

# Introduction to the New Testament

The New Testament is a record of historical events, the ‘good news’ events of the saving life of the Lord Jesus Christ—His life, death, resurrection, ascension, and the continuation of His work in the world—which is explained and applied by the apostles whom He chose and sent into the world. It is also the fulfillment of those events long anticipated by the Old Testament. Further, it is sacred history, which, unlike secular history, was written under the supernatural guidance of the Holy Spirit. This means it, like the Old Testament, is protected from human error and possesses divine authority for the church today and throughout human history until the Lord Himself returns.

## Origin and Meaning of the Term “New Testament”

Our Bible is divided into two sections we call the Old Testament and the New Testament, but exactly what does that mean? The Greek word for “testament,” *διαθηκη* (Latin, *testamentum*), means “will, testament, or covenant.” But as used in connection with the New Testament “Covenant” is the best translation. As such, it refers to a new arrangement made by one party into which others could enter if they accepted the covenant. As used of God’s covenants, it designates a new relationship into which men may be received by God. The Old Testament or Covenant is primarily a record of God’s dealings with the Israelites on the basis of the Mosaic Covenant given at Mount Sinai. On the other hand, the New Testament or Covenant (anticipated in [Jeremiah 31:31](#) and instituted by the Lord Jesus, [1 Cor. 11:25](#)), describes the new arrangement of God with men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation who will accept salvation on the basis of faith in Christ.

The old covenant revealed the holiness of God in the righteous standard of the law and promised a coming Redeemer; the new covenant shows the holiness of God in His righteous Son. The New Testament, then, contains those writings that reveal the content of this new covenant.

The message of the New Testament centers on (1) the Person who gave Himself for the remission of sins ([Matt. 26:28](#)) and (2) the people (the church) who have received His salvation. Thus the central theme of the New Testament is salvation.<sup>2</sup>

The names *Old* and *New Covenants* were thus applied first to the two relationships into which God entered with men, and then, to the books that contained the record of these two relationships. “The New Testament is the divine treaty by the terms of which God has received us rebels and enemies into peace with himself.”<sup>3</sup>

## Divine Preparation for the New Testament

In the time of the New Testament, Rome was the dominant world power and ruled over most of the ancient world. Yet in a small town in Palestine, Bethlehem of Judea, was born one who would change the world. Concerning this Person, the apostle Paul wrote, “But when the fulness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law (i.e., the Old Covenant).” In several special and wonderful ways, God had prepared the world for the coming of Messiah. Several factors contributed to this preparation.

### 1. PREPARATION THROUGH THE JEWISH NATION

The preparation for the coming of Christ is the story of the Old Testament. The Jews were chosen of God from all the nations to be a treasured possession as a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation ([Ex. 1:5-6](#)). In that regard, beginning with the promises of God given to the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob ([Gen. 12:1-3](#); [Rom. 9:4](#)), they were to be the custodians of God’s Word (the Old Testament [[Rom. 3:2](#)]), and the channel of the

Redeemer ([Gen. 12:3](#); [Gal. 3:8](#); [Rom. 9:5](#)). The Old Testament, therefore, was full of Christ and anticipated His coming as a suffering and glorified Savior. Furthermore, these prophecies were not only many, but very precise giving details of Messiah's lineage, place of birth, conditions around the time of His birth, life, death, and even His resurrection.

Though Israel was disobedient and was taken into captivity as God's judgment on her hardness of heart, God nevertheless brought a remnant back to their homeland after seventy years, as He had promised in preparation for the coming of the Messiah. Though four hundred years had passed after the writing of the last Old Testament book, and though the religious climate was one of Pharisaic externalism and hypocrisy, there was a spirit of Messianic anticipation in the air and a remnant was looking for the Messiah.

## 1. PREPARATION THROUGH THE GREEK LANGUAGE

It is highly significant that when Christ, the one who came to be the Savior of the world and the one who would send His disciples out to the ends of the earth to proclaim the gospel ([Matt. 28:19-20](#)), there was what A. T. Robertson called, "a world speech."<sup>4</sup> This was the result of the conquests and aspirations of Alexander the Great, the son of King Philip of Macedon, who more than 300 years before the birth of Christ, swept across the ancient world conquering one nation after another. His desire was one world and one language. In the aftermath of his victories, he established the Greek language as the *lingua franca*, the common tongue, and the Greek culture as the pattern of thought and life. Though his empire was short lived, the result of spreading the Greek language endured.

