

Examining Christian Doctrine

Lesson 1: The History of the Development of Christian Doctrine Part 1: The Formation of Doctrine in Ancient Israelite History

Introduction to the Course

What do you believe? Why do you believe it? When did people start believing that? Why did people start believing that? Where did this belief originate? Are there alternative views of this belief? Are there false views of this belief?

These are questions that are rarely asked, but are of the utmost importance. Especially when trying to share, explain, or defend our beliefs to others.

The beliefs that the church holds today were not created in a vacuum, nor did they fall out of the sky in a nice, neat, bound together genuine imitation leather Bible. They were developed, discussed, and debated for many years before finally being adopted as church dogma. The ideas surrounding what Christians have historically believed are as diverse as you could ever imagine. In this class we are going to look at the foundational beliefs of the Christian faith, but we will also look into the history and development of these beliefs for a deeper understanding of these issues.

The doctrines that we will look at in this study include:

- The Doctrine of God
- The Doctrine of Christ
- The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit
- The Doctrine of Man
- The Doctrine of Salvation
- The Doctrine of the Bible
- The Doctrine of Satan and Demons
- The Doctrine of Last Things
- The Doctrine of Death and Afterlife

Within these doctrines are a myriad of topics that we will discuss including: the Trinity, the Incarnation and Divinity of Christ, Spiritual Gifts (including Speaking in Tongues), Atonement Theories, Free Will, Eternal Security, the Rapture Doctrine, Heaven and Hell, and many more.

Defining Key Terms

Theology - The study of the nature of God and religious beliefs, typically informed by scripture, tradition, reason, and experience. It encompasses various disciplines such as biblical theology, systematic theology, historical theology, and practical theology.

Doctrine - A set of beliefs or teachings, often foundational to a religious tradition, that outlines its core principles and interpretations of scripture. Doctrines serve as authoritative guides for faith and practice within a religious community.

Ancient Near East - The region around the eastern Mediterranean Sea, including Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Canaan. The history of this region gives us an inside look at the views of deity and religion pre-Israel.

Intertestamental Period - The historical period between the close of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament and the emergence of the New Testament writings. It spans from the end of the Persian period (400 BC) to the beginning of the Christian era (1st century AD). This period is characterized by significant political, social, religious, and cultural developments,

Second Temple Period - Refers to the time period during which the Second Temple in Jerusalem stood, from its reconstruction following the Babylonian exile (late 500's BC) until its destruction by the Romans in 70AD. This period known as Second Temple Judaism is marked by profound religious changes in Judaism.

Jewish Sects – Religious groups during the Second Temple Period, with their own beliefs, practices, and interpretations of Jewish law and tradition. Include are Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes.

Hellenism - The spread of Greek culture, language, and influence throughout the eastern Mediterranean and Near East following the conquests of Alexander the Great in the 4th century BC. Known as 'Hellenization', this period of cultural exchange influenced the development of language (Hebrew to Greek), Jewish literature (rise of Apocalyptic literature), theology (the soul, afterlife, and judgment, etc.), and religious movements (Jewish Sects) during the Intertestamental and Second Temple Periods.

Oral Tradition - Israelite society relied heavily on oral storytelling and communal memory to pass down sacred narratives, teachings, and customs from one generation to the next. The shift from primarily oral tradition to written records in Jewish and Israelite history occurred gradually over several centuries, with significant developments taking place during the Monarchy Period (1000-586BC) and continuing into the Second Temple period (516BC – 70AD).

Covenant – The idea of Covenant is found throughout the Old Testament. Covenants are sacred agreements or pacts between God and the people of Israel, outlining mutual rights, responsibilities, and obligations. The most significant is the Mosaic Covenant given to Israel at Mt. Sinai. This includes the giving of the Ten Commandments and other laws, as well as promises of divine protection, blessings, and the land of Canaan as the inheritance of the Israelites.

Eras of Doctrinal Development: Old Testament and Israelite History

Man's revelation of God is progressive. Adam, Abraham, Moses, David nor any other person wasn't given a Bible or a Systematic Theology book from heaven and told, "here's everything for you to know about God, Jesus, and theology." As God revealed Himself and His plan to humankind, we grew in our knowledge and understanding of God. Below are listed specific time periods throughout Israel's history in which God revealed Himself and things about Himself to people, which we have recorded in the Bible.

1. Pre-Israelite History:

- **Ancient Near East:** The cultural, religious, and political environment of the ancient Near East, including Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Canaan.
 - Religious themes include: practices, beliefs, and mythologies of neighboring cultures, such as Mesopotamian creation myths, Law Codes, and Egyptian religious rituals.
- **Patriarchal Period:** The time of the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) as recounted in the book of Genesis.
 - Religious themes Include: Covenant, promise, and the relationship between God and humanity.)

2. Israelite History: Exodus and Wilderness Period:

- **The Exodus and Wilderness Wanderings:** The freeing of Israelites from slavery in Egypt under the leadership of Moses. The Israelites' experiences in the wilderness, including episodes of testing, rebellion, and divine provision.
 - Religious Themes Include: the covenantal relationship established between God and the people of Israel at Mount Sinai, including the giving of the Ten Commandments. Exploration of theological themes such as faithfulness, obedience, and divine guidance.

