

## PART TWO: THE VISION OF JESUS IN CONTEXT

Syllabus Objectives	<p><i>Knowledge</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• be familiar with the socio-political and religious context in Palestine at the time of Jesus</li> <li>• identify, compare, and evaluate sources of evidence for Jesus of Nazareth</li> <li>• be familiar with the teachings of Jesus in relation to the reign of God, as well as the implications and impact of these teachings</li> <li>• be able to identify the various messianic expectations at the time of Jesus.</li> </ul> <p><i>Understanding</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• trace the development of the understanding of Jesus and the meaning of his life</li> <li>• be aware of the historical nature of Christianity and the role of the cultural context in the shaping of belief and practice from ancient times to the present day</li> <li>• understand the relationship between faith and culture.</li> </ul> <p><i>Skills</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• differentiate the evidence of history from the witness of faith.</li> </ul> <p><i>Attitudes</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• appreciation of the place of cultural context in the preaching and development of the Christian traditions</li> <li>• awareness of the significance of Jesus of Nazareth as a historical figure</li> <li>• appreciation of the limitations of the historical approach to interpreting the life of Jesus.</li> </ul>
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Topic: 2.1      *The impact of Rome*

Procedure

**Description of content:**      *characteristics of the Greco-Roman world at the time of Jesus*

- *urban life and the disappearance of traditional kinship patterns*
- *the clash between the imperial cult and monotheistic faiths*

Discuss:      Do the political rulers affects the way people act in a society?

Take feedback and conclude with reference to the ways in which political rulers affects the way people act in society today e.g. smoking ban etc.

Discuss:      Who were the political powers at the time of Jesus?

How did these political rulers affect the way people acted in society?

Take feedback and conclude by reviewing the historical background to the Greco-Roman world at the time of Jesus i.e. from the conquest of Alexander the Great in 323 onwards and Pompey's capture of Jerusalem in 63 B.C.

**Description of content:**      *- Roman rule as a threat to the political, social, and religious systems in Palestine at the time of Jesus*  
    *- the responses to Rome*

Discuss:      Who had political power in Palestine at the time of Jesus?

How did Roman rule affect the way people lived in Palestine at the time of Jesus?

Take feedback and conclude by reviewing Junior Certificate RE syllabus Section B Part 1 the historical background to life in Palestine at the time of Jesus.

Video: Masada

Group Work:      Divide students into three groups to research the impact of Roman rule on the political, social and religious systems in Palestine at the time of Jesus.

Give each group one of the following cards.

Give each group time to research and identify supporting evidence for the statement that is written on their card and to present their finding to the rest of the class.

## Group Cards:

### POLITICAL SYSTEM

Rome stood for political order in Palestine at the time of Jesus. It was a foreign power and most people felt helpless in the face of this power, with inevitable feelings of hatred. Jesus refers to one incident when there was a clash in the temple in which some Galileans were killed by Roman soldiers (Luke 13:1-5).

### SOCIAL SYSTEM

The Herodian dynasty had been very unpopular. There was much corruption among the Roman administration. Taxes were a source of disagreement. All of this led to much social unrest in Palestine at the time of Jesus. The people of Israel resented being ruled by others when they believed they were God's chosen people.

### RELIGIOUS SYSTEM

Judaism as practised in Jesus' day included temple, sacrifices, pilgrimage, offerings from the land, prayers, observance of the law, Sabbath, circumcision, messianic hopes for the future etc. Although there were good and devoted religious teachers, many religious authorities of the day had become quite secularised, furthering their own ambitions by subservience to the Roman power.

Write the heading "Palestine at the time of Jesus" on the chalkboard and divide into three sections with one of the following sub-headings in each: "political system", "social system" and "religious system".

When each group has completed their research they are asked to present their finding to the rest of the class. After each presentation discuss:

What was the impact of Roman rule on the political / social / religious system?

Note feedback from students on the chalkboard and conclude by emphasising how the time of Jesus was one of intense transition and crisis that had an affect on the political, social and religious life in Palestine at the time of Jesus.

