



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

New Testament Survey

Lesson 1 – Introduction and Overview

Introduction

The purpose of this course is to become better acquainted with the New Testament and how it presents the coming of Christ as the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies and types. On the evening on which Jesus was arrested, He spoke to His twelve apostles (minus Judas Iscariot) about the Holy Spirit. He said: **“I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever – the Spirit of truth”** (John 14:16-17). **“He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you”** (John 14:26). **“He will testify of Me”** (John 15:26). **“He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you”** (John 16:13-14).

Because of this promise of Jesus, we can be confident that what these apostles and their associates wrote about Jesus is the truth. The New Testament is the collection of the writings of the apostles and their associates that were recognized from the beginning as the Word of God Himself, communicated by the Holy Spirit Himself to the men who had been chosen by Jesus Himself to be His witnesses.

The apostle Paul was not one of the original twelve apostles, but Jesus chose him also to be His witness. Paul said of his writings: **“We have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches”** (1 Corinthians 2:12-13). Notice that Paul claims that it was not only general ideas that the Holy Spirit gave to him, but that the very words Paul used in his teaching came from God Himself.

In one of his letters, Jesus’ apostle Peter put the letters of the apostle Paul on the same level as the Scriptures of the Old Testament. He wrote: **“Consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation – as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures”** (2 Peter 3:15-16).

That is why we say that the New Testament, as well as the Old Testament, is the very Word of God. It is breathed out by God to specially chosen apostles and prophets, so that believers in Jesus would have an absolutely reliable source of God’s truth for their faith and life. Jesus

said to His disciples: “**If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free**” (John 8:31-32). The apostle John said of his writings: “**These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name**” (John 20:31).

Before we look at the individual books themselves, here is an overview of New Testament history that shows where the various books fit into the history. The books of the New Testament are written in **bold face** with **CAPITAL LETTERS** so that it will be easy to see where they fit into the history.

To get the most out of this course, it is important to read and study the Bible itself, chapter by chapter, verse by verse. In contrast to the Old Testament, the New Testament is not long. You should be able to read every chapter and every verse of the New Testament during this course.

As we begin this study of the New Testament, we pray: “Blessed Lord, You have given us Your Holy Scriptures for our learning. May we so hear them, read, learn, and take them to heart, that being strengthened and comforted by Your holy Word, we may cling to the blessed hope of everlasting life, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen” (*Christian Worship – A Lutheran Hymnal*, p. 25).

An Overview

The Books of the New Testament

The books of the New Testament can be divided into five groups:

One: The four Gospels: There are 3 similar ones. We call them the synoptic gospels (**MATTHEW, MARK, LUKE**), and there is 1 that is different from the others (**JOHN**). These four Gospels give us the account of Jesus’ birth, life, death, and resurrection.

MATTHEW was one of the 12, a tax collector. He wrote chiefly for Jewish Christians; therefore he quotes the Old Testament frequently.

MARK was a younger man, a companion of Paul, and later he was Peter’s helper. He wrote chiefly for Gentile Christians in Rome, stressing the mighty deeds of Jesus.

LUKE was a physician and Paul’s companion. He wrote the Gospel of **Luke** and **Acts** for a Greek man named Theophilus. Luke stresses that Jesus is the Savior of the world – of every man, woman, and child.

JOHN was one of the 12. He was Jesus’ closest friend. He wrote his Gospel much latter than the others, therefore he provides additional information. John shows that Jesus is both true God and true man.

Two: The book of **ACTS**. It tells how the Good News of Jesus traveled from Jerusalem to Rome after Jesus' ascension to heaven.

Three: The 13 letters of Paul: **ROMANS** through **PHILEMON**. These letters proclaim and explain the message of Christ's forgiveness to the early Christian congregations.

Four: The letters of others, such as **JAMES, PETER, JOHN, JUDE**, and whoever wrote **HEBREWS**.

