

# Re-Introduction to the New Testament

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 provide information needed to properly understand, interpret, and apply the New Testament. 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. What is the New Testament?

- A. "Testament" means covenant, a **relationship**. "Old Testament" refers to the relationship that existed between men and God *before* Jesus Christ, whereas "New Testament" refers to the relationship God has with men now *through* Jesus Christ.
- B. In what ways is the NT like other literature?
  - 1) The documents that make up the NT were written in **human** language, using the normal "laws" of language. Language is a God-given ability to communicate. Communication uses sentences and statements to express truth.
  - 2) Because the NT uses normal human language we must understand the Bible the same way we understand anything other written literature—it has **one** meaning. "A text cannot mean what it never meant."
- C. What makes the New Testament different from other literature?
  - 1) Because humans are sinful they can make errors, and so what they *write* can have errors. If the Bible is human literature, does it therefore have errors?
  - 2) While the Bible was *written* by human beings, God was the one who moved and directed the human authors to write (2 Pet 1:21). Because of this, the Bible is described as being **inspired**, meaning God-breathed. Here's a definition of inspiration—

Inspiration means God-breathed, and is the result of the Holy Spirit moving a human author to write God's 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 different styles of writing.
  - 3) Because God protected and guided the human authors, **everything** they wrote was *exactly* what God wanted written and therefore without error.

So, when you read your Bible, who is speaking? How serious is that? If God spoke audibly, would that be *more* important? If you have a problem believing or obeying something in the Bible, how should the fact that it is inspired affect and control that?

## 2. How Did We Get the New Testament?

- A. Inspiration—God gave His word in written form through men
- B. Canonization—God’s people **recognized** the character of the Scriptures and welcomed them as God’s Word
- C. Transmission—God’s people needed God’s Word and so they **copied** and **translated** it

## 3. What are the Divisions of the New Testament

- A. The Basis for and Growth of Christianity—the **Gospels** and **Acts**
  - 1) The Gospels provide the basis of Christianity—the person and work of Jesus Christ and Israel’s rejection of Him as their Messiah
  - 2) Acts provides the birth and growth of Christianity
- B. The Doctrine and Practice of Christianity—the **Epistles** (Romans through Revelation)

Doctrine and practice—what you believe and how you live—are never separate issues. The latter is based entirely on the former. In the NT, issues of lifestyle, church life, and even petty problems are dealt with in light of God’s principles.

## 4. What is the Purpose of the New Testament?

The purpose of the NT is to give the **church** God’s written revelation of **Christian** doctrine and practice.

## 5. Why Study the New Testament?

- A. Learn about God’s character and will
- B. What Christians should believe
- C. How Christians should live
- D. Grow more like Christ (maturity)
- E. How churches should conduct themselves
- F. Gain help and encouragement
- G. Protection from false teaching

## 6. New Testament Books Already Surveyed

- A. **Matthew** – Jesus is the Christ, the King of the Jews
- B. **Mark** – Jesus is the Son of God and Suffering Servant
- C. **Luke** – The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost
- D. **John** – Jesus is God, the Savior
- E. **Acts** – The church witnessing for Christ
- F. **Galatians** – Salvation is by faith alone in Jesus Christ
- G. **Romans** – The gospel of God
- H. **1 Thessalonians** – Living for Christ while waiting for Christ
- I. **2 Thessalonians** – The Christian and the Day of the Lord
- J. **Revelation** – The revelation of Jesus Christ
- K. **Hebrews** – The superiority of Christ

## 7. What is an Epistle?

### A. Characteristics

- 1) They *explain* and *interpret* what the Gospels *report* about Jesus' death and resurrection.
- 2) They give the full and complete teaching about the **church** that the Gospels only mention (twice—Matt 16:18; 18:15-17). This teaching is both doctrinal and practical.
- 3) They connect the current church age (unanticipated in the OT) with the anticipated Davidic kingdom and the eternal state.

### B. Themes of the Epistles

- 1) **Salvation** by Christ alone, through grace alone, by faith alone
- 2) The church is Christ's **body**, distinct from the saved *before* and *after* the church age
- 3) The Holy Spirit's roles (what He does) and relationship to the church and Christians
- 4) How the church age fits in with the OT promises to **Israel**
- 5) The walk, service, and future destiny of **Christians**

- 6) **Prophecy**, covering the course and end of this age and the age to come

C. Historical Context of the Epistles

- 1) Christ ascended into heaven
- 2) The gospel was proclaimed and believed, Christians were baptized and assembled and organized into bodies of believers (called *churches*)
- 3) False teachers and sin issues affected the churches

D. General Style of the Epistles – how most of Paul’s letters are written

- 1) Opening – sender, recipient, and greeting
- 2) Thanksgiving or blessing – sometimes including prayer for the recipients
- 3) Body – doctrinal teaching and practical issues
- 4) Closing – personal greeting

E. How to Study the Epistles

- 1) Read the whole epistle in **one** sitting, as if it were a letter written to you personally or if you’re hearing it in your local church for the first time. You will never have a firm grasp of an epistle apart from continually reading it.
- 2) Note important **points** of the letter, such as *why* it was written, to *whom* it was written, its basic *theme*, and etc.
- 3) Follow the **outlines** provided here to help you see and grasp the author’s flow of thought.
- 4) Continue reading it, listing the different subjects and topics the writer addresses. Study individual paragraphs, looking at the main “point” each paragraph has. Interpret verses in light of the **context** of the paragraph and the epistle.
- 5) Pray, meditate, and digest the results of your study. Your **aim** in Bible study is a more Christ-like life!

## 8. What to Look Forward to in This Class

In addition to learning things about each book such as authorship, occasion, purpose, recipients, characteristics, “keys,” and outlines, here is a list of the books we will cover during the course of this class and some special things we will learn from them—

- A. **1 Corinthians** – Spiritual gifts, especially tongues
- B. **2 Corinthians** – Marks of an apostle
- C. **Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians** – the significance of the church; the Person of Christ
- D. **1 Timothy, Titus** – church order
- E. **2 Timothy, Philemon** – slavery in NT times
- F. **James, 1 Peter** – relation of faith and works; 1 Peter 3:18–22
- G. **2 Peter, Jude** – the Christian’s response to false teachers
- H. **1-3 John** – fellowship with God; 1 John 5:16–17