

study two

SURVEY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

BIBLE INSTITUTE

study two survey of the new testament

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QUICK HISTORY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

[persia]

1. At the close of the Old Testament, the major world power was Persia (what is now Iran). It was under Persian rule that Israel was allowed to return home and rebuild its country about 458 B.C.
2. Persia became weak from quick expansion and bitter infighting and soon disappeared as a world power about 324 B.C.

[greece (macedonia)]

1. Philip II united all of the independent Greek city-states and created an empire. When he died, his son, Alexander the Great became **King** about 336 B.C.
2. Alexander the Great had a massive army, and in less than 15 years, he conquered nearly all the known world. In order to control his new lands, he imposed his culture upon the conquered countries. This process was called **Hellenism**. The changes consisted mainly of language, holidays, customs and worship of Greek gods.
3. Alexander died at a young age (33). His vast empire was divided into five parts, one for each of his generals. Only two of the empires concern us as we seek to better **understand** the New Testament.

[ptolemaic and seleucid empires]

1. The Ptolemaic Empire was south of Israel, in Egypt. The Seleucid Empire was north of Israel, in **Syria** and Babylon (what is now Iraq).
2. Both of these empires fought against each other, and often the battleground was **Israel**.
3. Both kingdoms continued Hellenism in their lands. In Israel, the Seleucids went so far as to **outlaw** Jewish practices, persecute the Jews, and desecrate the Temple.
4. The nation of Israel eventually revolted against the Seleucids and won back its **independence**. (circa 168 B.C. to 37 B.C.) However, because of internal struggles, it was ripe for conquest by the up-and-coming power of Rome.

[roman empire]

1. After **defeating** several of her enemies, Pompey, a Roman general, took control of Israel (also called Palestine) in 63 B.C. Not until 1948 would Israel regain its political independence.
2. Rome stopped its expansion and turned to a period of peace. This was called the Pax Romana. Rome had very few internal struggles. Civilization developed quickly through many **advancements**.

Key Note: One of the advancements was the construction of the famous “Roman Roads,” which connected the entire Empire. Although there were few Roman Roads in Israel, they would become extremely helpful for the Apostle Paul, and others, as they spread the Gospel to the world.

3. In Israel, Rome allowed native vassals, or kings, to rule. The first was Herod the Great (ruled 37 B.C. to 4 A.D.), a person from Edom. He was **ruthless** and cruel. (How cruel? He killed two of his wives and three of his sons.)

4. Life in Israel was very difficult under Roman rule. But it was at least **peaceful**. (Note: Except for the Zealots, which are mentioned later.)

[wrap-up and quick review]

After Jewish exile in Babylon

- The Jews return and rebuild their nation
- Alexander the Great takes control over Palestine (Israel)
- Ptolemies take control over Palestine
- Seleucids take control over Palestine
- Jews revolt against the Seleucids
- Jews win independence
- Rome takes control of Palestine
- Jews revolt and lose
- Roman rule was difficult for the Israelites

Understanding the historical background makes reading the Bible easier and more interesting. It’s like turning a black and white image into full color.

THE CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS SETTING

[hellenism]

1. The spread of Greek culture, philosophy, language, and style that began with Alexander the Great continued through the **Roman** period.

2. Alexander spread Hellenism to make his rule manageable. Imposing his Greek culture on others made it possible for him to govern such a huge **empire**. (And it later benefited the Romans when they conquered the world.)

3. Greek influence spread across the entire spectrum of human society: from “surface” areas like clothes and language to “deep” areas like **religion** and philosophy.

For many conquered people groups, Hellenism was an enlightenment compared to their own culture. The Greeks were very advanced in scholarship, art, and medicine.

For some, like the Jews, it was an imposition and a curse. Immorality was also characteristic of Hellenism.

4. Here lies the problem for the Jews. Hellenism became a huge **dividing** factor for the once unified people who sought to follow the Old Covenant.

Some Jews accepted and desired Hellenism, others **rejected** and fought against it.

[judaism]

1. By the time of the New Testament, the Jewish faith was far **different** than 400 years prior (during the time of the prophets).
2. The exile and utter defeat of the Jewish nation (fall of Samaria and Jerusalem) took many Jews out of their **homeland**. When Jesus walked the earth, more Jews lived outside of Israel than inside.
3. Without the temple in which to worship God, the Jews had to find new ways to worship and keep their **identity** as a people. Two major developments occurred:
 - (a) Learning and **studying** the Torah became the highest “calling” for a Jew.
 - (b) The “Synagogue” was created and became the place to worship, instead of the Temple. For worship, animal sacrifices were replaced by **learning**.
4. Without these developments, the culture and beliefs of the Jewish people could have been lost to **history**. These changes ensured the survival of Jewish culture and identity.