### Outcomes:

- identify one way in which Roman rule impacted on each of the following:
  - the political system in Palestine at the time of Jesus
  - the social system in Palestine at the time of Jesus
  - the religious system in Palestine at the time of Jesus
- briefly outline the responses of the following groups to Roman rule: Zealots; Sadducees; Pharisees; Essenes.

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## Topic: 2.2 Evidence for Jesus of Nazareth

### Procedure

**Description of content:** *religious / secular sources of evidence for Jesus*

Review Junior Certificate RE syllabus Section B Part 2 sources of evidence for Jesus with reference to the evangelists and Josephus as well as the writing of St. Paul.

*Read handout / overhead:* SECULAR SOURCES OF EVIDENCE FOR JESUS

#### Pliny the Younger

He was appointed imperial legate of the Roman province of Bithynia in northwest Asia Minor in 111 A.D. In one of his letters to the Roman Emperor, Trajan, he advises the emperor how he ought to treat the rapidly expanding religious group known as 'Christians'.

#### Tacitus

He was a Roman historian, wrote in his *Annals* of the great fire that swept through the city of Rome in 64 AD. He tells how the Emperor Nero who was generally believed to have started the fire, falsified a charge of fire-raising against the Christians in Rome. He says Christians got their name from Christ who was executed by the procurator Pontius Pilate in the reign of Tiberius.

### Written Assignment:

What key points about Jesus of Nazareth are made in the statements of Pliny and Tacitus?

**Description of content:** *evaluating the evidence.*

Write the heading “Sources of evidence for Jesus” on the chalkboard and divide into three sections with one of the following sub-headings in each: “primary”, “secondary” and “authoritative”.

Brainstorm the students understanding of the terms “primary”, “secondary” and “authoritative”.

Present students with the following cards:

Gospel of Mark	Gospel of Luke	Gospel of Matthew	Gospel of John
Letters of St. Paul	Josephus	Pliny the Younger	Tacitus

**Assignment:** Place each card under one or more of the above headings and say why you would place it there.

**Outcomes:**

- outline the key points in the religious evidence for Jesus from two of the following: any two of the evangelists; Paul; Josephus
- outline the key points in the secular evidence for Jesus from Tacitus and Pliny the Younger
- evaluate the evidence according to the following criteria:
  - primary or secondary source
  - authoritative source.

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**Topic:** 2.3 *The teachings of Jesus and their impact on the community*

**Procedure**

**Description of content:** *Jewish understanding of the Kingdom of God at the time of Jesus*

Read the following statement:

“The reign of God is the situation that results when God’s will is really done. What is God’s will? As revealed in Jesus, God’s will is our well-being. God wants the wholeness, the healing, and the salvation of every creature and of all of us taken together. The reign of God, then, involves justice and peace among everyone, healing and wholeness everywhere, fullness of life enjoyed by all....”

- Elizabeth Johnson (1990) *Consider Jesus* London: Geoffrey Chapman p. 52.

**Discuss:** What might the Kingdom (reign) of God looks like in Ireland today?

What was the Jewish understanding of the Kingdom of God at the time of Jesus?

Take feedback and conclude that the expression ‘kingdom of God’ had its roots in the early political history of Israel. The people of Israel believed that since God was transcendent, created everything and sustained the Jewish nation, he was the one and only king of Israel. But as time went on they felt they needed an earthly king who would rule them with God’s justice and be his representative among the people. King David was the very best of Israel’s kings, but even he had his shortcomings. Around David’s time there was a belief that one day a son of David would be raised up who would let God rule and bring God’s peace to the land. At the time of Jesus the rabbis taught the people that they ought to live as though the Kingdom of God had already come so that their quality of life would change.

**Description of content:** *characteristics of the Kingdom of God as preached by Jesus*

- *peace as the alternative to violence*
- *inclusion as the alternative to the emergence of elites*
- *sharing of goods as the alternative to amassing of wealth*
- *a God of the powerless as the alternative to a God who sanctions inequalities*

Review Junior Certificate RE syllabus Section B Part 3 with reference to the characteristics of the Kingdom of God in the words and actions of Jesus.

