

COURSE STUDY GUIDE

# Before the Bible

## The Didache's Influence on Early Church Policy

Taught by Bishop Andy C. Lewter, D.Min.

Oberlin College • Harvard Divinity School • United Theological Seminary

CHAPTERS

VIDEO LESSONS

INCLUDED

VERSION

### ❖ WELCOME TO THE COURSE

Welcome to one of the most fascinating journeys in Christian history! In this course, you will explore the *Apostolic Didache*—a remarkable document written toward the end of the first century AD that served as the early church's practical manual for worship, ethics, and community life, long before the Bible was formally canonized. Through engaging video lessons, rich study notes, an interactive flipbook, and a full eTextbook, you will gain an understanding of how the earliest Christians organized their faith, conducted their rituals, and built their communities.

### ❖ ABOUT YOUR INSTRUCTOR

This course is taught by **Bishop Andy C. Lewter, D.Min.**, a distinguished theologian, educator, and church historian with a passion for making early Christian scholarship accessible to all believers.

### Academic Credentials

- B.A. — Oberlin College
- M.Div. — Harvard Divinity School
- D.Min. — United Theological Seminary

### Scholarly Achievements

- Author of more than **12 published books**
- Creator of more than **100 online courses**
- Current **Historian** of the Full Gospel Baptist Church Fellowship
- Over 50 years in theological education and ministry

Bishop Lewter's academic journey began at Oberlin College, where he first encountered the Didache under the mentorship of the renowned religion scholar Professor Harry Thomas Frank. That formative experience ignited a lifelong commitment to the study of early Christian literature—a commitment he now shares with students around the world.

## ❖ WHO IS THIS COURSE FOR?

This course is designed for:

- Pastors, bishops, and church leaders seeking deeper historical grounding for their ministry
- Seminary students and theology majors studying early Christian history
- Lay leaders, Sunday school teachers, and Bible study facilitators
- Lifelong learners with a serious interest in the origins of Christian practice
- Members of the Full Gospel Baptist Church Fellowship and affiliated ministries
- Anyone who has ever asked, *"How did the early church function before the Bible?"*

No prior academic training in theology is required. Bishop Lewter's teaching style bridges scholarly rigor and pastoral warmth, making this material both intellectually enriching and spiritually relevant.

## ❖ BENEFITS OF THIS COURSE

By completing this course, you will:

- Gain a **profound understanding** of the Didache and its place in early Christian history
- Discover the **roots of modern church practices**—baptism, Eucharist, fasting, and prayer
- Appreciate how early Christians built **cohesive, resilient communities** without a formal Bible
- Develop **historical awareness** that will inform and enrich your ministry leadership
- Access **scholarly insight** from one of the leading voices in Baptist church history
- Earn continuing education credit that strengthens your **theological credentials**
- Receive a **comprehensive resource library** including eTextbook, flipbook, video lessons, and study notes
- Connect the ancient wisdom of the Didache to the **contemporary challenges** facing the church today

## ❖ WHAT YOU WILL LEARN

This course provides a thorough, chapter-by-chapter exploration of the Didache:

- **The Historical Context of the Didache** — What was the world like when this document was written? Why did early Christians need it?
- **The Didache as a Policy Manual** — How did it function as the governing framework for fledgling Christian communities?
- **Rituals and Practices** — Detailed study of baptism, the Eucharist, fasting, and daily prayer as prescribed in the Didache
- **Moral Teachings and Community Ethics** — The 'Two Ways' framework and its ethical guidelines for Christian living
- **The Didache in the Absence of Scripture** — How oral tradition and texts like the Didache filled the void before the Bible was canonized
- **The Decline of the Didache's Influence** — The historical factors that led to its eventual obsolescence in the fourth century
- **The Didache's Enduring Legacy** — How its teachings shaped later church practices, governance, and Christian literature
- **Modern Relevance and Research Directions** — What the Didache means for church leadership, ethics, and scholarship today

## ❖ HOW THE COURSE IS STRUCTURED

The course is structured to provide multiple learning modalities, ensuring every student can engage with the material in the way that works best for them. Each chapter of the Didache is explored through a combination of video teaching, written study notes, and supplementary resources.

