

Story of the NT

Introduction Part 2

Welcome back to the story of the New Testament. We're going to continue with lesson one, the introduction, and this will be part two. In part one, we did a short review of the story of the Old Testament.

This lesson continues on page five in your handout. You may look at the top of page five. As we begin this course, it is appropriate for us to ask, Why should we study the New Testament?

Before we dig into the books of the New Testament to uncover the big picture story, we must first understand some important background information leading up to the start of the New Testament story.

We're going to look at the New Testament from a literary perspective. The New Testament is literature and there are some things we need to understand about literature to have an increased sense of reliability, of confidence in the authenticity and the accuracy of the New Testament. Understanding these truths will increase our trust in the accuracy of the New Testament.

We will also look at the New Testament from a historical perspective. It is important to understand what was happening in history between the end of the Old Testament and the start of the New Testament period. There were 400 years from the end of the Old Testament to the beginning of the New Testament. God was moving and working during that period of time in actual history to prepare for the coming of Jesus.

And we will also look at the New Testament from a theological perspective. What was God communicating through the New Testament? How does this relate to or build upon what He communicated in the Old Testament? What was God communicating about himself, about us and our need for a Savior, about how we could be brought back into relationship with him?

Our goal in the next two sessions is to understand what was happening during that time leading up to the coming of Jesus how the New Testament was structured to communicate this message of hope, salvation, a renewed relationship with God. And as His disciples, to live on mission for the Lord Jesus, making him known and expanding his kingdom.

Let's read the paragraph in the middle of page 5.

"The New Testament is the story of God's effort to redeem the lost, sinful human race. It is the record of establishing the new covenant which was God's way of saving lost mankind. In the Old Testament, God promises to make a new covenant with his people Israel. Israel's Messiah would be the one who would bring this covenant into existence. The New Covenant would focus on the spiritual life and redemption of Israel. However, as the New Testament unfolded, it became clear that the New Covenant would reach beyond Israel to include the rest of mankind. The New Covenant was God's provision of salvation for lost people who could not save themselves. Jesus Christ, Israel's Messiah, inaugurated the New Covenant with his sacrificial death on the cross. The New Testament proclaims or declares this good news."

This is a good summary of the purpose of the New Testament. There were a number of references to Jeremiah chapter 31. This is where Jeremiah prophesied the new covenant that would come with the Messiah. It's a reminder of the promise that God made to Abraham in Genesis chapter 12, that through him all the nations of the earth would be blessed. Let us Jeremiah chapter 31:31 - 34, as we focus on this New Covenant promise.

Remember, this is written in the Old Testament looking forward to the New Covenant that would come through the Lord Jesus Christ.

"Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt. My covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord. For this is a covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord. I will put my law within them, I will write it on their hearts, and I will be their God and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, Know the Lord, for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sin no more."

That's Jeremiah prophesying what would come through the Lord Jesus, the New Covenant in his blood.

You can also see a reference there on page 5 to Hebrews chapter 8:6-13. If you were to read that passage, you would see that it is a word for word repetition of what Jeremiah prophesied in Jeremiah chapter 31. In fact, Hebrews chapters 8 through 10, speak to this New Covenant. There is no longer a need for the priesthood, the sacrifices, and the man-made holy place within the temple. All of those things were a shadow of the reality to come. Jesus is our great high priest, Jesus is the ultimate and final sacrifice for sin. Jesus' death on the cross for our sin established this new covenant.

So that's a good place for us to start as we think about the story of the New Testament. It is the story of God continuing to build his kingdom and establishing a new covenant of grace that would be implemented and put into place through the Lord Jesus.

As we continue on page 5, I said we were going to look at the New Testament in this introductory lesson from three perspectives. We want to understand the New Testament as a work of literature, from an historical perspective and also from a theological perspective.

Let's discuss the New Testament as a work of literature.