*Group work / Scripture Assignment:*

Divide students into four groups and distribute work cards.

Give each group one of the above characteristics of the Kingdom of God to research the Gospels for an example of Jesus' preaching on it and set out its main points.

*Scripture Assignment - Work Cards:*

PEACE AS THE ALTERNATIVE  
TO VIOLENCE

INCLUSION AS THE ALTERNATIVE TO  
THE EMERGENCE OF ELITES

<p><i>Group 1 Task:</i> Find an example of Jesus' preaching on this characteristic of the Kingdom of God and set out its main points. <i>Research:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Matthew 5:9, 43-44; 7:9-10; 11:25-27.</li> <li>• Luke 11:11-12.</li> <li>• Etc.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Group 2 Task:</i> Find an example of Jesus' preaching on this characteristic of the Kingdom of God and set out its main points. <i>Research:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Matthew 6:30-44; 9:12; 14:13-20; 22:1-14; 12:27.</li> <li>• Luke 9:10-17; 10:18; 14:15-24; 15</li> <li>• John 6:1-15.</li> <li>• Etc.</li> </ul>
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SHARING OF GOODS AS THE ALTERNATIVE TO  
AMASSING OF WEALTH

A GOD OF THE POWERLESS AS THE ALTERNATIVE TO A  
GOD WHO SANCTIONS INEQUALITIES

<p><i>Group 3 Task:</i> Find an example of Jesus' preaching on this characteristic of the Kingdom of God and set out its main points. <i>Research:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Matthew 5:23-24; 6:1-8, 25-34; 7: 7-11; 25:31-46</li> <li>• Mark 12:28-34;</li> <li>• John 13:34; 15:12-13; 17</li> <li>• Luke 6: 20, 30, 38; 10:29-37; 15:11-32.</li> <li>• Etc.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Group 4 Task:</i> Find an example of Jesus' preaching on this characteristic of the Kingdom of God and set out its main points. <i>Research:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Matthew 19:3-9; 23:8-12; 27:55</li> <li>• John 4. 8:3-11; 13: 14, 35; 19:25; 20:11-18.</li> <li>• Mark 10:42-44</li> <li>• Luke 7:36-50; 8:1-3</li> <li>• Etc.</li> </ul>
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When each group has completed their research they are asked to present their finding to the rest of the class. After each presentation discuss:

What are the main points in this characteristic of the Kingdom of God?

What example are there of Jesus' preaching on it?

Note feedback from students on the chalkboard and conclude by emphasising -

*Peace as the alternative to violence*

- The Kingdom is centred on God the Father who forgives sinners and frees the poor e.g. Mt 11:25-27
- Jesus calls on the 'Father' (Abba) proposing an image of God as loving parent. The focus of the mission he receives from the Father is to bring God's peace to the world i.e. Jewish notion of Shalom meaning the perfection of fulfilment in every sense e.g. Matthew 5:9; 7:9-10; Luke 11:11-12

*Inclusion as the alternative to the emergence of elites*

- It is because Jesus himself experiences the sustaining, merciful, compassionate and liberating aspects of the Father ('Abba') that he goes out to the poor, the afflicted, the hungry saying: 'God is near you, he saves you, he frees you'. e.g. Matthew 9:12; 22:1-14; 12:27 Luke 10:18; 14:15-24; 15

- These signs of the Kingdom are linked to the ‘New Exodus’. Just as God intervened in Egypt to free his people from slavery, now through word and deed, Jesus is freeing people from all forms of slavery e.g. Matthew 6:30-44; Mt 14:13-20; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-15.

