

New Testament Introduction and Survey

Class Description

A general and foundational study of the New Testament books. Introductory issues the New Testament will be covered and each New Testament book surveyed. The following will make up the content of this class:

- ✓ Basic issues of inspiration and canonicity
- ✓ How we got the NT
- ✓ Necessary historical and cultural background issues of NT times
- ✓ The Biblical background of the NT
- ✓ Basic geography of NT times
- ✓ What each NT book is about (its overall message)
- ✓ What each NT book says (its content)
- ✓ Who each NT book was written by and to (authorship and recipients)
- ✓ Why each NT book was written (occasion)

Goals for this Class

- God will be glorified and pleased by our consideration and study of His Word
- A key text for this teaching ministry is 2 Timothy 3:14-17; this should direct and control us during this class

2 Tim 3:14-17 ¹⁴You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them, ¹⁵and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; ¹⁷so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”

- Equip believers with a firm understanding of the gospel message (Eph 4:11-16)
- You will have a good grasp of each NT book—its message, occasion, purpose, content, etc. The NT was specifically written *to* us and *for* us, so it is absolutely essential that you know what God has to say
- Gain a working knowledge and/or “grid” for correct interpretation and application
- By gaining a better grasp of what the NT says, you gain protection from false teachers, grow stronger in your faith, and be equipped to be able to minister God’s Word to others

Requirements

- In preparation for each class, please **read the notes covered during the previous class**
- Additionally, before each class **complete the worksheet** handed out for that class.
- By preparing for each class in this manner you will have a better grasp and handle on the material. Remember, *what you get out of this depends on what you put into it!*

Notes and Class Instruction

- I have notes and blanks throughout – if at anytime you miss something, ask at anytime, call me, or check the church website (the full notes will be available in Adobe PDF format)
- Unless otherwise indicated I will use the *New American Standard Bible* (1995 edition) which is what I teach and preach from in the services of Orwell Bible Church. You are welcome to use the translation you currently use, but extra copies will be available if you so desire.
- If at *any* time you have a question or comment, please ask! The objective is to learn, not plow our way through the notes in a set amount of time.

Sources and Additional Reading for Further Study

J. Gresham Machen, *The New Testament: An Introduction to its Literature and History*. Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1976.

Mark Dever, *The Message of the New Testament: Promises Kept*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005.

Robert G. Gromacki. *New Testament Survey*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1974.

D. A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo, and Leon Morris. *An Introduction to the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992.

In addition to the above-published works, I am indebted to the classes taught and syllabi written by two of my professors from Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, Dr. William Combs (New Testament Introduction; Acts and Pauline Epistles) and Dr. Robert Bruce Compton (Gospels; Non-Pauline Epistles).

PART ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE NEW TESTAMENT

1. The New Testament

A. The Origin and Meaning of the Name “New Testament”

- 1) “Testament” is from a Latin word, *testamentum*. The Greek word (*diathēke*, διαθήκη) can mean “last will and testament,” “covenant,” or “compact, contract.” “Testament” at one time referred to a covenant between God and man (compare the KJV with NASB in passages such as Luke 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25).
- 2) “Covenant” refers to a **relationship**. “Old Testament” refers to the relationship that used to exist between men and God before Jesus Christ, whereas “New Testament” refers to the relationship God has with men now through Jesus Christ.
- 3) “New Testament” refers back to the “new covenant” of Jeremiah 31:31. All who trust in Jesus Christ have the ability to know and obey God, have forgiveness of sins, and the Holy Spirit indwells them, three essential aspects of the new covenant. (A fourth aspect will be fulfilled when Israel is restored to God and her land.)
- 4) The basis for referring to the two sections of the Bible as “testaments” is found in 2 Kings 23:2 and 2 Cor 3:14

2 Kings 23:2 “The king went up to the house of the LORD and all the men of Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem with him, and the priests and the prophets and all the people, both small and great; and he read in their hearing all the words of **the book of the covenant** which was found in the house of the LORD”

2 Cor 3:14 “But their minds were hardened; for until this very day at the reading of **the old covenant** the same veil remains unlifted, because it is removed in Christ”

- 5) After 250 A.D. when the Christian writings were definitely recognized as inspired they were called “the New Testament” and seen as equal in authority to the Old Testament.
- 6) Tertullian (A.D. 190-220) was the first to use the name *Novum Testamentum*.

B. How the New Testament Came To Us

The Bible isn’t put together as a textbook on religion. Instead, think of the Bible as a **library**, made up of many books, written by different authors, and under a variety of circumstances. God speaks in the Bible but He does so by means of men. This class will look at some of the circumstances that the Biblical books were written under and to. Who were the human authors? When did they write? Why did they write? The more you learn about these matters the more alive and real the Bible will be to you.