The New Testament is an ancient work of literature. It is a book, yet is also much more than a book. Literature is written, there are authors, languages, culture, and structure. There are different types of genre of writings such as poetry, history, fiction, mystery, fantasy, apocalyptic writings. Within the New Testament there are different forms or writings as well: Historical narrative, parables, prophesy, doctrine, apocalyptic themes.

What is the New Testament? It's a collection of 27 books. Yet it was written by one divine author, the Holy Spirit of God.

There were nine human authors. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John wrote the four gospels. The Apostle Paul wrote 13 of the 27 books of the New Testament. And there were other authors like Peter, Jude, and James. The author of Hebrews is unknown to us. So there were 9 human authors of the 27 books of the New Testament.

There was a primary language. It was written in the common language of the people at that time, which was Koine Greek.

And if you remember back to the story of the Old Testament, the structure of Hebrew Bible changed in 250 BC. 70 theologians were commissioned to translate the Old

Testament Hebrew scriptures from Hebrew into Greek, which was the language of the people. That translation was called the Septuagint. The structure of the Old Testament after that work was completed provided us with the 39 books of the Old Testament that we have today.

Septuagint stood for the number 70. Often you will see the Roman numeral for 70, LXX to represent this translation of the Old Testament.

At the bottom of the page, there's a chart that that compares the Old Testament and the New Testament from a structural perspective.

The Old Testament is much longer than the New Testament. In the Old Testament, there are 929 chapters. There's only 260 chapters in the New Testament.

There are 31 authors in the Old Testament. There are only 9 authors in the New Testament.

The Old Testament contains 39 books, and we talked about that song, 5, 12, 5, 5, 12 to remember the structure. 5 books of law, 12 books of history, 5 books of poetry, 5 major prophets, 12 minor prophets.

There are 27 books in the New Testament. The structure is 4, 1, 21, 1. This can also be turned into a song. 4, 1, 21, 1 ... 4, 1, 21, 1.

4 gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

1 book of history, Acts.

21 epistles. These letters represents 75% of the New Testament.

1 book of prophecy, Revelation.

The span of time that covers the historical time of the Old Testament was at least 4,000 years, maybe longer (from Creation to Malachi). The time span for the New Testament is less than 100 years.

There are 1,189 chapters in the Bible. It's interesting to note that only four chapters are without the presence of sin. Think about that.

What four chapters are without sin? Where sin is not present?

Well, in Genesis chapter 1 and 2, God made all things and everything was very good. Adam and Eve were in perfect relationship with God. There was no sin present in the world.

There was a perfect relationship between God and man. In Genesis chapter 3, sin enters the world. In Revelation 21 and 22, the last two chapters of the Bible, we read about the new heaven and new earth.

God is with his people and there is no sin. There's no death. There's no mourning. The new heaven and new earth will continue for eternity in perfect relationship with God. It is interesting that the first two chapters of the Bible and the last two chapters of the Bible are without the presence of sin.

The rest of the Bible is God's love story. God's story of redemption showing us how God will bring his people back to himself, how he will build his kingdom. The story of God's kingdom is really the story of the Bible.

Turn with me to page six as we continue to look at the New Testament as Literature.

We have the four Gospels. In the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, **Jesus is revealed**. The gospels proclaim the person and work of Jesus Christ.

In the book of Acts, we read about the story of the early church. **Jesus is preached**.

There are 10 sermons in the book of Acts. Jesus is being preached and introduced and affirmed to the world.

In the 21 epistles, **Jesus is explained**. These letters go from Romans to Jude. There are 21 books or letters that provide doctrinal teaching and instruction to the churches and to Christian leaders.

And then the conclusion of the New Testament in Revelation, **Jesus is expected**. It is the conclusion, not just to the New Testament, but to the biblical story.

Let's review those phrases again. If we went all the way back to the Old Testament, in the Old Testament, we could say **Jesus is predicted**.

In the Gospels, **Jesus is revealed**.

In the book of Acts, **Jesus is preached**.

In the 21 epistles, **Jesus is explained**.

