

9. INTRODUCTION TO THE NEW TESTAMENT

(1) Introductory thoughts:

- The last 3 books of Old Testament History (Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther) cover a period of about 100 years following the decree of Cyrus, King of Persia, which allowed the Jews to return to their land (about 536–432 B.C.). From Nehemiah (and the Prophet Malachi) 400 years passed until the birth of Jesus Christ.

(1. Population of Israel's land:

- Following the decree of Cyrus, fewer than 50,000 of the Jews returned to the land under Zerubbabel (Ezra 2). About 80 years later another company returned with Ezra. (Ezra 7 – 8). And, no doubt, other Jews returned later.
- Someone has estimated that more than 4,000,000 Jews lived in the Roman Empire during New Testament times, but that only around 700,000 lived in the land that God gave to Abraham and his descendants. [Even today there are more Jews living in New York than in Israel.]

(2. Languages spoken during New Testament times:

- The Jews in the land of Israel spoke Aramaic and Hebrew.
- The *lingua franca* (common language) of the Roman Empire was the Greek of the common people (*Koiné*).
- The legal language of the Roman Empire was Latin, but that was used mainly in the western regions of the Empire.
- Thus, many people in that day were at least bilingual, and some even trilingual.

(3. Travel during New Testament times:

- People traveled mostly by foot, but they also used donkeys, horses, mules, and by carriage or litter. Most commercial travel was by ship.
- Rome was famous for its system of roads. Much of the Empire had a very good system of roads made as straight as possible and very durable. The road system of Israel was not as good.
- The early Christian Missionaries used these roads to speed the spread of the Gospel.

(4. Classes of people during New Testament times:

- 1. Among the Jews were Pharisees and Scribes, Sadducees, Herodians, and Publicans.
- 2. It is said that slaves outnumbered freemen in the Roman Empire. This must be taken into account as you read the New Testament.
- 3. The families of the Israelites were usually strong, and quite large. Divorce was easy in the Roman Empire, and quite easy among the Jews. The Graeco-Roman families were small, and weak. Immorality was common.

(2) Why was the New Testament Written?

(1. It was written to complete the revelation of the Old Testament.

- The Old Testament ends with “curse” (Mal. 4:6).
 - Israel is scattered.
 - The Abrahamic and Davidic promises are unfulfilled, and apparently all is lost.
 - Revelation ends with a new heaven and a new earth.
- See Heb. 1:1–2; Jer. 31:31–34; Mal. 3:1

- (2. To show the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies (Luke 4:21; John 13:18; 17:12; Acts 1:16, and many more).
 - The Old Testament pointed to the coming Messiah; the New Testament presents the fulfillment of that hope.
- (3. To present the way of salvation in its fullness (John 20:31)
- (4. To give needed truth for God’s children (John 4:25; 17:8; 16:12–13). This is especially related to the Church (Matt. 16:18; Eph. 5:23–32).

(3)What is the Distinguishing Characteristic of the New Testament?

- It is Grace (John 1:17).

(4)Relation of the New Testament to the Old Testament

- (1. The Bible is a unity: Its unifying message is that of Redemption through Christ.
- (2. “The New Testament is in the Old concealed,
— The Old Testament is in the New revealed” — Augustine
 - 1. The Old is the seed plot.
 - 2. The New is the garden in bloom.
- (3. The importance of studying each Testament in the light of each other:
 - There is value in following the New Testament streams to the Old Testament springs (and inversely).
- (4. The Old is God speaking “in time past unto the fathers by the prophets,” while the New is God speaking “in these last days” to us “by His Son” — Heb. 1:1–2

(5)The Divisions of the New Testament

- (1. Kinds of writing:

1. History — 4 Gospels and The Acts of the Apostles	— 5 books
2. Doctrine (didactic, teaching) — the Epistles	— 21 books
3. Prophecy — The Book of the Revelation	— 1 book
Total	— 27 books
- (2. A further characterization of the books:
 - 1. Gospels — the revelation of the Gospel
 - 2. Acts — the propagation of the Gospel
 - 3. Epistles — the interpretation of the Gospel
 - 4. Revelation — the culmination of the Gospel

(6)Importance of a Study of the Backgrounds

- (1. Authenticity — authorship, date of writing, message.
 - This is both internal and external evidence.
- (2. Circumstances
 - Why, and to whom was the book written, and what were the needs to bring about the writing.

- (3. Language
 1. There is no real basis for holding them to be written in Aramaic.
 2. They were not written in the classical Greek of the day, but in the common Greek of the people (Koiné).
 3. Floods of light are thrown on New Testament Greek by the discoveries in Koiné.

10. INTRODUCTION TO THE NEW TESTAMENT BOOKS OF HISTORY

(1) Author — 4 writers:

- (1. Matthew — a Publican who became a disciple of Christ.
- (2. Mark — not a disciple, but a relative of Barnabas and a companion of Paul and Barnabas in their missionary activities (Acts 12:12 & 25; 13:13; 15:37-39; Col. 4:10)
- (3. Luke — a physician, possibly a Greek (or possibly a Hellenistic Jew) not a disciple, also a companion of Paul. Luke wrote Luke and Acts.
- (4. John — one of the twelve Apostles, a fisherman when the Lord called him. He wrote his Gospel, I, II, and III John, and the Revelation of Jesus Christ.

(2) Date or Period

- Dates suggested are from the earliest date of 37 on to John's Gospel in 90 A.D.

(3) Relationship to the rest of the Bible

Notice that the Redeemer and His redemption have a prominent place throughout the entire Word of God. This begins in Genesis.