VIDEO LESSONS	STUDY NOTES	COURSE RESOURCES
<p>Each chapter is covered by dedicated video lessons taught by Bishop Lewter. Lessons include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Engaging lecture-style teaching</li><li>• On-screen text highlights</li><li>• Discussion of primary source passages</li><li>• Pastoral application for today's church</li><li>• Q&amp;A; and reflection prompts</li></ul>	<p>Comprehensive written notes accompany every video lesson, providing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Chapter summaries and outlines</li><li>• Key terms and definitions</li><li>• Historical timeline references</li><li>• Reflection and discussion questions</li><li>• Scripture cross-references</li></ul>	<p>Students receive a complete resource library included with enrollment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Full eTextbook: Before the Bible</li><li>• Interactive Flipbook edition</li><li>• Chapter review quizzes</li><li>• Downloadable note-taking templates</li><li>• Recommended reading list</li></ul>

❖ **INCLUDED: eTEXTBOOK & INTERACTIVE FLIPBOOK**

Every enrolled student receives **full access to two digital formats** of the course textbook, *Before the Bible: The Didache's Influence on Early Church Policy*, authored by Bishop Andy C. Lewter, D.Min.:

### eTextbook

The complete digital textbook is included as a downloadable eTextbook, allowing students to read, highlight, and reference the full text at any time—on any device. The eTextbook mirrors the print edition and serves as the primary reading companion for all video lessons and study notes.

### Interactive Flipbook

The course also includes an interactive **flipbook version** of the textbook—a dynamic, page-turning digital experience that brings the text to life. The flipbook is ideal for online reading, visually engaging presentations, and sharing within church or study group settings. It provides a rich, immersive reading experience directly within the course platform.

# ❖ CHAPTER-BY-CHAPTER COURSE OUTLINE

## Chapter 1

### Introduction to the Didache

Explore the historical context, authorship, dating, and purpose of the Didache. Understand why this first-century document was essential for the early Christian community.

## Chapter 2

### The Didache as a Policy Manual for the Early Church

Examine the structure, content, and key themes of the Didache as a governing framework. Discover how it shaped church governance, leadership roles, and community accountability.

## Chapter 3

### Rituals and Practices in the Didache

A deep dive into the Didache's instructions for baptism, the Eucharist, fasting, and prayer—and what these rituals reveal about early Christian identity and worship.

## Chapter 4

### Moral Teachings and Community Ethics

Study the 'Two Ways' framework—the Way of Life vs. the Way of Death—and the Didache's ethical instructions on love, charity, honesty, and communal responsibility.

## Chapter 5

### The Didache in the Absence of Canonical Scriptures

Understand how the Didache functioned as the primary guide for faith and practice before the New Testament was canonized. Explore the role of oral tradition and how the Didache compared with other early writings.

## Chapter 6

### The Decline of the Didache's Influence

Trace the historical factors—rise of the New Testament canon, theological development, evolving local practices, and emerging ecclesiastical hierarchy—that led to the Didache's gradual obsolescence.

## Chapter 7

### The Legacy of the Didache

Discover how the Didache's influence persisted in later church practices, Christian literature, and theological discussions—even after its formal use ceased.

## Chapter 8

### Conclusion: The Didache's Enduring Significance

Synthesize key findings from across the course. Reflect on the Didache's modern relevance for church governance, ethics, worship, and the ongoing study of early Christianity.

## ❖ KEY REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Use these questions to deepen your engagement with each chapter:

- How does the Didache challenge or deepen your understanding of the practices in your own church community?
- In what ways did the early church demonstrate resilience and adaptability in the absence of a formal Bible canon?
- How might the 'Two Ways' moral framework of the Didache apply to ethical decision-making in ministry today?
- What does the Didache's approach to community organization reveal about the nature of Christian leadership?
- Why is it important for contemporary church leaders to understand documents like the Didache that predate the Bible?

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