianity emerged.
- b. Following below is an historical chronology that lists key historical dates and how Biblical writings fit into the known historical records.
- c. There are many ancient texts, but none quite so provocative as the Bible that has emerged within history, and where we have a solid record of this emergence.
- d. The obvious question emerges from our study of Christian Anthropology is what is Jesus to You? Is He Messianic God/man predicted by Scripture? Was he merely a Prophet, teacher, or wandering preacher? Whoever you think Jesus is will define your past, present and future. Thus, this is no inconsequential matter!
- e. Dr Jim Denison in his daily Denison Report stated that Jesus “will not be silenced, packaged, or predicted.” Jesus demands an answer.  
Denison goes on to quote noted writer Max Lucado... “The Jesus of many people is small enough to be contained in an aquarium that fits on a cabinet. He never causes trouble or demands attention. If you want a goldfish bowl of Jesus, steer clear of the real Jesus Christ. He changes everything! No, Jesus doesn’t make you sexy, skinny, or clever. Jesus doesn’t change what you see in the mirror. He changes how you see what you see. He will not be silenced, packaged, or

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predicted. He is the pastor who chased people out of church. He is the prophet who had a soft spot for crooks and whores. He is the king who washed the grime off the feet of his betrayer. He turned a breadbasket into a buffet and a dead friend into a living one. And most of all, he transformed the tomb into a womb out of which life was born anew . . . your life.”

**See the following “Schedule A” for a concise historical timeline of Scripture and world events.**

**SCHEDULE A – KEY DATES AND WRITINGS OF OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT** – These dates are derived from a number of scholarly sources including Dr. Bill Creasy – Logos Ministry, Dr. Gary Tuck – Western Seminary, Zondervan’s Archaeological Study Bible, Zondervan’s International Dictionary of the Christian Church.

**HISTORICTY OF THE BIBLE**

**OLD TESTAMENT:**

- 1) 5,500 BC Copper Age Begins
- 2) 3,500 BC Bronze Age Begins
- 3) 3,050-2,181 BC Old Kingdom of Egypt
- 4) 2,686-2,566 BC Egyptian Pyramids Built
- 5) 2,166-1,901 BC Abraham
- 6) 1,914-1,805 BC Joseph
- 7) 1,792-1,750 BC Hammurabi
- 8) 1,526-1,406 BC Moses – Pentateuch
- 9) 1,446 BC 1<sup>st</sup> Passover in Egypt
- 10) 1,200 BC Iron Age Begins
- 11) 1,114-1076 BC Tiglath-Pileser rules Assyria
- 12) 1,000 BC Ruth – Book of
- 13) 1,060-1,020 BC Prophet Samuel
- 14) 1050-1010 BC King Saul
- 15) 1,010-970 BC King David – Psalms
- 16) 1,000 BC Mayan’s Rule Meso America
- 17) 970-930 BC King Solomon – Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs
- 18) 870-845 BC Elijah
- 19) 760-763 BC Isaiah
- 20) 753 BC Rome is Founded
- 21) 650-582 BC Jeremiah
- 22) 620-540 BC Daniel
- 23) 620-570 BC Ezekiel
- 24) 520 BC Haggai
- 25) 520-516 BC Jerusalem Temple Rebuilt
- 26) 522-509 BC Zechariah
- 27) 478 BC Esther – Book of
- 28) 465 BC Malachi – Book of
- 29) 450 BC Joel – Book of
- 30) 457-430 BC Ezra & Nehemiah – Book of
- 31) 360 BC Plato writes The Republic
- 32) 399 BC Socrates writes The Apology
- 33) 336-323 BC Alexander the Great

**NEW TESTAMENT:**

- 1) BC 6-4 Jesus is Born
- 2) AD 27-28 Jesus public ministry
- 3) AD 30-32 Jesus Crucified, Buried and Resurrected
- 4) AD 48-49 James Epistle
- 5) AD 48-49 Council at Jerusalem – Paul
- 6) AD 49 Galatians Epistle
- 7) AD 51 1st Thessalonians Epistle
- 8) AD 51-52 2nd Thessalonians Epistle
- 9) AD 55 Gospel of Mark
- 10) AD 55-56 First Corinthians Epistle
- 11) AD 56 Second Corinthians Epistle
- 12) AD 56-57 Romans Epistle
- 13) AD 58-62 Gospel of Matthew
- 14) AD 59-62 Gospel of Luke
- 15) AD 60-62 Acts of the Apostles
- 16) AD 61 Ephesians Epistle
- 17) AD 61 Philemon Epistle
- 18) AD 62 Philippians Epistle
- 19) AD 62 Colossians Epistle
- 20) AD 63-64 First Peter Epistle
- 21) AD 63-66 First Timothy Epistle
- 22) AD 63-67 Titus Epistle
- 23) AD 66-67 Second Peter Epistle
- 24) AD 67-69 Second Timothy Epistle
- 25) AD 67-69 Jude Epistle
- 26) AD 67-69 Hebrews Epistle
- 27) AD 70 Fall of Jerusalem, and Destruction of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple
- 28) AD 75-85 Gospel of John
- 29) AD 90-95 First John Epistle
- 30) AD 90-95 Second John Epistle
- 31) AD 90-95 Third John Epistle
- 32) AD 90-95 Revelation