1) Inspiration

- a. Definition: Inspiration means God-**breathed**, and is the result of the Holy Spirit moving a human author to write divine revelation (2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:21). The Spirit's work involved **protecting** the human authors from error and **guiding** them in the selection of words consistent with their individual personalities and stylistic differences.

The result of the Spirit's work was revelation written by **men** yet having **God's** authority in them.

When the Holy Spirit moved Peter to write a message to Christians, *God guided him to write exactly what God wanted him to write and protected him from making any errors.* God guided Peter the fisherman to write a message that used all of Peter's personality and way of writing (grammar and syntax), yet protected Peter from making any errors. The result of this united authorship was a single message given to and understandable by human beings that is absolutely true because of God's guidance and protection.

The result of inspiration is a single message: What God said, the human author said; what the human author wrote, God wrote. The only way we can know what God meant is through the human author's words. Because of this, no one can say that Peter meant one thing, but God meant another. **What the human author meant is what God meant.**

b. Aspects of Inspiration

- The *words* are God-breathed, not merely thoughts or ideas (Matt 5:18). This is called verbal inspiration.
- All the words are God-breathed not merely those referring to salvation (2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 3:15-16). This is called *plenary* inspiration.
- The original writings were without **error**; what the Scripture says is a correct statement of facts or principles. This is called *inerrancy*.

Consider the following two affirmations in response to the charge of murder: (1) "I have never killed anyone," and (2) "I ain't never killed nobody no time." Was one, both, or neither in error? Was one, both or neither inaccurate?

- The result of inspiration was a written revelation from God to man that is divinely authoritative, inerrant in the **original** writings (Acts 1:16; 28:25; 1 Cor 2:13; 14:37)

Inspiration took place when the Holy Spirit breathed out the Scriptures through a David or an Isaiah, not when the scribe made the copy or reproduction that Peter or Paul was using.

2) Canonicity

How did the church know what books were inspired and which ones weren't? How were they able to say which ones should be considered as Scripture and others were not?

The 66 books of the Bible make up the complete canon of Scripture. Canonicity is the historical process by which the Spirit of God led Israel and the church to recognize those writings that were genuinely inspired (inspired at the time of writing, not canonization). This canon is closed (1 Cor 13:8-10; Rev 22:18, 19) as the apostles and prophets have passed off the scene (Eph 2:20).

a. Terms

- “Canon” means rule or standard, and refers to those books that are recognized as authoritative—the correct **list** of books that are God’s Word
- “Canonicity” refers to the historical process whereby God’s people **recognized**, collected, and organized the inspired writings

The process of canonization did not **make** the Scriptures inspired—they were inspired the moment they were written. Scripture was *recognized* to be inspired.

Believers have the assurance from the Holy Spirit that God’s Word is true as He removes our natural hostility toward it and replaces it with a certainty that the Bible is from God and is His truth.

b. Process—*How* were the inspired books recognized and collected into the correct list?

- Principles for the New Testament
 - (1) Was it connected with an **apostle** (apostolicity)?
 - (2) Is it relevant to the church as a whole (catholicity)?
 - (3) Does it agree with the **faith** of the church (orthodoxy)?
 - (4) Has it been welcomed and profitably used in local churches (traditional usage)?
- How long did it take for the NT books to be recognized as inspired and collected into the list? **The purposes for this were spurious docs and persecution**

By the 4th century A.D. the current collection of NT books was recognized to be God’s inspired Word (*Decrees of the Council of Nicea*, 350; Athanasius’ Easter letter in 367; Council of Laodicea, 363)

c. What about the Apocrypha?

- What is the Apocrypha?

Meaning: *Apocrypha* means “hidden” or “concealed.” It refers to writings outside the Hebrew canon

Content:

1 Esdras	Letter of Jeremiah
2 Esdras	Prayer of Azariah and Son of the Three Young Men
Tobit	Susanna
Judith	Bel and the Dragon
Additions to Esther	Prayer of Manasseh
Wisdom of Solomon	1 Maccabees
Ecclesiasticus	2 Maccabees
Baruch	

- Why aren't they considered part of the canon?
 - (1) The Jews never included them as part of the canon
 - (2) They are never cited in the New Testament
 - (3) They were never considered canonical until the Roman Catholic Church canonized them at the Council of Trent on April 8, 1546.
 - (4) Some of them have unbiblical or heretical teaching (prayers for the dead, salvation by works)
 - (5) Some have historical and chronological errors

For more information on the Canon and Canonicity see [Appendix A](#).

3) From Greek Manuscripts to English Translations

What are the issues? There are two issues facing us at this point: first, understanding that only the original writings were inspired, and second, the fact that those were written in Greek.