And in Revelation, **Jesus is expected**.

Jesus is the main theme throughout the Old Testament. He's the focal point of the New Testament. He is the focal point of all of Scripture.

At the bottom of page 6, there is another chart that helps us understand the structure of the New Testament as literature. Let me review this for you.

On the very top line, you can see a listing of the major events throughout the time of the New Testament.

Under the Gospels, you see the life of Christ. The book of Acts is the historical timeline of the early church. The small numbers listed are the actual years or time periods for these major events.

For example, the birth of the church happened around 33 AD. The first missionary journey of Paul took place between 48 to 49 AD.

Other events listed are Paul's second and third missionary journeys, Paul's trial and first imprisonment. Paul is then released, imprisoned a second time, and executed. The final of the timeline is the expansion of the church. The New Testament story ends around 90-100AD.

Obviously, we're still living in this period of the expansion of the church. Below this line on the chart you see another gray line. The words, Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and the ends of the earth are written. When we study the book of Acts, we will learn that the outline for the book of Acts comes from Acts 1:8.

"You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in Judea and all Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

And that is the outline for the structure of the story of the New Testament after the resurrection of Jesus. Initially the apostles reach out to the Jews in Jerusalem. The church is scattered in response to persecution and the ministry expands to Judea and Samaria, and then it continues to the ends of the earth.

Below that line on the chart, you can see a four rows of different New Testament books.

There are historical books like the Gospels and Acts. These books are positioned beneath the time period and events that were taking place during the New Testament story.

For example, Luke is a historical book. It is one of the four gospels. The numbers underneath it show the estimated time when that book may have been written, between 58 to 60 AD. Matthew was written between 60 and 70 AD. The book of Acts was written between 58 and 63 AD.

This helps us understand when these books fit into the timeline of the New Testament.

Below that are some of Paul's letters to the churches such as Galatians, 1st and 2nd Thessalonians, Romans, 1st Corinthians, 2nd Corinthians, Ephesians, and so forth. If you look at Galatians, you can see that it was one of the earliest books written by Paul around 49 AD. If you draw a line up to the top, Galatians was written during the time of Paul's first missionary journey.

Move to the right and look at the letter to the Ephesian church. It was written around 60 AD. If you draw a line up, you see that it was written during Paul's first imprisonment.

The letters of Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians, and Philemon were all written while Paul was in a prison in Rome. That is why we call them the prison epistles.

Paul also wrote letters to pastors, such as Philemon, Timothy, and Titus. Based on this chart, you can see where they fit into the timeline of the history and the structure of the New Testament.

And finally, there were general letters, such as James. James was maybe one of the earlier letters written something between 44 and 49 AD. That would have been during Paul's first missionary journey. There were other letters such as 1st and 2nd Peter, Jude, Hebrews, 1st, 2nd, and 3rd John, and Revelation.

This is just another chart to better understand the structure of the New Testament and begin to tell the story.

The New Testament is literature. There were books, there were dates, there was history that was taking place. Because the New Testament is literature, there are proven ways to evaluate the accuracy and reliability of ancient literature.

At the top of page 7, you will see a gray box on the right of the page. It says there are 3 tests for literature.

There is the **character test**. We want to know whether the document was put together with honesty. What was the character of the authors and the content they wrote about?

There is the **copy test**. Have the documents reached us accurately? We assess the reliability of an ancient document based on the gap between the date of original manuscript and the date of the first copies. We are also interested in how many copies of the ancient document exist?

There is also the **corroboration test**. Do other historical sources confirm or deny the literature that we are interested in?

These three tests can be applied to any work of ancient literature.

The Bible is an ancient work of literature.

At the top of page 7, we can say with confidence that the New Testament is historically accurate. Ephesians 2:19-20 says that the church was built upon the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. The initial founders of the church following Jesus, were eyewitnesses, people who walked with Jesus, who lived at that time.