[pharisees]

1. The Pharisees accepted the whole Old Testament, but also added **oral** tradition as equally authoritative. They were fairly liberal in their understanding and interpretation of Scripture.
2. Most Pharisees were either rich or financially comfortable. Their goal was to bring their interpretation of the Word of God to the **people**.
3. Pharisees did not practice a temple-focused religion (with the endless animal sacrifices). Instead, they tried to move Jewish practices into the **home**.
4. Pharisees emphasized moral and ethical codes rather than theology or a **heart** turned toward God.
5. Pharisees believed in angels and in life after **death**.
6. Pharisees viewed the Roman government as acceptable, as long as it didn't put constraints on Jewish **practices**.

[essenes]

1. The Essenes lived in extreme separation from society. They had a very low opinion of women, and therefore, married rarely. They followed a very, very strict observance of the **Sabbath**. Initiation for those wanting to join this sect took three years. They lived communally, sharing everything.
2. The Essenes rejected everyone but themselves: The Romans and the Jews were unclean and impure. They considered themselves the **true** Israel.
3. The Essenes accepted the whole Old Testament as Scripture along with some of their own writings. They had an extensive **angel** theology.
4. The Essenes are not directly mentioned in the New Testament.

[sadducees]

1. The Sadducees were made up of mostly upper-class Priests and held a significant amount of **political** power in Israel.
2. The Sadducees had a very narrow acceptance of Scripture, rejecting the moral law of the Pharisees, the prophets, and other historical or poetic writings. Only the **five books** of Moses were accepted.
3. The Sadducees had a very wide view of politics. They were mostly accepting, even **supportive**, of Roman rule.
4. The Sadducees did not believe in the active role of the Holy Spirit. They did not believe in angels or the **resurrection** of the dead.
5. The Sadducees affirmed the temple cult (Levitical purity and sacrifices), but held a **distant** view of God, believing He was disinterested in human affairs.

[zealots]

1. These people had a minimal religious agenda. They were loyal patriots to the Jewish state and **traditions**.
2. They were completely opposed to all forms of Roman (or any foreign) rule. They did not agree on paying tribute to Caesar, or using the **Greek** language.
3. Their major goal was political **independence** from Rome.

Christ interacted with all kinds of people. The better we understand them, the better we will understand his message.

STRUCTURE OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

[gospels and acts]

1. Each of the four Gospels provide different and complementary pictures of Jesus' life, ministry, and **teaching**.
2. The book of Acts records the **history** of the early church, and the spread of the Gospel from Jerusalem to Rome.
3. The books of this division are:
 - Matthew
 - Mark
 - Luke
 - John
 - Acts

[pauline letters]

1. Nearly all of Paul's letters were written for a **specific** occasion and purpose.
2. None of the Pauline letters is a complete "textbook" for theology. They are Paul's application of theology to the **real life** situations either the church or individuals were going through.
3. The books of this division are:
 - Romans
 - 1 and 2 Corinthians
 - Galatians
 - Ephesians
 - Philippians
 - Colossians
 - 1 and 2 Thessalonians
 - 1 and 2 Timothy
 - Titus
 - Philemon

[general letters]

1. These letters were written by different Apostles to encourage, instruct, and guide **believers**.
2. The books of this division are:
 - Hebrews
 - James
 - 1 and 2 Peter
 - 1, 2 and 3 John
 - Jude

[revelation]

1. This book records John's visions of the **end times**.

CONTENT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT BOOKS

[matthew]

1. The author was Matthew, a tax collector Jesus called to be one of his **disciples** (see Matthew 9:9).
2. This book is clearly written for **Jewish** readers. Not only does this Gospel contain the most Old Testament quotations, but the author also uses Hebrew terms when the other Gospels use Greek equivalents. (For example, it uses "Rabbi" instead of "teacher").
3. Matthew highlights Jesus' relationship to the Jewish faith: Jesus fulfilled every law and **prophecy** in the Old Testament. He also came to challenge the Jews for their unfaithfulness.
4. Matthew shows Jesus as the Master **teacher**.