Five: The book of **REVELATION**. This book contains visions received by John when he was in exile on the island of Patmos. It pictures the ultimate victory of Christ and His kingdom over all the forces of evil. It ends with a prayer for Christ's return: "**Come, Lord Jesus.**"

The Order of Events in New Testament History

The New Testament books cover quite a brief period of time compared with the Old Testament. The New Testament covers about one century: from around 5 BC to 95 AD.

Here is the possible order in which the books of the New Testament were written, and the order of events surrounding these books:

5 or 4 BC – The birth of Jesus Christ.

30 AD – Jesus died and rose again; the Holy Spirit came on Pentecost; the Good News spread. (Some give 33 AD as the year of our Lord's death.)

32 – Stephen died as the first martyr; Saul (Paul) was converted to the Christian faith.

43 – Paul and Barnabas worked as pastors in Antioch of Syria in the first mixed congregation, that is, made up of Jews and non-Jews (Gentiles).

45 – Jesus' brother James wrote the letter of **JAMES** to Jewish Christians.

The message of **JAMES** is a call to repentance from the mere profession of faith to a true and living faith in Jesus that produces good works.

46-48 – Paul went on his first mission journey with Barnabas and Mark to Galatia.

48 – Paul wrote his letter to the **GALATIANS** from Antioch in Syria.

Paul wrote this letter to the Galatians because false teachers, called Judaizers, were telling the Galatians that they must keep all the laws of Moses to be saved. In this letter, Paul defended the true Gospel: that we are saved alone by grace through faith in Christ, not by keeping the law.

49 – The first synod (that is, convention or gathering) of Christians met in Jerusalem (Acts 15).

49-51 – Paul went on his second mission journey with Silas, Timothy, and Luke to Macedonia and Greece. At Corinth Paul wrote **1** and **2 THESSALONIANS**.

The main subject of these two letters is the end of the world and some of the signs that are to precede that last day.

52-56 – Paul went on his third mission journey. He spent 3 years in Ephesus and went to Greece. During this third journey, Paul wrote his three longest letters:

From Ephesus Paul wrote **1 CORINTHIANS**. In this letter, Paul deals with many problems in that congregation, such as sexual sin, divisions, excommunication, marriage, the Lord's Supper, worship services, and the resurrection of the dead.

From Philippi Paul wrote **2 CORINTHIANS**. In this letter, Paul discussed his ministry as an apostle of Jesus and reveals much of his feelings and thinking.

From Corinth Paul wrote **ROMANS**, which is a summary of his Gospel preaching for a congregation he had not yet met. Since this letter to the Romans is a summary of the Gospel, more passages from this book are quoted in our catechism than from any other.

56-58 – Paul was in prison in Caesarea, awaiting trial.

58-59 – Paul went on his voyage to Rome as a prisoner, suffering a shipwreck near Malta.

59-61 – Paul was a prisoner in Rome, awaiting trial. He enjoyed much freedom, however.

As a prisoner in Rome, Paul wrote his letter to the **COLOSSIANS**. In this letter, he exalts Jesus as the Head of the Church and urges the Colossians to find everything they need in Jesus.

At the same time, Paul wrote a letter to a man from Colossi named **PHILEMON** about a slave named Onesimus who had run away from Philemon and met Paul in Rome.

At the same time Paul wrote his letter to the **EPHESIANS**, which is very similar to his letter to the Colossians. In Ephesians Paul speaks of the glory of Christ's Church, which is the body of Christ, the Head.

Toward the end of this imprisonment, Paul wrote his letter to the **PHILIPPIANS**. This is a letter of joy because of the wonderful Gospel of Jesus Christ.

50-60 – Perhaps during these years **MATTHEW** and **MARK** wrote their Gospels of Jesus' life.

62-63 – After Paul was released from prison, he went on more mission journeys, perhaps even to Spain.

During this time, Paul wrote **1 TIMOTHY** and **TITUS**. These are letters to guide his assistants in how they should carry on the work of proclaiming the Gospel.