It is significant that the Greek speech becomes one instead of many dialects at the very time that the Roman rule sweeps over the world. The language spread by Alexander's army over the Eastern world persisted after the division of the kingdom and penetrated all parts of the Roman world, even Rome itself. Paul wrote the church at Rome in Greek, and Marcus Aurelius, the Roman Emperor, wrote his *Meditations* ... in Greek. It was the language not only of letters, but of commerce and every-day life.<sup>5</sup>

The point here is that God was at work preparing the world for a common language and one that was a matchless vehicle of communication for clarity and preciseness to proclaim the message of the Savior. As a result, the books of the New Testament were written in the common language of the day, *Koine* Greek. It was not written in Hebrew or Aramaic, even though all the writers of the New Testament were Jews except for Luke, who was a Gentile. Koine Greek had become the second language of nearly everyone.

## 1. PREPARATION THROUGH THE ROMANS

But God was not finished preparing the world for the coming Savior of the world. When Christ was born in Palestine, Rome ruled the world. Palestine was under Roman rule. Above all else, Rome was noted for her insistence upon law and order. The longest, bloodiest civil war in Rome's history had finally ended with the reign of Augustus Caesar. As a result, over 100 years of civil war had been brought to rest and Rome had vastly extended her boundaries. Further, the Romans built a system of roads, which, with the protection provided by her army that often patrolled the roads, contributed greatly to the measure of ease and safety by which travelers could make their way back and forth across the Roman empire. Augustus was the first Roman to wear the imperial purple and crown as the sole ruler of the empire. He was a moderate, wise and considerate of his people, and he brought in a great time of peace and prosperity, making Rome a safe place to live and travel. This introduced a period called "Pax Romana," the peace of Rome (27 B.C.– A.D. 180). Now, because of all that Augustus accomplished, many said that when he was born, a god was born. It was into these conditions One was born who was and is truly the source of true personal peace and lasting world peace, versus the temporary and false peace which men can give—no matter how wise or good or outstanding. He also was truly God, the God-Man, instead of a man called God. The presence of Roman rule and law helped to prepare the world for his life and ministry so the gospel could be preached.

[Mark 1:14-15](#). And after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."

## The Religious World at the Time of the New Testament

Before surveying the New Testament, it would also be well to get a general picture of what the religious world was like when the Savior came on the scene and when the church was sent out into the world. As you read the quote by Merrill Tenney, note the great similarity to our world today. The message of the Savior as revealed in the New Testament is like a breath of fresh air after being in a smoke filled room.

The Christian church was born into a world filled with competing religions which may have differed widely among themselves but all of which possessed one common characteristic—the struggle to reach a god or gods who remained essentially inaccessible. Apart from Judaism, which taught that God had voluntarily disclosed Himself to the patriarchs, to Moses, and to the prophets, there was no faith that could speak with certainty of divine revelation nor of any true concept of sin and salvation. The current ethical standards were superficial, despite the ideal and insights possessed by some philosophers, and when they discoursed on evil and on virtue, they had neither the remedy for the one nor the dynamic to produce the other.

Even in Judaism revealed truth had been obscured either by the encrustation of traditions or by neglect ...

Paganism and all religions apart from knowledge and faith in God's Word always produces a parody and a perversion of God's original revelation to man. It retains many basic elements of truth but twists them into practical falsehood. Divine sovereignty becomes fatalism; grace becomes indulgence; righteousness becomes conformity to arbitrary rules; worship becomes empty ritual; prayer becomes selfish begging; the supernatural degenerates into superstition. The light of God is clouded by fanciful legend and by downright falsehood. The consequent confusion of beliefs and of values left men wandering in a maze of uncertainties. To some, expediency became the dominating philosophy of life; for if there can be no ultimate certainty, there can be no permanent principles by which to guide conduct; and if there are no permanent principles, one must live as well as he can by the advantage of the

moment. Skepticism prevailed, for the old gods had lost their power and no new gods had appeared. Numerous novel cults invaded the empire from every quarter and became the fads of the dilettante rich or the refuge of the desperate poor. Men had largely lost the sense of joy and of destiny that made human life worthwhile.<sup>6</sup>

## Composition and Arrangement of the New Testament

The New Testament is composed of twenty-seven books written by nine different authors. Based on their literary characteristics, they are often classified into three major groups —

1. **1. The historical** (five books, the Gospels and Acts)
2. **The epistolary** (21 books, Romans through Jude)
3. **The prophetic** (one book, Revelation).