3. Israelite History: Conquest and Settlement Period:

- **The Conquest and Settlement of Canaan:** The Israelite conquest of Canaan under the leadership of Joshua, as described in the book of Joshua. The division of the land among the tribes of Israel and the establishment of a settled agrarian society.
 - Religious Themes Include: Examination of theological themes related to warfare, conquest, and the fulfillment of God's promises. Exploration of religious practices, cultic sites, and tribal identity during this period.

4. Israelite History: The Monarchy Period:

- **United Monarchy:** The reigns of Saul, David, and Solomon, who ruled over the united kingdom of Israel and Judah.
 - Religious Themes Include: the establishment of the Davidic covenant and the construction of the Temple in Jerusalem
- **Divided Monarchy:** The division of the kingdom into Israel (Northern Kingdom) and Judah (Southern Kingdom) following the reign of Solomon.
 - Religious Themes Include: religious reforms, prophetic messages, and political tensions during the period of the divided monarchy

5. Israelite History: Exile and Post-Exilic Period:

- **Babylonian Exile:** The Babylonian conquest of Judah, the destruction of the Temple, and the exile of the Jewish people to Babylon.
 - Religious Themes Include: prophetic messages of judgment, hope, and restoration during the exile, as recorded in the books of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Isaiah
- **Return from Exile:** The Persian conquest of Babylon, the decree of Cyrus allowing the Jewish exiles to return, and the rebuilding of the Temple under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah.
 - Religious Themes Include: The restoration, renewal, and the reconstitution of Jewish identity.

6. Intertestamental Period (Second Temple Period):

- **Hellenistic Influence:** The Hellenistic period (300-1BC) and its impact on Jewish society, culture, and religion, including the spread of Greek culture, language, and ideas.
- **Emergence of Sectarianism:** Examination of the emergence of Jewish sectarian groups, such as the Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, and Zealots, each with distinct theological and ideological positions.
 - Religious Themes Include: Jewish resistance movements, apocalyptic literature, messianic expectations, and the anticipation of a future deliverer.

7. Life and Ministry of Jesus:

- **Historical Context:** The culture influenced by the political, social, and religious landscape of first-century Israel under Roman rule.
 - Religious Themes Include: key events, teachings, and controversies in the life of Jesus, as recorded in the Gospels
- **Messianic Expectations:** Jesus is seen as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies and the embodiment of God's kingdom.
 - Religious Themes Include: Jesus' proclamation of repentance, forgiveness, and the coming reign of God. Fulfilling the law and the New Covenant

Beliefs and Doctrinal Developments During This Time: Developing Theological Beliefs

There were many beliefs and developed and took on different forms throughout the ancient Near East and throughout ancient Israel's history. Many of these beliefs developed into what Christians came to believe. This example will give you an inside look at the similarities and differences from our current Christian doctrine.

From Polytheism (the belief in many gods) to Monotheism (the belief in one God) – While the majority of ancient Near East religions believed in polytheism, Israel was distinct in which they became a monotheistic people.

Angelic Beings and Divine Council - Beliefs about angelic beings as messengers, guardians, and agents of divine will permeated ancient Near Eastern and Jewish thought. Also seen is the idea of a divine council in the Hebrew Bible, depicting God presiding over a heavenly assembly of angels and supernatural beings who participate in divine governance and decision-making.

Divine Attributes and Nature of God - The various names and titles used to describe God throughout the Hebrew Bible reflected the different aspects of God's character and attributes such as holiness, sovereignty, omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence

Prophetic Hope and Messianic Expectations - The Second Temple Period witnessed a growing anticipation of a future messianic figure who would deliver Israel from oppression, restore the Davidic kingdom, and inaugurate a new era of peace and righteousness. Various messianic movements and interpretations emerged, influenced by biblical prophecy, historical circumstances, and political aspirations.

Development of Apocalyptic Literature - Apocalyptic literature flourished during the Second Temple Period, reflecting a heightened sense of cosmic conflict, divine judgment, and hope for eschatological deliverance. Texts such as Daniel, Enoch, and parts of Isaiah and Zechariah contain apocalyptic imagery, visions, and revelations

Expansions of Jewish Sects and Movements - Prominent sects included the Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, and Zealots, who often held differing views on theological matters such as the interpretation of the Law, the afterlife, and the role of Temple priesthood.

Afterlife beliefs and Heaven & Hell – There were many different ancient Near Eastern concepts of the afterlife, including ideas of paradise, underworlds, and judgment after death. In early Israelite thought, there was a more ambiguous understanding of the afterlife, with an emphasis on Sheol as a shadowy realm of the dead where all souls, regardless of merit, resided. However, during the Second Temple Period, influenced by Persian and Hellenistic ideas, Jewish beliefs about the afterlife, as concepts of resurrection, judgment, and rewards/punishments became more prominent

Satan and Demons – We see the biblical development of Satan as a rebellious angel and adversary of God and humanity, beginning with his portrayal in the book of Job and expanding in later Jewish literature. There was also development of demonic entities in Jewish thought, including their association with sin, illness, and spiritual warfare, as depicted in intertestamental literature such as the Book of Tobit and the Book of Enoch.

The Resurrection of the Dead - Beliefs in resurrection of the dead became more prominent during the Second Temple Period, particularly influenced by apocalyptic literature and prophetic visions.