

New Testament Survey Notes

1 Introduction: Why Study the New Testament (NT)?

- Even today, people are willing to suffer tremendous persecution because of their faith that is based on the Bible.
- More copies of the Bible have been printed than any other single book in human history.
- The Bible has shaped the world we live in.

1.1 *The Old and New Testaments*

- The OT is God's revelation that He gave to the Israelites from ~ 1400 BC to ~ 450 BC.
 - Hebrew OT is divided into 4 portions: Torah, Former Prophets, Latter Prophets, & Writings.
 - The OT discusses creation, fall of man, sacrificial atonement, & the nation of Israel.
 - The OT points towards a person that will save people from their sins, restore justice, and rule an eternal kingdom.
- The NT reveals the fulfillment of what the OT promises, in the person of Jesus Christ.
 - Many OT prophecies are fulfilled, some in very unexpected ways.
- There is another set of books (14), written from ~ 200 BC to ~ 100 AD, known as the *Apocrypha*.
 - Contains religious and historical writings.
 - Not recognized by Jews or Protestants as canon, but still valuable for our understanding.

1.2 *Canon: Which books belong in the NT?*

- How do we know which books should be in the Bible? Does the apocrypha belong? What if archaeologists discover a new letter written by Paul?
- "Canon" comes from Hebrew & Greek words meaning "reed" or "measuring stick".
- Tests for canonicity:
 - Written by a prophet or other Spirit-led person – ensured that message was from God.
 - Written to all generations – might be written to a particular audience, but applies universally
 - Written in accord with previous revelation – God's truth does not change or contradict itself
 - NT books must also 1) possess the "marks of apostolic authorship", 2) be dated in the first century, and 3) contain the message of the true gospel of Jesus Christ.
- Over time, the Hebrew people determined which books belonged in the OT. This common recognition existed by the time of Christ (e.g. Dead Sea Scrolls, Josephus).

- At the Council of Jamnia in AD 90, Jewish scholars & leaders confirmed the content of the OT.
- In a similar way, the early Christian church came to recognize the authority of 27 NT books:
 - During the first two centuries after Christ, there was broad agreement about 23 books.
 - Various heresies that arose during the 2nd century motivated agreement about the NT canon.
 - During certain periods of Roman persecution, possessing Christian literature became a capital offense; Christians wanted to know which books were worth dying for!
 - By ~ 400 AD, the authoritative statements of various church leaders and synods settled the question of which books belonged in the NT; this served to ratify the existing consensus.

1.3 Inspiration: How was the Bible written?

- The Bible claims God's inspiration for itself (2 Tim 3:16). What role did human authors play?
- *Neo-Orthodox Theory*: God is beyond our comprehension, the Jews experienced God, the Bible is their written witness of God, and revelation occurs to us when we read the Bible.
 - BUT, the Bible claims itself to be God's Word, not just a witness to it (2 Tim 3:16).
- *Dictation Theory*: God simply dictated to human scribes.
 - BUT, while this did happen on occasion (Jer 26:2, Rev 2:1, 2:8), the human authors also express their own personalities (Gal 1:6, 3:1, Phil 1:3-4, 1:8).
- *Limited Inspiration Theory*: God inspired the human authors but not necessarily their words. The Bible may contain historical errors, but the Holy Spirit protected the doctrine.
 - BUT, many points of doctrine rely on Biblical history (Rom 5:12-21, Matt 12:41) and archaeological finds continue to affirm Biblical history.
- *Plenary Verbal Inspiration Theory*: God's inspiration extends to all Scripture (incl. history), down to the choice of individual words (more human involvement than dictation theory).
 - This is the position held by evangelicals.
 - Implications: the Bible is trustworthy and carries God's authority.
- Jesus Himself promised His immediate disciples that the Holy Spirit would continue to teach them and that they must testify to others. (John 14:26, John 15:26-27, John 16:12-14)

1.4 Integrity of the NT Text

- How can we be sure that today's Bibles accurately reflect what the original authors wrote?
- Existence of over 5,000 Greek manuscripts containing copies of NT text. These include:
 - papyrus manuscripts: written on paper made from reeds. These are the oldest.
 - uncial manuscripts: written in capital letters on a leather surface.
 - minuscule manuscripts: written in cursive writing that was developed ~ 9th century.
 - lectionaries: books used for early church worship that contain scripture.