[mark]

1. The author of the second Gospel is John Mark, a close companion of the famous disciple, **Peter**. He was a young man when Jesus started his public ministry. His house was probably a meeting place for believers (Acts 12:12). He was likely associated with Jesus' ministry (see Mark 14:51-52).
2. This Gospel account was intended for the church in Rome (Gentile readers). Mark explains Jewish customs and seems to show an interest in **persecution** and martyrdom.
3. Mark shows Jesus as a man of **action**: Jesus is always on the go and never in one place for long. Romans understood and admired men of action.

[luke]

1. The author of the third Gospel is Luke, a **Gentile** physician who was a close associate of the Apostle Paul.
2. This book is addressed to a specific person, to "most excellent Theophilus" (Luke 1:3). Theophilus was probably a Roman official of some sort, who was most likely going to make sure Luke's works (Luke and Acts) got **distributed**. The purpose of this book is clearly stated in 1:4, "...so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught." (Note: Some scholars say that since Theophilus means "lover of God," that Luke could have been writing to any Gentile Christian).
3. The Gospel of Luke stresses the blessings and salvation Jesus brings to those who believe through grace. No man or woman can **earn** God's blessings.

[john]

1. The fourth Gospel was written by Jesus' **closest** disciple, John.
2. This Gospel was written much later than the other Gospels and is very **different** in content, style, and structure. Its purpose is clear:

But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name (John 20:31).

3. John emphasizes the dual nature and **mystery** of Jesus: God became man.

[acts]

1. The Book of Acts was also written by **Luke** and is a continuation of the third Gospel.
2. Acts records the beginnings of the spread of the early church, which started in Jerusalem and ended up in **Rome**.
3. Acts describes the ministries of Peter and then Paul. Peter was an apostle to the Jews and Paul brought the Gospel to the **Gentiles**.
4. If the Gospels are a testimony about Jesus, then Acts shows the power of the Holy Spirit. It wasn't great men like Peter and Paul (and the rest of the disciples) who spread the Gospel. It was (and still is) the **power** of the Holy Spirit.

[romans]

1. Paul wrote this letter to the church in Rome; which was very likely a Gentile congregation. This letter was a preparation for his first **visit** to this church.

2. Major themes in the book of Romans:
 - (a) sinfulness (or imperfection) of people;
 - (b) justification through faith;
 - (c) sanctification of believers;
 - (d) Israel's unbelief.

JUSTIFICATION:

Made right before God. Justification describes the process a non-believer undergoes when he or she becomes a believer. Believers no longer need to fear judgment from God, as they have been made right (or justified) before him.

SANCTIFICATION:

The holy living of believers. This is a life-long process where a Christian becomes more like Christ.

3. **Key verse:**

I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith" (Romans 1:16-17).

[1 corinthians]

1. Paul wrote this letter to the church in Corinth, which he had **started** earlier in his ministry.
2. This letter is a response to a letter the Corinthians had written to Paul. Paul also addresses reports of **disunity** (along with some other problems) in the church at Corinth.
3. Most of the themes of this book deal with how a Christian is to act:
 - (a) the unity of Christ and his church;
 - (b) how to deal with immoral Christians;
 - (c) public worship and spiritual gifts;
 - (d) the importance of the resurrection.

4. Key verse:

If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith (1 Corinthians 15:13-14).

[2 corinthians]

1. After Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, he made a short “painful visit” to the church in Corinth. His visit was unsuccessful. That is, it did not change them. So he wrote a “sorrowful letter” which was **lost** to the church when the New Testament was put together. After receiving Paul’s “sorrowful letter,” the Corinthians changed their hearts and their actions. When Paul heard this positive response, he wrote what we know as 2 Corinthians.

A Chronology of Paul’s Relationship with the Corinthians

- 1 Corinthians written
- “Painful visit” by Paul
- “Sorrowful letter” written
- Paul hears the good news of their change
- 2 Corinthians written

2. This letter, like any **personal** letter, is especially difficult to analyze. Often it goes off into side issues. Some of the themes are:
 - (a) God’s **comfort** in troubles;
 - (b) the **superiority** of the Gospel over the law;
 - (c) our **confidence** now because of a real future with God.

3. Key verse:

We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body (2 Corinthians 4:8-10).

[galatians]

1. Paul wrote this letter to a **region** of a few churches rather than a single church.
(Most of his letters were meant to be circulated to many churches.)
2. Paul wrote this letter to fight against the problem of “Judaizers.” These were Jewish Christians who made Jewish **customs** (like circumcision) a requirement to be a Christian.
3. What is the problem with this? Judaizers added to the Gospel religious rituals more tied to the Jewish faith. The result being that God’s free gift of salvation still had to be **earned**.
4. Major themes include:
 - (a) the **authority** of the Gospel, and Paul’s ministry;
 - (b) freedom;
 - (c) salvation is by **faith**, not “observing the law”;
 - (d) Christians’ responsibility: **serve** one another in love.