There were nine authors. These authors were eyewitnesses, family members to Jesus, or contemporaries with the apostles. Matthew was an eyewitness. John Mark was an associate of Peter. Luke was an associate of Paul. John was an eyewitness. Paul was taught by the ascended Jesus. Peter was an eyewitness. James and Jude were half-brothers of Jesus.

The writer of Hebrews is unknown but was surely a contemporary with the apostles.

As we consider when these authors wrote their books, there was not enough time for myths to develop. The events that were recorded, were written so close to when the events took place. There was not an extended period that would allow for myths to develop, for the story to change.

Anyone living at that time could have challenged what the author had written. Most of the New Testament books were written 30 to 40 years following Jesus' ascension. We don't have a record of people refuting what these New Testament authors wrote in the early years of the church.

Another aspect of the character test is seen in the testimony of church fathers. These were leaders in the church who followed the original authors. These were men such as Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Origen, Tertullian, and Eusebius. They believed the message of the original authors. In fact, the New Testament could be reconstructed from their quotations from the 2nd and 3rd centuries. In their writings, they cited the New

Testament more than 36,000 times, and they quote every verse in the New Testament except 11 verses. This shows that they believed the New Testament to be true and reliable because their writings matched the original manuscripts.

An additional aspect of the character test is to examine the nature of the record itself. When you read through the Bible, and specifically the New Testament, you get a vivid, unembellished, detailed, self-incriminating explanation or testimony. Claims are made by eyewitnesses that might diminish key characters. For example, we read about Peter, a future leader of the church, denying Jesus. We read that Jesus called Peter Satan, "Get behind me, Satan." The disciples fell asleep in the garden at the most critical time in Jesus' ministry. These are just a few examples. If you really wanted to put the New Testament in the best light possible, you would probably remove these from the final document.

When the author includes self-incriminating, unembellished truths, it helps to reinforce the character of the authors. Here's another one. They did not deny their testimony under the threat of death. Who would die for a lie? If the writers of the New Testament really knew that Jesus never rose from the dead, as soon as the first person was killed for their faith, the others would say, I'm out. I'm not going to continue on with this lie. But they knew it was true. And they continued, at the risk of their death. 11 of the 12 apostles were martyred. They were killed for their faith. The apostle John died of old age. So who would die for a lie? All of these truths corroborate the character of the authors.

The role of women in the New Testament also brings authenticity to the authors.

Women were the first to witness the resurrected Jesus. In that culture, women were not trusted. They could not testify in a court of law. They were not permitted to speak. Their testimony was not valid. Yet Jesus appears to the women first after his resurrection. Women were valued in his ministry. If you were writing this to try to make the story as believable as possible, you would not have worked through women to the degree that the New Testament does.

Many of the difficult passages and demanding sayings of Jesus remain in the Scriptures. John 6:60 is an example.

Jesus says, unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood, you have no part in me. And at that point, it says, many who followed him began to leave him because of these hard

sayings. Yet, to those closest to him, Jesus asks, Do you want to leave me also? But Peter and the others respond, where can we go? You have the words of life.

If you wanted to make the story more believable, the authors might have removed these kinds of statements.

One final example of the Character test is that the New Testament includes many historical people. More than 30 different historical people are referenced. Kings and governors and emperors and religious leaders. The authors wrote what was true, the good, the bad and the ugly. The character of the authors can be trusted thus the quality of the ancient document can also be trusted.

The next test for ancient literature is the **corroboration test**.

Outside of the Bible, were there others who wrote about the things that are in the Bible to support the claims that are made? The answer is yes! There were many non-Christian sources like Roman and Jewish historians who wrote about what was referenced in the New Testament. And these historians were not supporters of Christianity.

Most were vocal enemies of the new church that was forming. Yet, in their role as a historian, they recorded history through their eyes and those who lived at that time. They affirmed that a man named Jesus, who claimed to be the Messiah actually lived, that he was crucified by the Romans, that people claimed that he rose from the dead after three days. Pontius Pilate was real. These historians, who were not followers of Jesus, affirmed that these events took place giving credibility to the authenticity and reliability of the New Testament as an ancient work of literature.