61-64 – Peter wrote **1 PETER** and **2 PETER** to persecuted Christians. He died in 64.

1 PETER is a letter of hope amid sufferings and persecutions. Peter calls on the Christians to obey the government, even if it is persecuting them; he asks them to live holy Christian lives, and to look beyond this life to the glories of heaven. **2 PETER** is chiefly a warning against false teachings.

65-67 – Paul wrote **2 TIMOTHY** shortly before his execution by the Roman government.

2 TIMOTHY is Paul's last word and a farewell to his dear young friend.

65-70 – Luke wrote **LUKE** and **ACTS** for a Greek man named Theophilus, based on his research.

About this same time, **JUDE**, another brother of Jesus, wrote his short letter.

JUDE is a severe warning against false teachers.

About this same time, an unknown author wrote the letter to the **HEBREWS**.

The theme of **HEBREWS** is how much better the New Testament is than the Old Testament. It was written to warn Jews against going back to living under the law of Moses and Jewish ceremonies. Most importantly, this letter proves that Jesus is our great High Priest who kept the Law for us and sacrificed Himself for our sins.

70 – Jerusalem and its Temple were destroyed by the Roman armies, just as Jesus had said.

90-100 – The Apostle **JOHN** wrote his Gospel, three letters, and **REVELATION**.

In **1 JOHN**, he asks us to test our lives to see if they are truly Christian.

2 JOHN is a short letter about brotherly love and a warning against false teachings.

3 JOHN is a short letter to Gaius about a church problem.

The Apocrypha

The Old Testament as we know it was complete by the time of Ezra. It has three parts: the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings (which is also called Psalms). The Old Testament was

translated from Hebrew into Greek around 250 BC This Greek translation, known as the Septuagint, is quoted very often in the New Testament.

14 books not in the Hebrew Old Testament were added to the Greek Septuagint. These books are not quoted in the New Testament as part of Scripture, but some Bibles print them between the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Roman Catholic Church accepts these 14 books, known as the *Apocrypha*, as part of the Bible.

These books are books of the Apocrypha: 1 and 2 Esdras (or 3 and 4 Ezra), Tobit, Judith, an addition to Esther, Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus or the Wisdom of Jesus Sirach, Baruch, the Son of the Three Holy Children, History of Susanna, Bel and the Dragon, the Prayer of Manasses, and 1 and 2 Maccabees. Some of these books help us understand the history between the Old Testament and the New Testament.

Besides these apocryphal books, there were other books written by Jews during this period: the Books of Enoch, the Assumption of Moses, the Ascension of Isaiah, the Book of Jubilees, the Psalms of Solomon, the Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs, and the Sibylline Oracles. These books have little value for us today.

There are also some books that are called the Christian Apocrypha or *Pseudepigrapha*. These books were written many years after the apostles, but false teachers claimed they were written by the apostles or during the days of the apostles. These books include the Gospel of Thomas, the Acts of Paul, the Acts of Peter, and a book called Barnabas. There is even supposed to be a Gospel of Judas (Judas Iscariot). All of these books were rejected by the early Christians as not having come from the Holy Spirit and therefore unworthy of being included in the Bible. But there are many so-called Christian scholars today who claim that these books are just as good as the books we have in the Bible. These false teachers deceive many simple Christians by their lies.

Questions

1. Why should we believe that the New Testament is the Word of God?
2. Why was the New Testament written?
3. What are the five main divisions of the New Testament?
4. Name the persons the Holy Spirit used to write the New Testament books.
5. Who wrote most of the letters that are found in the New Testament?
6. What do James and Jude have in common?
7. Why was the letter to the Hebrews written?
8. Which books of the New Testament were the last to be written?
9. Why do some Bibles include the books known as the Apocrypha?
10. Why do we not regard the Apocrypha as the Word of God?
11. Why should we not trust books such as the Gospel of Thomas?