*Sharing of goods as the alternative to amassing of wealth*

- The relationship with God is to be one of a child before a loving Father, putting God first in one’s life and following Jesus’ radical demands e.g. Matthew 6:1-8, 25-34; 7: 7-11.
- Jesus takes up the ‘Shema’ prayer of love of God alone (Deut 6:4) and links it with another commandment, that of love of neighbour (Lev 19:18) e.g. Matthew 5:23-24; 25:31-46. Mark 12:28-34 John 13:34; 15:12-13.17. Luke 10:29-37; 15:11-32
- Jesus proposed a culture of sharing as opposed to amassing of wealth e.g. Luke 6: 20, 30, 38

*A God of the powerless as the alternative to a God who sanctions inequalities*

- In the new community that begins with Jesus the relationship between men and women is one of mutuality and equality e.g. John 13:35.
- If Jesus serves and washes the feet of his disciples, they too are to serve one another e.g. John 13:14

*Written Assignment:*

- Outline four characteristics of the Kingdom of God as preached by Jesus.
- Jesus spoke in parables about God’s kingdom. Pick one example from the preaching of Jesus and explain how it shows an aspect of Jesus’ understanding of the kingdom.
- Pick any *two* of the following statements of Jesus and comment on its relevance to modern society:
  - ‘Blessed are the peace-makers’
  - ‘Love your enemies’
  - ‘Sell your possessions, give to the poor and come follow me’
  - If somebody strikes you on the right cheek, turn also to him the other’.
- Matthew has collected the teaching of Jesus in the Beatitudes (chapters 5-7 of Matthew’s Gospel). Write an essay highlighting what you think are the central moral insights of this teaching.

*Outcomes:*

- Outline the Jewish understanding of the Kingdom of God at the time of Jesus
- Outline four key characteristics of the Kingdom of God as preached by Jesus
- Provide an example of each of these characteristics from the preaching of Jesus

*Topic: 2.4 Jesus as messiah (Higher Level only)*

*Procedure*

**Description of content: different expectations of messiah at the time of Jesus**

Review Junior Certificate RE syllabus Section B Part 5 with reference to the meaning attached to the title Messiah for Jesus.

*Or*

Write the statement “Jesus as messiah” on the chalkboard and brainstorm students as to the meaning of this statement.

Take feedback and clarify if necessary that the title ‘Messiah’ means ‘Anointed One’. People at the time of Jesus expected the Messiah to be priestly, davidic and prophetic.

Assignment: Match the following descriptions with the expectations of the Messiah outlined below.

◆ Davidic ◆ Priestly ◆ Prophetic

One match has been completed as an example for you. Make two other matches.

Prophetic =            **A**  
                               =            **B**  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
                               =            **C**  
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### EXPECTATIONS OF THE MESSIAH

<b>A</b>	Such a person was usually understood as an authoritative messenger and spokesperson for God. The people expected this person to be powerful like Moses who led the people out of slavery and into freedom
<b>B</b>	Such a person was expected to be a descendant of a king who was regarded as the founder of the Israelite monarchy and people at the time of Jesus expected a second such king to intervene in their difficult socio-political situation.
<b>C</b>	Such a person was associated with Aaron and the tribe of Levi in the Old Testament. They were seen as the mediators for entrance into the sphere of the divine. People at the time of Jesus expected such a person would help re-establish God's kingdom.

Take feedback and clarify if necessary that Prophetic = A; Davidic =B; Priestly =C

**Description of content:**        *the awareness Jesus had of these expectations.*

Discuss:        How did Jesus react to being referred to as the messiah? Why did he react this way?

Take feedback and clarify if necessary that Jesus himself was reluctant to use the title because of the wide range of socio-political expectations that were associated with this title. Jesus would not be the Messiah of popular expectation, but through his life of service, preaching the Kingdom and laying down his life for others, Jesus showed an alternative meaning of the title Messiah.

*Scripture Assignment:*

Find an example of the expectation of the messiah as priestly, davidic or prophetic associated with Jesus.

*Research:* Matthew 1:1-17; Luke 3:23-38; 6:16; 10:31; Mark 8:3; 11:10; Etc.

Note feedback from students on the chalkboard and conclude by emphasising -

- Jesus is understood as a prophet within the long line of prophets that had gone before him...In the eyes of those around him he clearly comes across as a prophet...
- This explains the importance of the genealogies in Matthew and Luke who trace the descent of Jesus back through David

*Outcomes:*

- Briefly explain each of the following expectations of the messiah at the time of Jesus: priestly; Davidic; prophetic
- Provide one piece of evidence from Jesus' words, and one from his actions that shows his awareness of these expectations.