5. Key verse:

I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort (Galatians 3:2-3)?

[ephesians]

1. Paul’s letter to the church in Ephesus was not written as a response to a specific **problem** or heresy.
2. This book emphasizes the church as Christ’s body and the unity and **blessings** all believers share.
3. Some major themes include:
 - (a) all Christians have been **chosen** according to God’s plan;
 - (b) **salvation** by grace, the unity of all believers;
 - (c) Christians’ responsibility: be **imitators** of God;
 - (d) God’s **protection** for our life (God’s armor).

4. Key verse:

Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes (Ephesians 6:11).

[philippians]

1. Philippians is Paul’s letter of joy to the church at Philippi, which was his **favorite** church. Paul wrote this letter from prison to express his joy over the spread of the Gospel in and around the Philippian church.
2. There was a possible threat of Judaizers, as chapter 3:1-6 seems to be speaking against Jewish **legalists**.

3. Major themes include:

- (a) joy and **rejoicing**, even in difficult times;
- (b) the **humility** of Christ;
- (c) the foolishness of **accomplishments** without Christ;
- (d) Christian; responsibility: working out **salvation**.

4. Key verse:

Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel (Philippians 1:27).

[colossians]

1. Paul's letter to the church in Colossae was written to **combat** several varied heresies (defined as: a religious belief opposed to the main doctrines of the church). Colossae had a long history and sat on major trade routes. Thus, it had many different kinds of people living there.

2. These many different people groups meant different **ideas**, religions, and philosophies. This letter was written to argue against the so-called "Colossian Heresy," which was a mix of:

- Jewish legalism (circumcision and food regulations)
- Early Gnosticism (beliefs combining Greek philosophy, Oriental mysticism, and Christian theology)
- Mysticism (worship of angels)

3. Major themes include:

- (a) the supremacy of **Christ**;
- (b) Christ as the **head** of the church;
- (c) Christians are to be **focused** on Christ, not earthly things.

4. Key verse:

See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ (Colossians 2:8).

[1 thessalonians]

1. Thessalonica was the capital of Macedonia and boasted of **200,000** inhabitants. It was a seaport town, connecting Rome with the East.

2. Paul wasn't able to stay in Thessalonica for very long (one month), so he wrote this letter soon after he was **forced** to leave by the Thessalonian Jews.

3. Some major themes include:

- (a) faith, love, and **hope**;
- (b) **living** to please God;
- (c) the second **coming** of Jesus.

4. Key verse:

We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us (1 Thessalonians 2:8).

[2 thessalonians]

1. This letter wasn't written too long after the first letter to the Thessalonians (perhaps six months). It contains many of the same elements, as the church's situation hadn't changed. They were being **persecuted** and were immature in their understanding of Jesus.

2. One major misunderstanding concerned the second coming of Christ. Many in the church had stopped **working** because they thought Jesus would return soon. Because of this, much of this letter is about eschatology (end times).

3. Major themes include:

- (a) **encouragement** in suffering;
- (b) "Man of lawlessness," the **Anti-Christ**;
- (c) Warnings against not **working**.

4. Key verse:

But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth (2 Thessalonians 2:13).

[1 timothy]

1. Paul wrote this letter to his spiritual son, Timothy, in order to give him **pastoral** advice.

2. Timothy received this letter while he was pastoring in **Ephesus**.

3. Some of Paul's exhortations to Timothy include:

- (a) warnings against **false** teachers;
- (b) public worship **instructions**;
- (c) church **officials** (elders and deacons);
- (d) how **widows**, elders, and slaves are to be treated.

4. Key verse:

Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity (1 Timothy 4:12).

[2 timothy]

1. This letter is the last Paul ever wrote. He was at the end of his life, in a Roman prison, waiting to be executed because of his **faith**.

2. Major exhortations to Timothy:

- (a) do not be **ashamed**, but be strong in the Lord;
- (b) foolish **speech**: quarreling, godless chatter, stupid arguments;
- (c) godlessness will come in the **last** days.

3. Key verse:

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

[titus]

1. Titus was a Gentile pastor whom Paul had left on the island of Crete. The Cretans' dishonesty, **gluttony**, and laziness were legendary, but Titus was an able co-worker of Paul.