- Small time gap between authorship and our oldest copy. For example, a papyrus manuscript of John (found in Egypt) is commonly dated as 125 AD, ~ 35 years after the original was written.
- The NT was translated into many languages as the gospel spread. The translations collectively witness to the integrity of the original Greek text.
- We have various writings of church fathers from ~ 95 to ~ 250 that quote NT text.
- The attempt to determine the original text when various copies disagree is called *textual criticism* or *lower criticism*.
 - Experts agree that differences in the copies do not affect the gospel message or any other Christian doctrine.
- Multiple English translations of the NT differ in style & nuance, but present the same picture of Jesus Christ.

1.5 Reasons for Study

- The NT contains God's words. God can be experienced through the NT.
- The NT has great personal significance; it concerns our eternal salvation & life on this earth.
- Cultural literacy - Jesus is the most dominant figure in the history of western culture.
- To destroy our preformed, personal opinions that are not true.
- To avoid misguided reliance only on the Holy Spirit.
 - Jesus & Paul displayed extensive training in OT scripture.

1.6 Hermeneutics: How should we interpret the Bible?

- Historical-Cultural analysis
- Contextual analysis
- Lexical-Syntactical analysis
- Theological analysis
- Special literary forms analysis
- Applying the Biblical message to today's culture
- For more details, take ChASM's Hermeneutics class!

2 The Middle East in the Days of Jesus

- "*praeparatio evangelium*" - the idea that BC history is a prelude leading up to the appearance of Christ. The Greek word "*evangelion*" means "message" or "gospel". Christ is the messenger.

2.1 Geography

- *Coastal plains*: rich soil, numerous springs, and a high water table make good farmland; lack of natural harbors preclude maritime activity. Towards the north, the coastal plains yield to the mountains. Towards the east, the *Shephelah* (foothills) make excellent land for olive groves. Note the east-west orientation of the Jezreel Valley, which allows easy access to the Jordan Rift.
- *Central mountain range*: Mount Herman rises to 9,200 feet. The remaining Galilee mountains rise 2,000-3,000 feet. The Ephraim and Judean hill country lacks easy east-west passages.
- *Jordan Rift*: this 10-mile wide depression drops from 300 feet in the north to -1,275 feet at the Dead Sea.
- *Transjordanian highlands*: plateaus reach up to 5,700 feet, which causes enough rainfall to support sheep-herding and wheat. Four east-west river gorges create natural boundaries. There is no natural barrier to the Arabian desert.

2.2 Administrative Districts

- 3 west of the Jordan: Galilee, Samaria, and Judea
- 3 east of the Jordan: a collection of smaller districts, Decapolis, and Perea.
- See the map on page 44.

2.3 History

See chapters 1, 2, 20, & 28 in "NT_history_notes".

2.4 Jewish Religion

2.4.1 Unifying Factors in Judaism

- Judaism was primarily a way of life, not an accepted set of doctrines.
- Jews worshiped the true God, who revealed Himself to them & had a special purpose for them.
- God gave the land to the Jews and He wished to be worshiped in Jerusalem.
- God would send a Messiah to defeat the Romans and usher in a time of universal peace.
- The synagogue was the center of Jewish life. It functioned as a school, place of worship, religious & civil court, and a place for social interaction.
- The law (Torah) and the traditions of the elders
- The temple, priesthood, and the festivals

2.4.2 Religious Groups

See chapters 6, 7, 8, & 9 in "NT_history_notes".