Legal experts have even looked at the New Testament. There is a reference in your handout to Simon Greenleaf. He lived from 1783 to 1853. He was a professor of law at Harvard University, and he concluded that if the New Testament documents and witnesses were tested in a court of law, they could prove to be reliable. They would have held up to the standards of evidence in a court of law.

Even archaeological discoveries affirm the reliability of the New Testament and the Bible as a whole. Every day, every year, there are new archaeological finds that are being uncovered that confirm places, people, artifacts that are referenced in both the Old and the New Testament. Each of these are part of the Corroboration Test.

Turn to the top of page 8, we can see the New Testament also is also textually authentic. 2 Peter 1:20-21, tells is that the authors of the New Testament didn't write whatever they thought. They wrote as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. The human authors of the Old and New Testament wrote exactly what God intended.

How reliable are the manuscripts of the New Testament?

There are more manuscripts of the New Testament than any other books of antiquity. There are better copies and greater accuracy. Dr. Bruce Metzger of Princeton University compared the accuracy of three great books of antiquity.

Based on the **Copy Test** ...

The Marabahata, an ancient Hindu poem, is assessed as 90% accurate. The Iliad of Homer is assessed 95% accurate. The New Testament is assessed as 99.9% accurate.

There are more than 5,700 Greek manuscripts, copies of the New Testament. Most other books from the ancient world survive today with just 10 copies, maybe at the most 20 copies of manuscripts.

Most of the ancient books are trusted even though there is a span of more than a thousand years from when the original was written to when the first copies started to appear. The New Testament has manuscripts that date from within 25 to 150 years from the date that the book was written.

If we look at this chart on page 8, we want to assess the number of copies and the time from the original document to the first copies. To be most reliable, we want to see a short period of time from the original to the first copies. We also want to see many copies that can be compared to each other for accuracy and consistency.

The shorter the time from the original to the first copies, and the more copies you have, all give you greater sense of reliability that the ancient document is authentic.

On the chart, you can see the black box is the time in years from the original writing to the first copies. The gray box is the number of copies that exist for that work of ancient literature.

For the New Testament, the first copies began to appear 25 years after the original writings. And there are more than 5,700 Greek copies of the New Testament. When you consider manuscripts in all languages, there are more than 24,000 New Testament

manuscript copies. These would be languages such as Armenian, Coptic, Gothic, Ethiopian, Latin, Georgian, and Slavic, to name a few.

There are 24,000 New Testament manuscripts. There are 5,750 Greek copies. The first copies of the New Testament appeared within 25 years of the original.

Now, if you go down through the chart and compare other ancient literature with the New Testament, none can compare. For Plato, there were a thousand years from the original writings of Plato to the first copies. And there are only 7 manuscript copies. Yet no one doubts the works of Plato. No one doubts the work of Caesar. No one doubts the work of Homer. Why do they doubt the work of the New Testament? Well, we know, because it's a spiritual issue.

But if you looked at the New Testament as a work of literature, and you compare it to the tests of ancient literature, it is reliable. We can, without a doubt, know that what we hold in our hands is arguably the most reliable work of ancient literature in the world today.

At the bottom of page 8, we can see also that as a work of literature, the Bible, the New Testament is divinely authoritative.

We are told this in 2 Timothy 3:16-17. "All scripture is breathed out by God."

In 2 Peter 1:19-21, we know that the authors of the New Testament and the Old Testament did not write whatever they wanted. They were carried along by the Holy Spirit. God established these 27 books through his church and for his church.

The church didn't create the New Testament. God did. Authority preceded the canon.

God already said, this is my Word. And the Church discovered that God's word is true.

Let's stop here. When we continue we will be in Part 3 of the Introduction lesson. We will continue on page 9, as we look at the New Testament from a historical and theological perspective.