2. Some of Paul's exhortations to Titus were:

- (a) watch out for **false** teachers;
- (b) qualifications of church **leaders**;
- (c) what to **teach** to different groups.

3. Key verse:

But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared He saved us, not because of righteous things, but because of his mercy (Titus 3:4).

[philemon]

1. Paul wrote this short letter (only 25 verses!) to Philemon, owner of the slave, Onesimus. Onesimus had **stolen** many things from Philemon, and had then run away from him -- a crime punishable by death.

2. Philemon was a "dear friend and fellow worker" of Paul, thus Paul thought he could **plead** for Onesimus on his behalf.

3. Key verse:

So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me (Philemon 17-18).

[hebrews]

1. The early church fathers thought this book was written by Paul, but they weren't 100 percent certain (which is why it is placed after Philemon). Modern scholars have **proven** otherwise.

2. Although its authorship is not certain (some think Apollos from Acts 18:24 could have been the author), this does not take away from the book's powerful message. Thoroughly Jewish in character, this letter is pivotal in understanding the Old Testament in light of **Christ**.

3. Major themes of this book include:

- (a) Christ's superiority over **angels**, Moses, and the Levitical priesthood;
- (b) Christ as the **perfect** High Priest;
- (c) great people of **faith**;
- (d) Christians' responsibility: **love** each other, praise God.

4. Key verse:

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are-- yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need (Hebrews 4:15-16).

[james]

1. James was written by Jesus' brother, James, the **leader** of the Jerusalem church.

2. James is purely practical. Its theology drives straight to the point of Christian living: Faith without **works** is no faith at all.

3. Some of the major themes in James are:

- (a) persevering through **trials**;
- (b) not showing **favoritism**;
- (c) taming your **tongue**;
- (d) watching out for **worldliness**.

4. Key verse:

In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead (James 2:17).

[1 peter]

1. This letter was written by the Apostle Peter, written to "God's elect . . . scattered throughout the world." Persecution from the Romans was just beginning and 1 Peter is a letter to **comfort** believers.

2. Some of the major themes include:

- (a) faith (in Christ) and **hope** (of his return);
- (b) holy **living**;
- (c) submission to **political** authority;
- (d) suffering for doing **good**.

3. Key verse:

. . . who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time (1 Peter 1:5).

[2 peter]

1. Peter's first letter was a comfort from persecution outside the Church. This letter is a warning against **false** teachers, "evil doers," and dangers from within the Church.

2. The purposes and themes of this letter are:

- (a) to stimulate Christian **growth**;
- (b) to combat **false** teaching;
- (c) to **encourage** watchfulness of Christ's return.

3. Key verse:

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9).

[1 john]

1. The writer of this letter is the disciple "whom Jesus loved," John, author of the fourth Gospel and Revelation. This letter was written to believers in general, to argue strongly against an **early form** of Gnosticism.

2. The two central teachings to Gnosticism were:

- (a) matter (physical) is **evil**, and spirit is good;
- (b) salvation is through secret **knowledge**.

3. The central purposes of 1 John was to:

- (a) expose false **teachers**;
- (b) give **assurance** of salvation.

4. Key verse:

I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life (1 John 5:13).

[2 john and 3 john]

1. Similar to 1 John, these letters were written to expose false teachers and **encourage** believers.

2. These letters teach that true love is **obedience** to Christ's commands.

3. Key verses:

Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son (2 John 9).

Dear friend, do not imitate what is evil but what is good. Anyone who does what is good is from God. Anyone who does what is evil has not seen God (3 John 11).

[jude]

1. The author of Jude was **Judas**, the brother of Jesus and James.

Note: This is not the Judas who betrayed Jesus.

2. This letter defends the **grace** of God: rely on Jesus; do not deny him.

3. Key verse:

But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit (Jude 20-21).

[revelation]

1. This well-known, and often misinterpreted letter, was written by John. It was the last book written of the New Testament, a time when worship of the Roman **emperor** was being forced upon Christians.

2. Purpose: to encourage Christians to remain **faithful** to God. Its message, in short, is that God is in control of history and He wins in the end.

3. Key verses:

Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near (Revelation 1:3).

Then I saw a new Heaven and a new earth, for the first Heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of Heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband (Revelation 21:1-2).

[so what do i do now?]

The purpose of this lesson was to give you an overview of the New Testament so you can better understand it when you read it. Now that you've had a quick look at each book in the New Testament, choose one this week to begin studying.

Share this with a leader so he/she can hold you accountable.