The following two charts illustrate the division and focus of this threefold classification of the New Testament books.<sup>7</sup>

New Testament Books						
History	Letters					Prophecy
Matthew	Paul's				General	Revelation
	Early during missionary journeys	Later after arrest at Jerusalem			James	
Mark					Hebrews	
Luke	Galatians	First imprisonment	Release	Second imprisonment	Jude	
John	1 Thess. 2 Thess.	Colossians	1 Timothy Titus	2 Timothy	1 Peter 2 Peter	
	1 Cor. 2 Cor.	Ephesians Philemon			1 John 2 John 3 John	
Acts	Romans	Philippians				

1. An Overview as to Focus		
<b>Historical</b>	<b>The Gospels:</b>  Matthew, Mark, Luke, John	<b>1. Manifestation:</b>  <i>Telling the story of the coming of the Savior and His person and work.</i>
1.	<b>Acts</b>  The Acts of the Holy Spirit through the apostles	<b>1. Propagation:</b>  <i>Proclaiming the message of the Savior who has come.</i>

<b>Epistolary</b>	<b>Epistles:</b>  Letters to churches and individuals.  Romans through Jude	<b>1. Explanation:</b>  <i>Developing the full significance of the person and work of Christ and how this should affect the walk of the Christian in the world.</i>
<b>Prophetical</b>	<b>Revelation</b>  The apocalypse of the Lord Jesus Christ	<b>1. Consummation:</b>  <i>Anticipating the end time events and the return of the Lord, His end time reign, and the eternal state.</i>

## The Order of the Books of the New Testament

As seen in the previous classification, the order of the New Testament books is logical rather than chronological. As Ryrie explains,

First come the Gospels, which record the life of Christ; then Acts, which gives the history of the spread of Christianity; then the letters, which show the development of the doctrines of the church along with its problems; and finally the vision of the second coming of Christ in Revelation.<sup>8</sup>

Though Bible scholars differ on the exact date when the books of the New Testament were written, the order of the writing of the books was approximately as follows:

1. Book	1. Date (A.D.)	1. Book	1. Date (A.D.)
James	45-49	Philippians, Philemon	1. 63
Galatians	49		63-64
1 & 2 Thessalonians	51	1 Peter	63-66
	50s or 60s	1 Timothy	63-66
Mark		Titus	63-66
	50s or 60s		64-68
Matthew		Hebrews	
	55		66
1 Corinthians		2 Peter	
	56		67
2 Corinthians		2 Timothy	
	57-58		68-80
Romans		Jude	
	60		85-90
Luke		John	
	61		85-90
Acts		1, 2, 3 John	
	61		90-95
Colossians, Ephesians		Revelation	

## The Collection of the Books of the New Testament

Originally, the books of the New Testament were separately circulated and only gradually collected together to form what we now know as the New Testament part of the canon of Scripture. By preservation of God, our twenty-seven New Testament books were set apart from many other writings during

the early church. They were preserved as a part of the New Testament canon because of their inspiration and apostolic authority. Ryrie has an excellent summary of this process:

After they were written, the individual books were not immediately gathered together into the canon, or collection of twenty-seven that comprise the New Testament. Groups of books like Paul's letters and the Gospels were preserved at first by the churches or people to whom they were sent, and gradually all twenty-seven books were collected and formally acknowledged by the church as a whole.

This process took about 350 years. In the second century the circulation of books that promoted heresy accentuated the need for distinguishing valid Scripture from other Christian literature. Certain tests were developed to determine which books should be included. (1) Was the book written or approved by an apostle? (2) Were its contents of a spiritual nature? (3) Did it give evidence of being inspired by God? (4) Was it widely received by the churches?

Not all of the twenty-seven books that were eventually recognized as canonical were accepted by all the churches in the early centuries, but this does not mean that those that were not immediately or universally accepted were spurious. Letters addressed to individuals (Philemon, 2 and 3 John) would not have been circulated as widely as those sent to churches. The books most disputed were James, Jude, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, and Philemon, but ultimately these were included, and the canon was certified at the Council of Carthage in A.D. 397.

Although no original copy of any of the writings that comprise the New Testament has survived, there exist more than 4,500 Greek manuscripts of all or part of the text, plus some 8,000 Latin manuscripts and at least 1,000 other versions into which the original books were translated. Careful study and comparison of these many copies has given us an accurate and trustworthy New Testament.



# **New Testament Survey Instructions**

To complete the following lessons please read the following material and then fill out the work sheets that follow. There are no videos for this section the answers are all in the reading material.