- a. The first issue is this: For whatever reason, we don't have the original writings available to us (they were either worn out, disintegrated, or possibly even destroyed). Additionally, there are over 5000 Greek copies (called manuscripts) of various parts of the NT and no two of them are **exactly** alike!

For 1,400 years the NT was copied by **hand**, and those who copied it made every possible kind of copying mistake.

At first, those who made copies were Christians who wanted a copy for their congregation. As Christianity spread there was a demand for more copies, and sometimes demand affected the accuracy of the copies made.

Later, as copies were made by commercial book manufacturers (called *scriptoria*) trained scribes would make a copy of a book as another would slowly read the text

that was being copied. It's not hard to see how mistakes could be made by inattention, not hearing a word right, or hearing a word that could be spelled different ways. As an example of the last two, consider these examples:

“Death is swallowed up in victory (νῆκος)” 1 Cor 15:54
“Death is swallowed up in conflict (νεῖκος)”

“A rainbow (ῥίς) that looked like an emerald” Rev 4:3
“A priest (ἱερεῖς) that looked like an emerald”

Copying manuscripts was hard work. Scribes often finished a copy with these words: “Writing bows one's back, thrusts the ribs into one's stomach, and fosters a general debility of the body.” In an Armenian copy of the Gospels the scribe complained that as a heavy snowstorm raged outside his ink froze, his hand became numb, and the pen fell from his fingers!

If a *scribe* was copying a manuscript and the text he was making a copy from said, “Jesus Christ was the devil,” he knew that it was wrong and would naturally seek to make a correction: “Jesus Christ was *against* the devil.” Scribes rarely left anything out because they did **not** want to leave out anything that was inspired.

Thus, with no two manuscripts agreeing exactly, the first issue is how can we know what God's Word **is**?

The answer is complex, but in a nutshell, each manuscript must be carefully **examined** and **compared** with others. As much as we'd like to have every copy be a perfect copy, that is not reality. The good news is that there are **no** textual differences that affect any Christian doctrine.

- b. The second issue is this: We can't read Koine Greek, yet as Christians we need God's Word! How can we know what God's Word **says**?

The answer is that it must be **translated** so that the meaning of the original Greek is **understandable** to the people needing the Scriptures. Language doesn't stay the same, so from time to time translations must either be updated or entirely new ones made so that Christians are able to understand God's Word. For example, consider the opening lines of Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, written in the late 1300's—

Whan that Aprill, with his shoures soote
The droghte of March hath perced to the roote
And bathed every veyne in swich licour,
Of which vertu engendred is the flour

- The first English translation was produced by **John Wycliffe** in the 1380's. During that time the Roman Catholic Church threatened anyone possessing a non-Latin Bible with execution!

1 In the bigynnyng was the word, and the word was at God, and God was the word.
 2 This was in the bigynnyng at God.
 3 Alle thingis weren maad bi hym, and withouten hym was maad no thing, that thing that was maad.
 4 In hym was lijf, and the lijf was the liyt of men; and the liyt schyneth in derknessis,
 5 and derknessis comprehendiden not it.

- **William Tyndale** produced his copy of the Bible in English in 1525-26
- **Myles Coverdale's** edition was published in 1535
- **John Rogers** (aka Thomas Matthew), published in 1537
- **Myles Coverdale** produced the Great Bible (it was big) in 1539
- The **Geneva Bible** was produced in 1560; it first introduced verse numbers; it had notes in the margins throughout; it was the preferred Bible for over 100 years, and was the Bible the Pilgrims brought to America
- The **King James Bible** was first produced in 1611; the Church of England wanted a Bible without the controversial marginal notes of the Geneva Bible (proclaiming the pope as the anti-Christ!) and included the Apocrypha; it is ironic that the KJV is honored by Protestants today, as it was produced in opposition to Protestants! (The Church of England persecuted Protestants.) The KJV in print today is not the 1611 but the 1769 edition.
- The **English Revised Version** was published in England in 1880
- The **American Standard Version** was published in America in 1901, and later revised several times, the most recent in 1995
- The **New International Version** was published in 1973
- The **English Standard Version** was published in 2002

Keep in mind that the original intent of the Protestant Reformers was to get the Bible out of a language few could understand (Latin) and bring it into the language that people normally used. William Tyndale fought and died for the right to print the Bible in the common, spoken, modern English tongue of his day... as he boldly told one official who criticized his efforts, *“If God spare my life, I will see to it that the boy who drives the plowshare knows more of the scripture than you, Sir?”*

What is the difference between a translation and the original copy that the NT authors penned? One key and important difference is that the Holy Spirit

supernaturally protected the **biblical** author from error but the Holy Spirit does *not* do that for translators.

As a result, a translation can only be considered to have the authority of inspiration as it accurately gives the **meaning** of the original into a different language.