• The New Testament:

- (1. The **Gospels** show a fulfillment of the Old Testament promise of the Redeemer. They speak of the coming of that Redeemer, His birth, His perfect life, His teachings, His atoning death, and His physical resurrection. In these we see the Redeemer and His redemption completely fulfilled.
- (2. The **Acts of the Apostles** gives a history of the early Church, starting from the ascension and ending with Paul's imprisonment in Rome (an interval of about 30 years). Acts tells of the beginning of the spread of the message of redemption to the entire world. It tells of the founding of the Church, and of the establishment of Local Churches under the direction of the Holy Spirit. The message of redemption goes beyond the chosen people and to all of the nations of the world. The great missionary movement is begun.
- (3. The **Epistles** give the doctrinal and practical teachings for believers. They treat the privileges and responsibilities of the believers, and they give instructions for practical Christian behavior. In the Epistles redemption is explained in its fullness and shown to be a vital part of the Christian's daily life and victory. The application of redemption is the primary subject of the Epistles.

(4. The **Revelation** brings everything to its consummation in the earthly blessing upon Israel and the heavenly blessing through Christ upon those who are redeemed. Revelation gives the completion of the prophetic scheme and the culmination of all things.

• The Old Testament:

(5. The **Pentateuch** lays the broad foundation for all that follows, introducing the first five dispensations, tracing the sinfulness of man from Adam to Moses, and following the history of Israel from Abraham (as the chosen people) through Jacob to the forty years in the wilderness. It records the deliverance of Israel from bondage in Egypt, the establishment of the moral and ceremonial Law. Israel is brought right up to the promised land, ready to enter. The Redeemer is first mentioned right after the fall, seen again as the promised Seed in God's promise to Abraham. Redemption is pictured throughout the Pentateuch, with the shedding of blood to provide a covering for Adam and Eve, in the Passover, in the ceremonial Law, and in various other places in these five wonderful books.

(6. The books of **History** tell of the period of Israel in the promised land. They begin with the entering into the land under Joshua and end with the carrying away of the people into Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar, and the restoration which followed. The genealogical line of the Redeemer is seen in these books, leading up to David, and then seen descending from David.

(7. The **Psalms** (and in the broad sense, all of the poetical books) treat poetically of the sorrows, joys, hopes, and the worship of Israel. The Redeemer and His redemption are seen prophetically in these books. Some of the most clear predictions concerning Christ are seen in the Psalms. Where but in Psalm 22 do we see the crucifixion described with such detail and clarity?

(8. The **Prophets** deal with the failure and sin of Israel. In these books we may see the predictions and warnings of judgment and ultimate blessing in Christ, the coming Redeemer. Isaiah 53 and Zechariah 12 are clear predictions of Christ, our Savior.

(4)The Historical Books of the New Testament:

- (1. Matthew — 28 chapters
- (2. Mark — 16 chapters
- (3. Luke — 24 chapters
- (4. John — 21 chapters
- (5. Acts — 28 chapters

(5)The Themes of the Historical Books:

- (1. Matthew — Christ as King
- (2. Mark — Christ as Servant
- (3. Luke — Christ as Man
- (4. John — Christ as God
- (5. Acts — Propagation of the Gospel

• See the chart on page 15.

11. INTRODUCTION TO THE FOUR GOSPELS

(1) Meaning of the Word Gospel

1. “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ ...” (Mark 1:1) — *Gospel* is translated from the Greek, *euaggelion*, meaning “glad tidings,” or “good news.”
2. The word “gospel” is never used in the New Testament of a book. The word means “good news,” and it refers to the good news concerning Jesus, the Son of God, the Saviour of the world. There is only one Gospel, and that is defined in I Cor. 15:3–4 as the death of Christ for our sins, his burial, and His resurrection on the third day.
3. When we say, “The Gospel According to Matthew,” we refer to the good news of Jesus Christ as recorded by Matthew. There is but one Gospel with four presentations (see Chart on page 15).

(2) What the Four Gospels Are

- The Gospels tell us *when* and *how* Christ came, while the Epistles tell us *why* and *for what* Christ came. The Gospels expound; the Epistles explain.
- W. H. Griffith Thomas suggests four words:
 - 1. *Preparation* — In the Old Testament God makes ready for the coming of the Messiah.
 - 2. *Manifestation* — In the four Gospels Christ comes into the world, lives an exemplary life, dies for the sins of mankind, and establishes His Church.
 - 3. *Appropriation* — In the Acts and Epistles, the ways are revealed in which the Lord Jesus was received, appropriated, and applied to individual lives.
 - 4. *Consummation* — In the Book of the Revelation, the outcome of God’s perfect plan is revealed. [It is the Revelation of *Jesus Christ*. It reveals Him in His final victory and glory.]

(3) The Purpose of the Gospels

- The purpose of the Gospels is to present the Redeemer — His birth, ministry, teachings, death, and resurrection. Four is the number of the earth. The Holy Spirit uses four Gospels to tell of the earthly ministry of the Saviour.
- Why four Gospels? There are four distinct offices of Christ portrayed in the Gospels (see chart on page 15). There are differences in emphasis. There are things omitted in one Gospel that will be found in another.
- There are keys to the emphasis of each of the Gospels in the way it begins (“front door key”), and the way it ends (“back door key”).

(4) The Synoptic Gospels

- The first three Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) are called Synoptic, because they give a synopsis of Jesus’ life. They emphasize His life primarily in Galilee. These three Gospels may be viewed together.
- John’s Gospel stands apart in that he does not give a synopsis of Jesus’ life, but he emphasizes Christ’s life in Judæa.