2.4.3 Other Groups

- **Herodians:** probably a political party that was loyal to the Herodian dynasty. They are mentioned three times in the NT (Matt 22:16, Mark 3:6, 12:13).
- **Therapeutae:** contemplative mystics who were prominent in Egypt, but also widely dispersed.
- **Common people:** had no political influence, looked down upon by the Pharisees. They formed the majority of Jesus' disciples and were a major focus of his ministry. (Matt 10:6, Mark 6:34)
- **Samaritans:** mixed population, both racially and religiously. Many considered themselves Jews, but had their own version of the Pentateuch, temple, and styles of worship. Long history of mistrust and atrocities resulted in deep hatred between the Jews & the Samaritans.

2.4.4 Literature of the Jews

- **Old Testament:** see section 1.1 above. NT authors regard OT as God's word. Jesus never quotes any source except the OT. The *Septuagint* is a Greek OT translation (2nd century BC).
- **Old Testament Apocrypha:** see section 1.1 above. Some were translated with the Septuagint. The Roman Catholic church accepted them as canon in 1546 at the Council of Trent.
- **Apocalyptic Literature:** Primary focus is the revelation of what has been hidden, particularly with respect to end times. See page 59 for a list of typical themes. Exists in OT & NT.
- **Old Testament Pseudepigrapha:** falsely ascribed to some well-known, ancient person. They deal with a large variety of subjects. No one ever considered them Scripture, but they provide valuable insight into Jewish & Christian thought.
- **Dead Sea Scrolls:** over 800 volumes of literature, hidden by the Essenes at Qumran.
- **Rabbinic Writings:** although most of the *Mishnah* and the *Talmud* were written after Christ, they reveal much about traditional Pharisaic teachings.
- Other Writings:
 - **targums:** Aramaic translations of the OT, plus lots of commentary, started ~ 400 BC.
 - **Midrash:** OT commentary, however, it was written after Christ.
 - **Tosefta:** yet more stuff that parallels the Mishnah. It was deemed less authoritative, so it was not included in the Mishnah.
 - **Philo:** Jewish philosopher & theologian from Alexandria (20 BC - 50 AD). Motivated to reconcile Greek & Hebrew thought, he developed the allegorical method of interpretation.
 - **Josephus:** Jewish military commander who survived the 1st Jewish revolt & wound up writing history books for the Romans! He mentions James, John the Baptist, & Jesus.

2.5 Conclusions

- God controls history and uses it to work out His purposes.
- Human beings are an active part of God's plan, and we bear the consequences of our choices.
- Christians of the NT era saw history as pointing to a Messiah, which was fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ.

3 The Gospel and the Four Gospels

3.1 Content of the Message

3.2 Growing Body of Material

3.3 Why the Gospels Were Written

3.4 Trustworthiness of the Gospels

- 4 The Gospel of Matthew**
- 5 The Gospel of Mark**
- 6 The Gospel of Luke**
- 7 The Gospel of John**
- 8 The Life of Jesus Christ**
- 9 The Teaching Ministry of Jesus**
Level 3 bullet item Christ
- 10 Modern Approaches to the NT**
- 11 The Modern Study of the Gospels**
- 12 The Modern Search for Jesus**
- 13 The World and Identity of the Early Church**
- 14 Acts 1-7**
- 15 Acts 8-12**
- 16 Acts 13-28**
- 17 The Life and Teachings of the Apostle Paul**
- 18 Romans**
- 19 Corinthians and Galatians**

20 Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon

21 Thessalonians, Timothy, and Titus

22 Hebrews and James

23 Peter, John, and Jude

24 Revelation

25 Epilogue

25.1 Level 2 heading

25.1.1 Level 3 heading

JJH : SCRATCH

>>> Note to James: finish me!!!

- >>> JJH: go through NKJV in class, looking at headings
- Level 1 bullet item
 - Level 2 bullet item
 - Level 3 bullet item