



INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL OF THE WORD

New Testament Survey

⌘ INTRODUCTION ⌘

INTRODUCTION TO THE NEW TESTAMENT

The New Testament is a collection of 27 books — the bulk of which are letters to churches and individuals. The New Testament continues the story begun in the Old Testament where God had promised to bring blessing and redemption to man through the Messiah. The New Testament is the record of God’s doing just that. Without the 27 books of the New Testament, there would be great uncertainty regarding the purposes of God and many significant questions would remain unanswered.

The New Testament, less than one-third the length of the Old Testament, was written from about A.D. 45-95 in Koine Greek, the international language of the people. The language was widely used and flexible enough to cover a variety of ideas. As these books were copied and distributed throughout the Roman Empire, they were eventually placed in a standard order (more logical than chronological).

Comparison of the Two Testaments:

OLD TESTAMENT	NEW TESTAMENT
39 Books	27 Books
929 Chapters	260 Chapters
Covers over 4,000 Years	Covers about 100 Years
31 Authors	9 Authors

Context of the New Testament

A. How were things different from today?

1. Churches had very little focus on money or fundraising.
2. Church buildings were mostly the homes of believers in a local area and were not divided into congregations or denominations. All believers in one area would simply be the church of that region.
3. Different definitions of church government began to develop (compare the church in early Acts to 1 Timothy).
4. Church sizes varied by community, but they were not divided like they are today.
5. All house churches had problems; people were like they are today.
6. Churches did not have structure like they do today. During the writing of the New Testament, positions like elder and deacon were new ideas. Pastors were not the centralized leaders in the same way they are in many churches today.

B. Jesus' Context in the Pharisaic Community:

1. Shammai and Hillel
2. Jesus' break with Jewish tradition
3. Jesus was not the first travelling faith healer. Many others tried to fulfill the Messiah's role, but Jesus actually did the miracles and rose from the dead.
4. The Pharisees had added 613 rules to supplement the commandments. This was the level of legalism in the Jewish community at the time.

C. Paul's Significance as an Apostle

1. He has new revelations
2. Grace
3. The rapture
4. Focuses his ministry on the Gentiles
5. Paul suffered greatly for his ministry

6. Paul came from a culture wherein he had to follow the letter of the law, and his conversion introduced him to the concept of grace, which features heavily in his works and differentiates the New Testament from the Old Testament.

Christianity – Was it Jewish or Gentile?

The Jewish religion represents another major influence during this New Testament era. The Pharisees are referred to as the separated ones. From the time of the Jews' return from Babylon captivity through the intertestamental period, a movement for purity for the things of the Lord Jehovah grows. The Pharisees have an unbending loyalty to Scriptures and desires to live strictly by the law. But in their desire to make the law workable in everyday life, they develop a system of regulations and tradition, which by the time of Christ places the Jews in a sort of bondage. The Pharisees elevate those traditions to a place of equal or greater importance than the written Law of Moses. They become proud of their separation and knowledge and view themselves as superior to the rest of society. The actual number of Pharisees in the days of Christ is around six thousand. They are not a very large group, but still they wield tremendous power in Israel because they own the support of the people.

The scribes are a class of Israelites who are well educated. Their job is to teach and interpret the law. They not only teach the law, but they are responsible to prosecute those who break the law. A great majority of the scribes belong to the party of Pharisees. The gospels reveal a close association between the two.

The sect of the Sadducees originated during the intertestamental period. They were not as numerous as the Pharisees, but they were usually wealthy and wielded political authority. The party of the Sadducees also includes high-ranking priests. They refuse to accept the oral law developed by the Pharisees. They limit full authority of Scripture to just the five books of Moses. They do not believe in angels, demons, resurrection, or a coming Messiah.